

## **GWS officials critical of community opposition to stadium plan**

The Canberra Times April 3 2016, [Tom McIlroy](#)

Greater Western Sydney Giants officials have criticised residents near Manuka Oval for opposing a major redevelopment, calling on club faithful to speak up in support of the plan.

At a club briefing about the [\\$800 million Manuka Green proposal](#) on Sunday chief operating officer Richard Griffiths said the national capital needed a "world class stadium", and the plan could rival the successful Adelaide Oval redevelopment.

Mr Griffith and Giants board member Peter Taylor criticised local media, including *The Canberra Times*, for coverage of the plan, pitched to the ACT government as part of an unsolicited bid process in November 2015.

"When you read the local residents banging on about building development down Telopea Park ... it's just rubbish. It is absolute rubbish," Mr Griffiths said.

"They're local residents who resist change. They don't want increased population growth and density.

"Whilst we understand all that and take it on board, we are going to take on board the suggestions of rational people and try and incorporate that into the final design of what we want to do here."

He said existing treescapes and heritage assets including the Manuka Pool, would be retained and a running track built around the park in an attempt to emulate Melbourne's popular "Tan" track, around the city's Botanic Gardens.

He said the consortium proposal could include as many as 1000 apartments and a 160-room four star hotel. A health and wellbeing theme would guide the plan and a gym, sports medicine clinic and massage facility were also planned.

Mr Taylor said features of the ground, including outdated toilets and unattractive architecture, needed to be updated. He encouraged club fans to write to the media, to counter critical comments by "five or seven or 10 local residents".

A former business advisor for the ACT government, Mr Taylor said the club had hired a public relations consultant to help improve media coverage related to the project. He described the project's four month community engagement process as one of the longest and most comprehensive Canberra had seen in recent years.

He said "two or three people" against the project had spoken in the media but the club hadn't received significant negative feedback about the proposal.

"You'll find people within 1 kilometre of that oval who want to maintain the status quo," Mr Taylor said.

"I think we all know that Manuka is substandard," he said.

Mr Taylor said upgrading the ground in line with other AFL stadiums would cost \$80 to \$100 million but the ACT government's Mr Fluffy asbestos buyback and city to Gungahlin tram line meant there was no prospect of public funds for upgrades.

He said the proposal was Canberra-led and not driven by developers or a "land grab".

The deal would see a makeover for the ground's stands, including 4750 permanent seats and new roofing to cover 80 per cent of capacity. It also includes improved corporate suites, media facilities and player change rooms.

Last month former NSW auditor-general Tony Harris said the ACT would squander a competitive advantage if it accepts the plan and warned taxpayers would receive better value for money if the plan went to open tenders.

The meeting came before the club defeated Geelong by 13 points in front of a sell-out crowd of 13,656 at Manuka Oval.