



Alex Greenwich MP
Member for Sydney
Darlinghurst NSW 2010

Dear Mr Greenwich

Alex

Re: Green Park Hotel

Thank you for your letter of 10 December 2020. The Trustees of St Vincent's Hospital Sydney have asked that I respond on their behalf.

As previously advised, the Trustees of St Vincent's Hospital Sydney were approached by the owners of the Green Park Hotel after the decision was made by Solotel to close the premises and cease operations as they no longer viewed the pub as commercially viable. This provided the opportunity for the Trustees of St Vincent's Hospital Sydney to purchase the site to use for community and patient health care.

I appreciate the concerns you raise on behalf of some of your constituents and recognise that the Green Park holds a special place in the hearts of many. We understand that people are sad to see the site cease operating as a pub and recognise its importance to the local and LGBTQI+ community in particular. We also acknowledge the Green Park has an important historical and architectural legacy which St Vincent's intends to preserve.

As our local State MP, you will be aware that St Vincent's serves a catchment area with some of Australia's highest concentrations of homelessness, those living with mental health issues, and people with a substance-use disorder. While we have multiple planned uses for the site, such as our Arts for Health Program, Urban Health Program and Innovation Hub, a central function will be the proposed Safe Haven Café which is a new mental health service that will be important in supporting unmet needs in our area.

Based on the successful St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne Safe Haven Café model, which in turn is based on the Safe Haven Cafés in the United Kingdom, our service would provide an alternative support to people living with a mental illness – but who are not yet in crisis – other than presenting to an Emergency Department. It would act as an interventional treatment to circumvent possible psychosis and crisis care, and indeed, suicide prevention and support for people experiencing psychological and other distress.

This is part of the NSW Government's new suicide prevention initiative: Towards Zero Suicides designed to reduce NSW's suicide rate by 20 percent by 2023.

I hope you will be encouraged to hear that we will be engaging in a co-design process for the model of care for the Safe Haven Café. In doing so, St Vincent's will be working closely with mental health, drug and alcohol, and homeless health consumers – as well as population groups identified as being over-represented in these targeted populations, including CALD, LGBTQI+ and Aboriginal community groups – to collaboratively create and deliver these services at Green Park.

One of the Towards Zero Suicides initiatives is the Alternative to Emergency Department Service. This particular initiative is founded on the evidence-based understanding that we need to develop more community mental health services to help people before they require acute care, services like the Safe Haven Café.

The Green Park site is specifically appealing because of its warm and welcoming atmosphere to help people manage their mental illness and other health issues in a way that a service based in a vacant shopfront or a clinical location inside the hospital would not.

I appreciate the points you make in your letter regarding the importance of pubs as meeting places and the role the Green Park Hotel has played in the social and community life of the LGBTQI+ community for many years. But while community connection and an active social life are important contributors to someone's positive mental health, they are not always sufficient in stopping someone from experiencing emotional distress, or mental illness or managing its impact.

Finally, I appreciate your letter's recognition of St Vincent's Hospital Sydney's long-standing delivery of health services to the LGBTQI+ community. As you know, there is arguably no hospital in Australia which has a closer bond and a longer history of connection and support of the LGBTQI+ community than St Vincent's. We were particularly proud when we entered a float in the 2020 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras to both mark the 35th anniversary of Ward 17 South and to celebrate the hospital's ongoing support of the LGBTQI+ community and the contributions of our staff.

I appreciate, like me, many of your constituents are disappointed to see that the Green Park will no longer function as a pub. However, the Trustees of St Vincent's Hospital Sydney are fully committed to the important community health services we plan to host from the site and are confident they will make a major long-term difference, particularly in the lives of our area's most vulnerable who don't always have a strong voice.

Yours sincerely,

Handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "A. M. Schembri".

A/Professor Anthony M. Schembri AM
Chief Executive Officer

Date: 16.12.2020

TRIM: D/2020/81360