




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

Record of Proceedings, 21 May 2020

ADJOURNMENT

Toowong, Access to Land

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (6.16 pm): I am very pleased to finish this sitting week with a good news story from Maiwar. There is a peaceful part of my electorate tucked away in West Toowong. Originally known as Palmer's Paddocks, locals have enjoyed access to this space since the 19th century. In recent weeks, they have had a hard time making sense of what seemed like a decision to shut them out. Arthur Palmer was the fifth Premier of Queensland. Understanding the huge community value of these lands, in the 1800s Palmer gave residents full access to his lower paddocks there. They agisted animals, grew vegetables and enjoyed access to Toowong Creek.

Of course, when talking about access to land in our city, we should remember that all land in this country is and always was Aboriginal land which was stolen without compensation. Many locals will know about a 300-year-old scar tree on the site which was saved when the department agreed to move one of the new buildings recently constructed. As World War II was ending, Palmer's son gifted the land to the Department of Education to build Toowong high school. We are told that this was on the proviso that locals would continue to be able to access and enjoy its green spaces. I table some recent media that sets out some of the history of the site.

Tabled paper: Article from *Westside News* online, dated 18 May 2020, titled 'Pioneering family's land gift at risk from "petty bureaucracy"' [816](#).

Fast-forward to 2005 when the Labor government decided to turn this school into an academy for gifted students, now known as the Queensland Academy of Science, Mathematics and Technology. It is an honour to host such an outstanding school in our local area. It is one of the highest ranking in the state. Students travel from well beyond Brisbane's boundaries to participate in its curriculum and the International Baccalaureate program on offer. Recently the academy underwent a major expansion to support a full cohort of secondary students which has caused really serious disruptions for locals and restricted access they had previously enjoyed. In recent months, there has been growing uncertainty among the community about the long-term access to the green space at the school's ovals and along this beautiful stretch of Toowong Creek.

After access to the Vera Street Community Garden was closed and it was suggested that the entire campus might be fenced off, members of the community swung into action to make clear just how important this space is to them. I started a petition on behalf of these locals that gained over 1,000 signatures in only one day after it was posted online. The gate to the community garden was unlocked a day after I launched that petition. Just this afternoon I met with Minister Grace and provided her a copy. Today the minister confirmed that no new fencing will be built before the community has been consulted about future access to the green space.

This consultation will happen after the construction work is finished, and the minister has also personally committed to full community access to the school owned green space, including the oval and Toowong Creek, until consultation is finished, and that BCC's designated bike paths in the area will be

retained. This community is genuinely interested in a mutually beneficial outcome and a respectful ongoing relationship with the school. I very much look forward to engaging with the school and the local residents to shape how this space is used for years to come. In the time left, I would like to name-check a few people. So many people have been in touch with the office, but thanks to Brendan Grice, Heather Stafford, Natasha, Katherine, Judy and to everyone from the Vera Street Community Garden.

(Time expired)