

Car park DA feared first step to loss of green space

Angus Thompson



A bid by the owners of Canterbury Park Racecourse to decommission a car park previously slated for apartments has sparked fears the recreational land will be developed following the end of a 10-year ban on the track's sale.

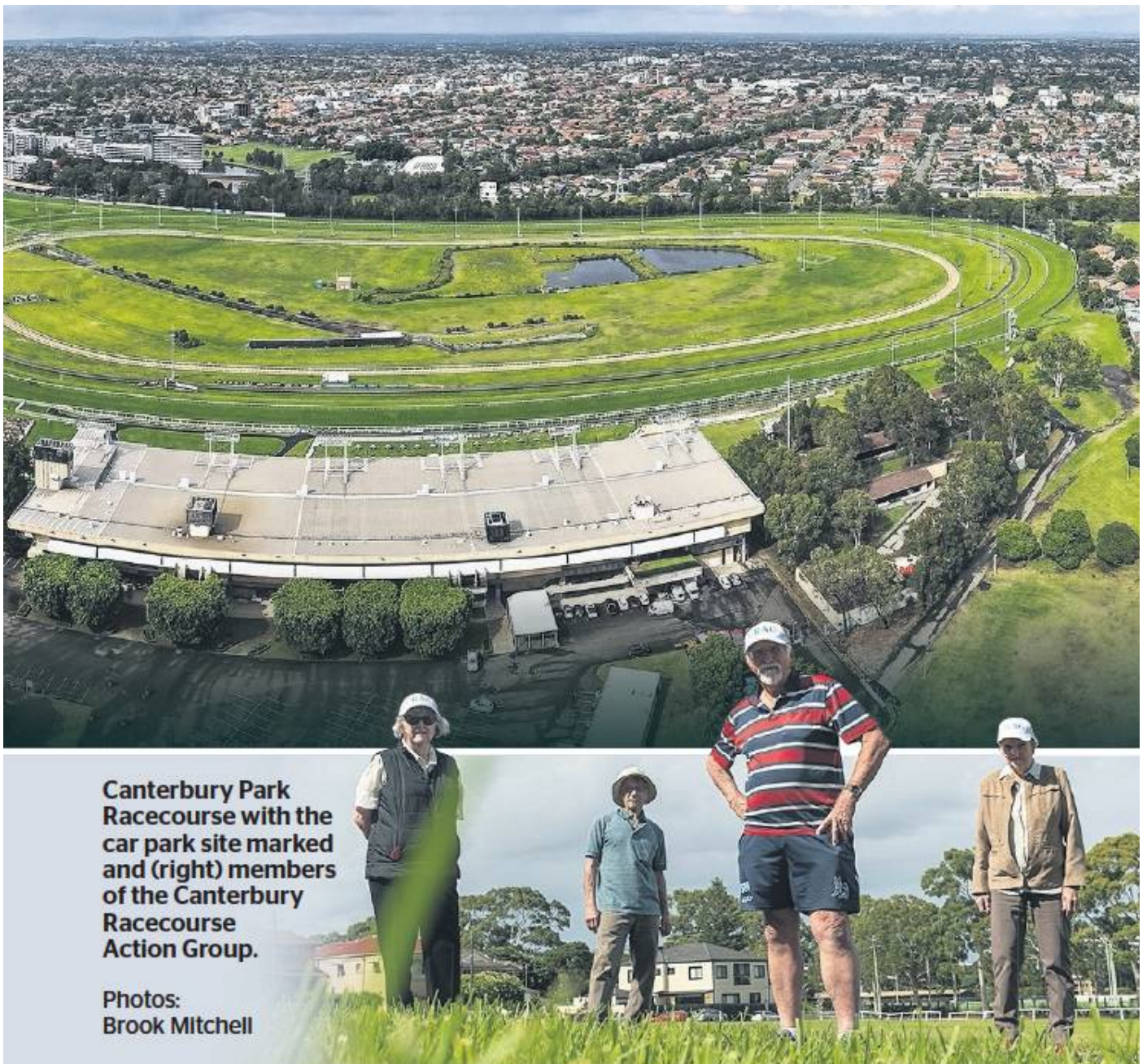
The Australian Turf Club said it had no immediate plans to sell the track or King Street car park, promised to Mirvac in 2017, but a recent notification from Canterbury-Bankstown City Council prompted warnings from state and federal MPs against any attempt to spot rezone the land for residential use.

Matt Burke from the Canterbury Racecourse Action Group said the ATC's application to end its use of the "area 6" car park – opposite the south-east edge of the

track – seemed benign, but residents were trying to stop development that locked away public space "from the outside in".

"In this case, it's like a DMZ [demilitarised zone] between two warring countries. You're losing that patch of grass and then it's on your doorstep," Mr Burke said.

Brian Hudson of the residents' group said the application was "just the first step" to selling the



whole racecourse.

An ATC spokesperson said the reason for its bid to decommission its use of the car park, used for overflow, was that it was more efficient to have parking in the infield of the racecourse, adding that the club had “no plans” for the surplus land if the application was approved.

Further, the spokesperson said there were no plans to stop racing or sell the track: “We continue to hold a highly popular night racing season ... as well as midweek racing throughout the year.”

The application to decommission the car park was first lodged in 2017, then relodged in 2019, but a traffic study submitted to the council by the ATC in December prompted Canterbury-Bankstown to readvertise it in late January, weeks before the decade-long moratorium on the sale of the adjacent racetrack ended early this month, prompting rumours of development plans.

The ATC spokesperson said the moratorium did not cover the area 6 car park in any event.

The Labor MP for Canterbury, Sophie Cotsis, lodged a motion in NSW Parliament yesterday to have the moratorium extended by at least five years, saying it was the area’s only large open green

space.

A masterplan for the precinct is also under way, with a review committee overseeing the process being chaired by the Greater Sydney Commission's Peter Poulet.

In a letter to the council, federal Labor MP Tony Burke, whose Watson electorate covers the area, said "now more than ever" open space was at a premium.

"Any attempt to change zoning in advance will undermine the master-planning and will potentially give rise to significant damage to the amenity of our local community," Mr Burke said.

Canterbury-Bankstown mayor Khal Asfour said no application to rezone the car park or the rest of the racetrack precinct would be considered before the masterplan for the area was complete, labelling the development application a "waste of time".

"Even if this was supported and determined for approval ... they still cannot put a development on that site," Cr Asfour said.

The ATC spokesman said the organisation was continuing to work with the council, the state government and the community in their planning processes regarding the precinct's future.

"We were invited and accepted the council's invitation to be involved with the Canterbury Racecourse Co-ordination group. We all have a role to play," the spokesperson said.