

Diane Smart Interview with Lester Kiewet
Good Morning Cape Town - Cape Talk Radio 2026-05-07

[Lester Kiewet] Let's go to Pinelands now, no not to talk about liquor licenses, but apparently it's some issue around the Pinelands Oval. Residents in Pinelands - they're pushing back against plans by the Pinelands s Hockey Club to install an AstroTurf field and lease around sixty percent of the lower Oval from the City of Cape Town. Now this is an historic and protected green space. It dates back to the early development of Pinelands. It's been used for all sorts of activities, not just exclusively for hockey, cricketers, athletics, soccer, frisbee players, dog walkers, families enjoying that green open space. Diane Smart - she's with the Pinelands Friends of the Oval. Good morning, Diane. Really appreciate your time. What's your opposition to this planned leasing of that, of that green space exclusively to the Pinelands Hockey Club?

[Diane Smart] Well, Lester, it is approximately sixty percent of the total green space that the proposed lease encompasses. As you described, it's a much loved green public open space in the heart of Pinelands. It's always been a public place since the suburb was first established, and it's a mixed use, multi-use space, a combination of a number of formal sports clubs that use it as well as many informal users. The Pinelands Hockey Club has not in fact used the space for the last twenty years or so because during that period of time hockey has been played on astro turf. So it's been used by cricket, frisbee, soccer, athletics, and then, as I say, a variety of informal users. Many people describe it as something akin to a village green or a common. It's a place where people meet, have social exchanges, just enjoy a large public open space with good views. Some exercise, some community building, social time and some sport.

Now in March, the city put out a notice calling for comments on a proposed ten year lease with an option to extend by a further ten years to the Pinelands Hockey Club. The notice contained very little information - almost none in fact - and most importantly failed to inform the public that the lease application is inextricably tied to a development of the land being the AstroTurf, and that in fact, the city had already pre-approved the astro turf in 2023 with no public participation process. So it seems to be a development application that's been clothed as a lease.

[Lester Kiewet] Is this a conversation around the balance between the effective use of space. So the hockey club says, we want to effectively use the space for a recreational activity versus the principle of the shared public open space of which the oval is now used.

[Diane Smart] Well, Lester, I would say that, and most people that I've heard speaking on this issue would say that it's not effective use of the space to grant the lease and build the AstroTurf, because it will then become an exclusive space for one club, as opposed to the mixed use space that is currently enjoyed there. It is already effectively used. The notice by the city describes the property as "under-utilized,

surplus to council's requirements and no demand exists for same". But I'm afraid that just displays a city that's very out of touch with its community, because it is a really well used space, and any city official that would take the time to actually go and spend some time there, particularly in the late afternoon/early evening, will see that it is abuzz with activity.

[Lester Kiewet] Now I'm not a Pinelands resident, so that will be my question. How do you quantify how this public open space is used recreationally? Dog walkers, families, people just wanting to walk around in some greenery, get some fresh air. How would you quantify that? Versus say, a hockey club saying well, we have a plan with it and we want to develop this into an AstroTurf and we formalise this area. That's why I make the distinction of, you know, they saying it's an effective use we can do doing something, versus how do you quantify how many people use it for other recreational activities, that aren't maybe as organized a hockey club.

[Diane Smart] Well, I think it has an intangible heritage and social benefit in the manner in which it is currently used, that can be difficult to quantify, and it's not just a numbers game. But you know it will be changed forever by a development like this. An AstroTurf is not something that's going to change back to a green open field in time. And of course there are big environmental impacts with the building of an AstroTurf. They're not easy to remove and they're costly to maintain. So you know, it's been touted by our ward councillor and by the hockey club as an investment in community sport. But as far as we can tell, the only people who are going to benefit from it is the Pinelands Hockey Club themselves. I mean, the city has been treated the public participation process as a tick-box exercise. It's been extremely difficult to get information out of them. I have, for example, put questions to them like, "which community is it going to benefit?", "Who apart from the club itself, is going to be guaranteed use of this facility", et cetera. But unfortunately there's been no answers forthcoming from the City and really not enough information from the city for the public to engage in a meaningful public participation exercise.

We're not opposed to public having, sorry to the hockey having an AstroTurf, but just not in this particular place.

[Lester Kiewet] Diane Smart - The Pinelands Friends of the Oval. The question to Pinelands residents: Should a single sporting club be allowed to take control of a majority of a long standing public green space if it maybe improves the facilities in that area, or does public access and the shared use of a green space, does that come first?