

## **6. COUNCIL REPORTS**

### **6.1 HOSKEN RESERVE SYNTHETIC PLAYING FIELD**

#### **Director Community Development**

#### **Community Wellbeing**

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#### **Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Conducts an independent, robust and broad community engagement process in 2021 on a refresh of the Hosken Reserve Master Plan.
2. Receives a report by May 2021 on the outcomes of the Hosken Reserve community engagement with options to determine future action.

#### **Executive Summary**

Hosken Reserve is a park located in Coburg North. It is used by a number of sporting clubs such as Pascoe Vale Soccer Club, The Australian Academy and the Merlynston Tennis Club, and is used by local residents and visitors for active and passive recreation. It is a designated off lead dog park.

A redevelopment master plan was completed for Hosken Reserve in 2009, with a site development plan. The 2009 master plan process highlighted 18 key improvements listed including the installation of a synthetic training pitch on the rectangular field, along with pavilion upgrades.

A range of additional strategies and studies have been undertaken since 2009 which resulted in a proposed project to install synthetic turf on the northern oval. This project was included in the budget approved by Council for 2020/21. This was part of Council's overall strategy to support active sport and recreation in the municipality.

Council officers have acknowledged that the community engagement for the Hosken Reserve synthetic turf project over many years was not adequate. All stakeholders should be included in Council's engagement practices and in this case, nearby residents were not adequately consulted. The gaps in engagement were not intentional but they caused understandable frustration and stress to local residents.

A March 2020 grant application for State Government funding for the Hosken Reserve project was awarded funds in September 2020. The funding was withdrawn in November 2020 following a review which found consultation and local support was insufficient. The tender process for the procurement of the synthetic pitch has been set aside.

Council officers propose that a consultation process take place in February-April 2021, which will involve local residents, the Pascoe Vale Football Club, the Merlynston Tennis Club, the Australian Academy and other relevant stakeholders.

This process would review and refresh the 2009 Hosken Reserve master plan to ensure a thorough understanding of the current and future community needs in the precinct.

The review would involve an independent, robust and broad community engagement process in line with Council's draft Community Engagement Policy 2020

It's proposed that a further report will then be brought to Council in May 2021 that details the outcomes of the community engagement, analysis of options and recommendations on a way forward.

## **1. Policy Context**

The 2017-2021 Council Plan establishes priorities and sets an agenda for this Council term while keeping sight of long-term future challenges and opportunities. To achieve this vision, three strategic objectives have been set:

- Connected Community;
- Progressive City; and
- Responsible Council.

These three strategic objectives guide a range of priority actions which Council will implement during this term. This report supports the 'Connected Communities' and 'Responsible Council' objectives of the 2017-2021 Council Plan:

- Set a clear vision and strategy for aquatics, leisure and sporting facilities to meet ongoing community needs; and
- Maintain and match our infrastructure to community needs and population growth.

Council's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2017-2021) includes the outcome Liveable Neighbourhoods and at points 4 and 5 states:

1. Moreland residents have access to well designed and well-located community facilities.
2. Moreland's buildings and public spaces are well designed and encourage community interaction.

This initiative also aligns to the Moreland Sports and Active Recreation Strategy three key strategic directions:

- Increasing participation by Moreland residents in sport and active recreation and fostering strong relationships with local recreation clubs, associations, peak bodies and government agencies;
- Ensuring Council's approach to sport and active recreation provision is underpinned and well informed by robust policies, strategies and plans;
- Ensuring an adequate supply and distribution of good quality sporting infrastructure used in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

A range of Council studies and strategies informed the development of the synthetic turf proposal at Hosken Reserve:

- Hosken Reserve Redevelopment Plan – Final Report (2009)
- North West Region - Football Venue Strategic Review and Feasibility Study (2009)
- Moreland Sport and Physical Activity Strategy 2014-2018
- Synthetic Soccer Pitches (2016)
- Sports Surface Needs Analysis (2018)
- Moreland Sport and Active Recreation Strategy (2019)

In addition, the proposed synthetic field is also underpinned by the recent State Football Facilities Strategy to 2026 conducted in partnership with the State Government Victoria, which identified a priority for an additional synthetic pitch in Moreland.

Council's Open Space Strategy 2012-2022 sets out a range of principles in managing open space across Moreland. It states the purpose of managing open is to achieve:

- *Quality of open space*
- *A welcoming place, attractive and appealing*
- *Well-maintained and clean, safe and secure*
- *Accessible and connected spaces*
- *Sustainable management practices*
- *Conservation and heritage values protected, including being biodiverse, supporting ecological networks*
- *Community involvement*
- *Letting people know how and where they can use open space*
- *Improving our management of spaces*
- *Promote activity, health and wellbeing for community benefits.*

## **2. Background**

Hosken Reserve provides active sporting facilities as well as passive recreation opportunities for the community. This background provides information about how the Hosken Reserve synthetic pitch project came about.

Council is the primary provider of community-based sport and recreation facilities in Moreland. Council is responsible for maintenance and development of these assets, in partnership with its users.

Council has 56 sports grounds available for use for sporting activities in the City of Moreland. These are currently very well utilised by a variety of user groups including sports clubs, sports associations, schools, community groups and residents of Moreland. With club membership growing annually, and Council fuelling growth through inclusive participation policies to promote participation for girls and women, the demand on these facilities is ever increasing.

In addition to the 56 turf surfaces, Council has one synthetic hockey pitch located at Brunswick Secondary College, Brunswick (installed 2008) and two community synthetic soccer pitches, located at John Fawkner College, Fawkner (installed 2009) and Clifton Park, Brunswick (installed 2011). All sportsgrounds and synthetic pitches are currently used at capacity.

The City of Moreland currently provides a range of high-level teams including a number of Football Federation Victoria (FFV) National Premier League Victoria (NPLV) and State League Division teams. It caters for 12 football clubs collectively providing 134 teams in associated leagues and competitions. With the exception of Brimbank, Moreland has the greatest number of teams in the North West region. Of the 134 teams in Moreland, 25 are women's and girls' teams, and 109 teams comprise of men's and junior boys. In 2019, Moreland provided 2,622 FFV registered players, 2078 registered players from Moreland were male and 544 females.

Moreland's turf football pitches are facing pressure from increased sporting demand due to the growing population and increased participation rates. Moreland's population is projected to increase by around 37,000 people over the next 17 years - from 191,000 to 228,000. The Moreland North area is anticipated to grow by 8,000, Moreland Central by 14,000 and Moreland South by 15,000. This growth will add to the demand for sport and recreation infrastructure (as well as to the demand for passive recreation space).

Council has a clear and strong commitment to supporting and improving the health and wellbeing of its community. The provision of high quality facilities such as sports grounds is an important part of realising this commitment. However, the demand for use of sports grounds exceeds the capacity of these grounds.

In response, Council's Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2019 prioritises the introduction of measures to increase the capacity of existing sportsgrounds so that the quality of these facilities can be maintained. Furthermore, Council prioritise the access to sports grounds for those clubs that provide opportunities for all members of the community including women and junior participants.

The Pascoe Vale Soccer Club has been in the municipality for 50 years and has over 400 playing members. Club activities are currently allocated across 4 sporting reserves for training and competition.

The secondary campus of the Academy is located next to the reserve. The campus currently has 900 students. The campus site has a land area of 1.4ha. This is considered very small for a secondary college. The college therefore relies heavily on access to the reserve for its students at recess times, physical education classes, intra and inter-school activities. The car park at the reserve is also very important to the school. It is used by buses and individual parents for student 'drop offs and pick ups'.

The conversion of existing sports grounds to synthetic/hybrid grass surfaces within Moreland has been previously adopted by Council as an important strategy for achieving sustainable use of grounds across the municipality, in the context of growing population.

However, local residents have raised many concerns about replacing natural grass with synthetic at Hosken Reserve. Community preferences for the use of open space must be considered.

### **3. Issues**

#### **Hosken Reserve Redevelopment Master Plan 2009**

In 2009, Council adopted the Hosken Reserve Redevelopment master plan which included plans for a new synthetic pitch.

The Hosken Reserve Master Plan recommended (option 3) for the conversion of the rectangular north-east pitch to synthetic turf. However multiple constraints were identified that saw the proposed project adjusted so that the proposed synthetic turf would be at the northern oval. The constraints were:

- Car park and access road needed to be reduced to allow for the required length of a senior field (100 metres x 64 metres) to be installed. Without the reconfiguration of the car park and access road, a senior football pitch cannot be accommodated.
- The reconfiguration of the car park would also require a turning circle for school buses which would encroach onto the rectangular pitch.
- The proposed synthetic turf would also encroach onto the northern oval which would mean the removal of significant mature trees, paths and park furniture within this location.

In 2017, Council officers engaged a specialist consultant to undertake a Hybrid Synthetic Sports Surface Needs Analysis. This analysis assessed the requirements and opportunities for Football Federation Victoria, AFL Victoria, Lacrosse Victoria and Cricket Victoria. The report assessed minimum facility requirements and potential locations for the establishment of new synthetic and hybrid sporting surfaces across the municipality. This assessment recommended "*Install a hybrid soccer / multi-sports field for community use with the \$1.2 million already allocated to the Hosken Reserve*". This report was noted by Council at its ordinary meeting held April 2018.

The Synthetic Sports Surface Needs Analysis informed the development of the Moreland Sport and Active Recreation Strategy, which was adopted by Council in November 2019, and included the Hosken Reserve synthetic pitch project.

### **2020 community feedback**

In March 2020, Council officers submitted an application to the World Game Facilities Fund. In August 2020, Council was advised that it had been successful in its application for the World Game Facilities Fund of \$500,000 contribution towards the project. Council publicised this grant via media release.

A tender process for the installation of the pitch commenced in September 2020, in order to meet construction timelines under the 2020/21 budget and under the terms of the grant. The tender has subsequently been put aside.

Residents who were previously unaware of the project were understandably surprised and taken aback when they learned of the project. Numerous complaints were submitted to Council. Issues raised included:

- Concern that no consultation had taken place with local residents about the synthetic pitch project.
- Many local residents were not living there when the original 2009 Master Plan was developed and could not be expected to be aware of the plan.
- The original 2009 resident survey did not canvass views about synthetic turf.
- Lack of transparency and information available about the project. For instance, the 2009 Master Plan was not on the Council website. In addition, the 2009 Master Plan proposed synthetic turf in the north-east field, not the northern oval, and it was unclear why or when this had changed and how.
- Concerns about synthetic turf and loss of natural grass, and impact on sustainability and urban heat effects.
- Concerns about increased sports usage of the reserve and impact on traffic and amenity.
- Alignment with other key Moreland strategies and plans including Moreland Open Space Strategy, Zero Carbon Moreland - Climate Emergency Action Plan, and Urban Heat Island Action Plan and the recently adopted Moreland Nature Plan.
- Concern about why the previous water harvesting project at Hosken Reserve was still installed, given the proposed synthetic pitch project (however, it has since been clarified that the water harvesting system will still be fully operational and fully utilised regardless of whether the synthetic turf project continues in its current form).

As the majority of resident concerns were received during the election period (caretaker period), Council released a limited statement of clarification at that time.

Council officers have acknowledged that the community engagement for the Hosken Reserve synthetic turf project was not adequate. All stakeholders should be included in Council's engagement practices and in this case, nearby residents were not adequately consulted. The gaps in engagement were not intentional but they have caused frustration and stress to local residents.

The situation has also affected other community stakeholders such as the Pascoe Vale Football Club who have been working in good faith to improve sporting facilities at Hosken Reserve.

The State Government undertook a review of the World Facilities Fund grant to Council for Hosken Reserve. The review found that consultation and local support was insufficient and the funding was withdrawn in November 2020. The Council tender process for the procurement of the synthetic pitch has been set aside.

### **Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

At this stage, an urban heat island effect assessment has not been undertaken, however, the design and plan to cool Hosken Reserve has incorporated the following items:

- water harvesting into the wetland to keep the reserve cooler as well as landscaping to reduce solar radiation.
- installation of LED technology floodlights also ensures the carbon footprint is reduced.
- shock pad made from recycled rubber - reduce infill between up to 50 per cent
- 100 per cent recyclable grass with no latex, no polyurethane and no coatings for the carpet.
- Organic infills - 100 per cent natural organic infill.
- Planting of more trees to offset any reduction of vegetation or increase in the built footprint.
- Construction using recycled concrete (green concrete)
- Installation of COOL GRASS synthetic which uses patent pending technology to reflect UV rays and dissipate the heat into the atmosphere instead of into the surface. Reducing the turf temperatures by 15 per cent and up to 10 degrees.

### **Hosken Reserve Master Plan refresh**

Given Council's longstanding commitment to the project and the strong community concerns expressed with the project, it is recommended that an independent Hosken Reserve master plan refresh be undertaken in coming months.

This would ensure that a thorough understanding of current and future demand and use of the precinct is captured and understood. The renewed strategic process would confirm the principles that will be applied for management of the site. It would identify the most appropriate future land uses for the reserve to ensure it has the best ability to meet the needs of the community in the short, medium and long term.

This project would include:

- Literature review: including a review of strategic documents relating to the park and the precinct to understand context and ensure strategic alignment with municipal wide intent;
- Site assessment: including review of site information, existing buildings, current status and utilisation, projected utilisation, traffic assessment, infrastructure assessment and soil analysis (as required);
- Undertake Environmentally Sustainable Design Opportunities Assessment including, but not limited to, integrated water management, urban heat island, energy efficiency, waste and recycling and with due consideration given to Council Strategies such as Integrated Water Management Strategy 2040, Zero Carbon Moreland Climate Emergency Action Plan (2019), Urban Heat Island Action Plan 2016-2026 and Waste and Litter Strategy 2018 and Sustainable Buildings Policy 2018

- Community and social infrastructure assessment: including understanding of community demographics, density projections, provision of open space and community spaces in precinct, understanding of community need and future site opportunities, including future infrastructure on the site;
- Robust engagement: including multiple forms of community engagement; and
- Reporting: including final report of recommended actions, refreshed master plan and indicative costings.

At the conclusion of this project, a refreshed master plan will be presented to Council for consideration. This document will be used as a basis for future capital works and site improvements for Hosken Reserve.

### **Human Rights Considerations**

The implications of this report have been considered in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

The proposal for further engagement supports Sections 12 and 18 of the Human Rights Charter which relate to freedom of movement and taking part in public life.

## **4. Community engagement**

The proposed community engagement process will involve local residents and all stakeholders and follow the principles and procedures set out in Council's draft Community Engagement Policy.

It is proposed that the community engagement be overseen by an independent facilitator. Local residents and stakeholders will be consulted on structure and method for the community engagement before the engagement is conducted in 2021. It's expected there will be multiple forms of engagement.

Council will 'involve' the community in decision making. This means that Council officers will work directly with the community, sports club and other users of the reserve throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. Council will also work with our community to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision.

## **5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

## **6. Financial and Resources Implications**

In line with the Hosken Reserve Master Plan (2009), Council has included the following items in the 5-year capital budget plan (2020-2025):

- Hosken Reserve- synthetic soccer- \$900,000 (2020/21)
- Hosken Reserve - Merlynston Tennis Club pavilion- \$566,000 (2021/22)
- Hosken Reserve - tennis club - court refurbishment - \$100,000 (2021/22)
- Hosken Reserve - soccer/football pavilion - \$221,500 (2021/22)
- Hosken Reserve – south soccer pitch reconstruction - \$600,000 (\$300,000 in 2021/22 and \$300,000 in 2022/23)
- Hosken Reserve - east carpark - \$425,000 (2023/24)

Depending on the outcome of the community engagement and Master Plan refresh review, any of these allocations can be changed by Council in future, as part of future budget and capital works processes.

In a refresh of the master plan, officers would continue to seek external funding contributions to projects identified to support implementation. Delivery of each stage of works would be subject to approval in Council's annual capital works budget process.

## **7. Implementation**

An independent community engagement facilitator will be appointed to facilitate the refresh / review of the Hosken Reserve Master Plan, and a community engagement plan will be drawn up. Any feedback received from the community and stakeholders about the community consultation process will be considered.

It's expected that community engagement would begin from February 2021.

A report will be presented to Council on the outcomes of the community consultation on this project by May 2021.

## **Attachment/s**

There are no attachments for this report.