

ATTACHMENT 2 - WRITTEN RESPONSE FROM VICTORIAN SIKH ASSOCIATION



Club House : Ashwood Reserve, Cnr Winbirra Pde and High St Rd Ashwood VIC 3147
PO Box 161 Mulgrave VIC 3170

ABN 75 580 628 531

Dear Monash City Council,

21st May 2021.

RESPONSE TO MONASH CITY COUNCIL by VICTORIAN SIKH ASSOCIATION AND WIDER COMMUNITY against the PROPOSAL OF DEVELOPING A SECOND SYNTHETIC HOCKEY FIELD AT THE ASHWOOD RESERVE

The Monash City Council recently informed the Victorian Sikh Association Inc. (VSA) of its proposal and intention to redevelop Ashwood Reserve North to provide a second synthetic hockey field and a larger carpark. The 2nd hockey pitch will mean that VSA and the community will no longer have a field for their sports and activities.

This proposal and the outcome of a feasibility study was presented to the Monash Council Meeting on 10th December 2019. Much to our disappointment, and surprise, VSA only found out about the proposal when there was a request by Monash City Council on April 9th, 2021 to use the pavilion for a Consultative meeting. Only after we had requested more information, we were given more details of the project on April 13th 2021. (As shown in the feasibility study attached as **Appendix 1**).

Clubs currently accessing the Ashwood Reserve include, *Waverley Hockey Club (WHC)* and *Victorian Sikh Association (VSA)*, however the information sought from these clubs in accordance with the report appears disparate. The WHC has a synthetic hockey pitch with lights and high fences that is locked with exclusive use and no access to the community. The VSA has the grass reserve with soccer post with no lights that is shared for community use.

There is extensive information on the Waverley Hockey Club (WHC), and clearly to have obtained such comprehensive information there would have been greater engagement and input

from (WHC) to have contributed to this feasibility report. On the other hand, information about the VSA is sparse, extensively lacking and ill informed. In recent times, Eastern Lions, Harlequins Rugby Club, Mt Waverley soccer clubs and other soccer teams have also accessed the reserve for training purposes and their input is also lacking within this feasibility report. In addition, the Ashwood reserve is also extensively used on a daily basis by the local residents and wider community and their input is totally lacking within the feasibility report.

The Council had met with some members of VSA on 24 April 2021, and it is unsurprising that at the meeting of Council Representatives with the members of the VSA and the community on the 24 April 2021, and 1 May 2021, at the VSA Pavilion, the Council officers in question apologized for not being aware of the impact of this proposal on the ongoing activities of the VSA, local residents and the wider community and for not being included in its deliberations.

Whilst acknowledged in this feasibility study that the *Victorian Sikh Association (VSA) is the main user of the Ashwood Reserve north grass field and associated pavilion and that the VSA has been a tenant at the Reserve for over 30 years*, the conclusions and recommendations in this report is summed in **one line** – *“the grass field, which the Victorian Sikh Association is currently the main user of, would transition into a synthetic hockey surface and would create a significant change to their typical use of the field”* . The report fails to demonstrate or articulate the impact of the proposal on the current use of this site on VSA and local community members. It fails to recognize what the VSA is and all the other sports and activities that VSA organizes.

The lack of consultation with the VSA and the wider community in undertaking the feasibility study was well demonstrated and established by the feedback given by the members of VSA and the wider local community present at the rather belated consultative meeting held with a few members of the Monash Council on the 1st of May 2021. A proposal that **does not** outline the impact on the major stakeholder has to be flawed at the outset and this Council needs to demonstrate a better understanding of VSA, a tenant of more than three decades. Local residents present at the meeting strongly expressed their disappointment at the lack of consultation by Council to the future use of the Ashwood Reserve, and that they were unaware of the proposed project. A research consultant met with VSA in January 2019 and then there was no communication until April 2021 to share the project plans, much to our shock and surprise.

Background:

Since the inception of the VSA in 1988 (formerly known as the VSSA, Victorian Sikh Sports Association) it has been housed at the Ashwood Reserve based in the Eastern Suburb of Melbourne. From its humble beginnings three decades ago, the VSA has progressed and grown to being a major multicultural association providing support and committed to sharing and celebrating our cultural heritage through sport and various other multicultural community participation and shared recreation activities.

What started out as an informal network drawn together by common interest and a shared love of sport, the VSA rapidly grew to a vibrant association committed to sharing and celebrating our cultural heritage through sports, cultural exchange and active multicultural community participation. Our new club house building was built in 2015 with the collaboration of our community, the Federal Government and Monash City Council.

The VSA of today is built on 3 pillars

- **Sport** – encourage participation in various sports to all members of the community. It adds to promote a healthy culture and lifestyle. Women’s, masters and kids in sports as the focus. Appendix 4.
- **Cultural** – to organise various multicultural activities and events to enhance cultural awareness, sensitivity, tolerance, multicultural safety, and cultural assimilation.
- **Social** – organise various events that members of the wider community can engage with each other and build a network for the community of all ages and culture.

Usage Considerations

- (a) VSA has played a pivotal role in promoting various sporting and multicultural activities to help people of all races to integrate and assimilate into the Australian way of life. The Ashwood Reserve and the VSA clubhouse has served as an important and vital “central home and focal point” for multicultural community members and the locals together with the wider community in promoting through the various sporting and cultural

activities a “home away from home”. This has been and continues to be the ‘hallmark’ and main aim of our organisation in enhancing the process of cultural togetherness. In view of this, the present use of the VSA clubhouse and the adjoining ground for various sporting and cultural activities is not only necessary but integral. (As shown **and detailed in Appendices 2 and 2A**).

- (b) the Ashwood reserve ground has served as an important venue for children and youngsters participating in various sporting facilities including soccer juniors, soccer masters, soccer ladies, kabadi, netball, volleyball, and hockey. This has been an important way of keeping our youth engaged in sporting & social activities to ensure healthy well-adjusted individuals who will become responsible citizens and contribute towards the building of a healthy nation. To take away this accessibility and facility for the youths will be in our opinion a short sighted and regressive step.
- (c) While the existing Waverley Hockey facility is used for up to 68 hours a week, (this is only extensively utilized during the winter hockey season). Out of the 43 competition hockey venues in Victoria, only 8 have two fields. Perhaps this reflects that while there is significant use, **it is only for a few months of the year for hockey activities**. How is the Waverley Hockey Club currently accommodating the additional capacity that they need?. **The feasibility reports contains data showing that over a 7 year period the number of WHC members has not increased but yet claim that there is a higher demand**.
- (d) In comparison, the Ashwood reserve is used **all year-round** by the VSA, local residents and wider community for picnics, dog walking, sporting activities and exercise and has the demonstrated potential for greater use. Other clubs, including the Rugby Club, Mt. Waverley Soccer and Eastern Lions also use the grounds for their recreational and sporting activities. This present proposal by Council of redeveloping it as a single synthetic hockey-pitch will put an end to such multipurpose usage.

Impediments to the Proposal moving forward.

- a) **Funding the Project:** A point highlighted in the findings of the feasibility study clearly state that “the development of the field can only be further considered if significant external funding is secured”. This point was further reiterated in the Conclusion of the

findings that “the development of the field, however, can only be further considered if significant external funding is secured”. No adequate response was received at subsequent meetings and the concern that rate payers may eventually be footing this bill was raised by residents.

- b) **Monash Council Survey:** On the 1st of May 2021 it was clearly articulated by various members of the VSA and wider community that the **present SURVEY** undertaken by Monash Council to gather data about the proposed second hockey pitch is compromised in its approach. The questions asked assume that the second hockey pitch will go ahead irrespective of the concerns of the stakeholders. This is totally unacceptable, for the results, outcome and analysis of this survey will NOT capture and depict the true sentiments and opinions of the present stakeholders.

In fact, one of the Councillors in attendance, promised to investigate this further, however, to date has not responded to our concern about the flawed survey. Many experienced members had extended “a helping hand” in drawing up a new balanced and unbiased survey. Despite the founded concerns of the VSA members and wider community about the present circulated survey, it is extremely disappointing to note that Monash Council **had NOT rescinded the survey** in its current form and has gone ahead to keep it open until the 21st of May 2021.

In view of this, we are of the opinion that the results and findings of this survey will be flawed and will not capture and reflect the actual needs of the VSA and wider multicultural community that presently utilise the Ashwood green on a daily/weekly basis.

- c) **FLOW of TRAFFIC and further congestion:**

A major concern, expressed by all the local residents, was the issue of the **flow of traffic**. The feasibility study indicates that the second hockey pitch will be used seven days a week and on certain days till 9pm. This will have an adverse impact upon the increased flow of traffic and cause greater congestion in the vicinity of the local area. It will also increase the noise levels and the impact of the added second floodlights switched on till late will cause a negative impact for the neighbourhood.

The local residents expressed great concern that people using the existing Hockey facilities often park illegally on their adjoining nature strips. Local residents do not believe an additional car park will resolve this issue. The additional second synthetic hockey pitch will attract greater traffic flow and add to the existing problems of traffic flow already faced by the local and wider communities.

ALIGNING TO A STRATEGIC VISION

- (a) From the feedback and overwhelming support received from the local residents at the last Public consultative meeting with representatives of Monash Council at the VSA Clubhouse on Saturday 1st May 2021, it was made clear that losing the green reserve will not only affect the members of the VSA but all the local residents of various age groups, who daily depend on it for their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

To redevelop the grounds for a single purpose second hockey pitch will be going against the philosophy and ethos of the Monash Open Space Strategy (2018), and Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy (MERSRS) in promoting various sporting and recreational facilities including shared recreational trails, and, in enhancing greater cultural understanding, harmony and assimilation. This is also not in keeping with the future strategic plan as mentioned within the Monash Open Space Strategy document (2018).

Monash Council is seen as a trailblazer in its focus and support of multiculturalism supporting diversity and migrants in the community. Re-purposing the Ashwood Reserve would be a significant step backwards. However, we believe that to advance the current use as envisaged by our members for future use with the cooperation of Monash Council would be the most economical, conducive way forward for the benefit of the wider community.

The VSA and community proposal for a multipurpose redevelopment of the Ashwood Reserve is being worked on, that includes a list of multicultural community facilities to improve the reserve. This is being undertaken in consultation with the local residents and wider community. Appendix 3.

SUMMARY and CONCLUSION.

- a) In summary , we sincerely hope that the foregoing provides some additional information and alternative views in redeveloping the Ashwood reserve. Given the concerns, and points raised by the local residents, members of the wider community and members of the VSA at the consultative meeting with Council members we suggest the following: An additional new survey to reflect and capture correctly the needs of the present stakeholders, local residents and wider community. Ongoing engagement with the community to outline what process will be undertaken before any decision is made.
- b) Share details of the different stakeholder groups that have been/will be asked to provide input
- c) Consider the proposal(s) (Appendix 3, work in progress on these proposals involving the local residents and wider community) and use of the reserve for the multicultural community at large.
- d) Consider an alternative site for the needs of Waverly Hockey Club.

In conclusion, we therefore urge Monash City Council to **abandon this proposed project** for a second synthetic hockey pitch and re-consider the needs of the local residents, wider community, and VSA, as opposed to the singular needs of the Waverly Hockey Club.

We would like the opportunity for further engagement with a view to expand the present VSA clubhouse for the use of the wider community and to promote the ethos of Monash Council for a better community.

Yours faithfully

Manjit S Sidhu

Manjit Singh Sidhu

President - Victorian Sikh Association.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Feasibility Study



Ashwood Reserve
2nd Hockey Field Feas

- Appendix 2 – Image Gallery of VSA Events



Victorian Sikh
Association -- Gallery

- Appendix 2A – VSA list of activities and events



VSA Events list.docx

- Appendix 3 – Proposed improvements to Ashwood reserve.



Victorian Sikh
Association Ashwood

- Appendix 4 – VSA Masters, Kids, Women in sports



VSA sports.pdf

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