

## **2.5 ASHWOOD RESERVE SECOND HOCKEY PITCH PROPOSAL - COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**

(Author: Kate Dunlop)

Responsible Director: Russell Hopkins

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report presents the results of the community consultation on the proposed second hockey pitch at Ashwood Reserve. The report clearly shows that there is both strong support and opposition to the proposed addition of the second hockey pitch.

### **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

The Waverley Hockey Club has for a number of years, been advocating for a second synthetic hockey pitch to be constructed at Ashwood Reserve to accommodate the club's existing and future needs. The club has a large membership base of approximately 500 members and competes in the Victorian Premier League.

Council considered the findings of the Melbourne Eastern Region Hockey Feasibility Study in December 2018 and a feasibility study for the potential development of a second hockey field at Ashwood Reserve in December 2019.

### **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION**

While the detailed site planning for a second hockey pitch and preliminary community consultation to inform future development confirms that it is feasible to develop a second pitch on this site, on balance officers believe that the proposal should not be supported due to the impact on other existing users and residents, as well as uncertainty about any financial contribution from Council. In this regard, it is recommended that Council:

1. Note the findings of the consultation on the development of a second hockey pitch at Ashwood Reserve and the need to accommodate the Sikh Community Association at an alternative location if the project were to proceed.
2. Only consider a project funding proposal as part of the 2022/23 budget process if funded externally for a study to identify potential locations and costs associated with re-locating the Sikh Community Association from Ashwood Reserve.
3. Advise the Waverley Hockey Club and all local State and Federal Members of Parliament and candidates at the next State and Federal election that any election commitment for a second hockey pitch at Ashwood Reserve will only be supported by Council if –

- a) it includes funding to relocate the existing tenants of the reserve; and
- b) it provides at least \$2 million toward the cost of the pitch, lighting and car parking.

**ASHWOOD RESERVE SECOND HOCKEY PITCH PROPOSAL COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**

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**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council:

1. Notes the findings of the community consultation on the development of a second hockey pitch at Ashwood Reserve and the need to accommodate the Sikh Community Association at an alternative location if the project were to proceed.
2. Only consider a project funding proposal as part of any future budget process if at least \$2 million in external funding is received for hockey facilities at Ashwood Reserve and funding towards the costs associated with re-locating the Sikh Community Association from Ashwood Reserve is also received.
3. Advise all stakeholders including the Waverley Hockey Club, Victoria Sikh Association, local residents and all local State and Federal Members of Parliament and candidates at the next State and Federal election that any election commitment for a second hockey pitch at Ashwood Reserve will only be supported by Council if it includes funding to relocate the existing tenants of the reserve; and provides at least \$2 million towards the cost of the pitch, lighting and car parking.

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a summary of the key findings and submissions received in response to community consultation undertaken on the proposed second hockey pitch Ashwood Reserve.

The report also recommends that Council only proceed with the proposal should it receive significant external funding for the hockey pitch and associated infrastructure at Ashwood Reserve and costs associated with the potential relocation of the existing user group to a comparable location.

**BACKGROUND**

The Waverley Hockey Club has for a number of years, been advocating for a second synthetic hockey pitch to be constructed at Ashwood Reserve to accommodate the club's existing and future needs. The club has a large membership base of approximately 500 members and competes in the Victorian Premier League.

At its Ordinary Meeting held 11 December 2018, Council noted the findings of the Melbourne Eastern Region Hockey Feasibility Study and agreed to undertake a feasibility study for a potential development of a second hockey field at Ashwood Reserve.

At its Ordinary Meeting held 11 December 2019, Council considered the findings of the feasibility study and resolved that Council:

- 1) Notes the Ashwood Reserve Second Hockey Field Feasibility Study has been completed and the detailed findings.
- 2) Notes that the proposal to redevelop Ashwood Reserve North to provide a second synthetic field and larger carpark is feasible from a site suitability, demand and usage perspective.
- 3) Notes that the development of the second field can only be further considered if significant external funding was secured.
- 4) Authorises officers to commence detailed site planning for a second hockey field at Ashwood Reserve and undertake preliminary community consultation to inform future development of the site with costings.
- 5) Notes that a development plan for Ashwood Reserve incorporating a second hockey field be presented to Council before September 2020.

This report therefore presents Council with a copy of the proposed development plan, findings of preliminary community consultation and indicative cost estimates to inform the next stage of the project.

### ***DISCUSSION***

Detailed site planning for a second hockey field at Ashwood Reserve was completed in 2020 as part of an integrated site plan (ISP) for the precinct. A copy of the precinct plan is provided within the consultation report (p.6) included as Attachment 1 to this report.

Consultation was undertaken with Waverley Hockey Club, Victorian Sikh Association (VSA) and local residents between 19 April – 21 May 2021. The purpose of the consultation was to understand the level of support and receive feedback for the proposed concept plan for Ashwood Reserve and to seek ideas on what design elements and reserve features should be included in the reserve improvement works.

The community consultation and engagement program for the second hockey pitch proposal included:

- Community survey available online at Shape Monash was open between 17 April - 21 May 2021.  
(<https://shape.monash.vic.gov.au/ashwood-reserve-hockey-pitch>)
- The survey link was circulated to local residents within a 500-metre radius of the reserve (approx. 900 residents via a project flyer on 17 April. It was distributed via BINGmail / Australia Post. Additionally, the flyer with survey link was distributed via a letterbox drop to local residents within a 500-metre radius of the reserve (approximately 900 residents) on 5 May.
- In total, 876 people completed the survey.
- 30 telephone and email response submissions were received.

Metropolis Research Pty Ltd undertook a data compilation and analysis of the submissions received via the online survey. A copy of the report is included as Attachment 1 to this report.

In addition to the above, written submissions were received from the Victorian Sikh Association (VSA) and Waverley Hockey Club and are included as Attachments 2 and 3 to this report respectively.

A number of meetings were also held on site in addition to a meeting between members of the VSA executive committee, Council's Mayor, Cr Brian Little, Cr de Silva, Cr Paterson and senior officers of Council including the CEO on Tuesday 6 July 2021.

A total of 876 responses were received to the online survey and were comprised of three primary groups, including respondents involved in hockey either as a player or club member (52%), local residents including local residents overseeing the reserve (32%), and Victorian Sikh Association members (16%).

The three groups of respondents each had different views on the proposal with both strong support and opposition for the proposal in its current form. It was clear by the responses that 183 people opposed the project however, 141 supported it, it was unclear if the other 553 definitively supported or opposed the project.

### Consultation Findings

#### *Hockey Club members and Players*

Waverley Hockey Club members (241) and hockey players (201) represented approximately 50% of the survey responses and provided clear support for the proposal.

Little if any opposition to the proposal existed with limited issues being identified by just 38% of club members and 34% of hockey players. The majority of respondents identified off-street or additional car parking as the biggest concern with some concern being expressed over the pavilion facilities.

It should be noted that the Waverley Hockey Club has previously received election commitments from both Labor and Liberal candidates in both State and Federal elections. The club remains focussed on securing similar commitments as part of upcoming State and Federal elections.

#### *Local Residents*

A total of 283 local residents responded to the community survey including 67 who overlook the reserve. Local resident respondents were significantly more likely than other respondents to be using the reserve for exercise and fitness related activities (31.2% compared to 3.4%), dog walking (16.0% compared to 0.2%), and informal play (14.5% compared to 1.9%). The overwhelming majority (86.6%) of the local resident respondents reported that they use the Ashwood, Jingella, Holmesglen Reserve corridor at least once a week.

From the survey responses, 173 local residents identified issues associated with the proposal, including 52% of local residents overlooking the reserve and 26.4% of other local residents registering their opposition to the proposal. Specific concerns of local residents included in relative priority were:

- Parking
- Noise
- Loss of open space and amenity
- Sportsground lighting; and
- Traffic and pedestrian management

It's important to note that the site proposed is a designated sports field in accordance with Council's Open Space Strategy, and as such, its use as a sports field is consistent with all planning guidelines and framework. The site has been previously been assessed and deemed suitable based on the findings of the feasibility report submitted to Council in December 2019.

*Victorian Sikh Association*

The land proposed for the second hockey pitch is currently used by the VSA, who have been tenants of the northern reserve and pavilion for 30 years.

It is clear through the consultation that the VSA identifies the reserve and pavilion as being of critical importance to their community. Whilst documented use of the reserve is limited, the VSA sees the linkage and provision of open space and grass as an essential element of their current and future success. Specifically, the group hosts a number of activities at the reserve including the VSA Friendship Football League and a range of social, cultural and physical activities designed to enhance cultural awareness, sensitivity, tolerance, multicultural safety, and cultural assimilation.

It would be possible to locate a new synthetic hockey pitch on the reserve and allow the VSA to continue to operate by using their existing pavilion and being allocated sports fields at other locations when required, noting that the VSA already regularly uses other football fields for soccer training on the basis no lighting exists on the location identified for the proposed second hockey pitch. The VSA strongly objected to this proposition at its meeting with Councillors and officers and maintains the co-location of its pavilion and sports ground (preferable more and larger facilities) is their priority.

In this regard, if Council were to proceed with a second hockey pitch at Ashwood Reserve, it must give due consideration as to whether it requires the VSA to share the facility or assist in their re-location to another venue with access to facilities at a comparable standard if not greater. To this end, the VSA's position is that Council commit to providing alternate facilities to an equal or better standard should it decide to proceed with the second hockey pitch.

Council should also note that the VSA currently has access to and occupies a relatively new, small pavilion built in 2016 to accommodate users of the second hockey pitch site including the VSA. The pavilion was built at a cost of less than \$0.75 million and received significant Federal Government funding.

Options available to Council include:

- 1) *Abandon the proposal* – This position would disappoint the hockey community. Whilst previous studies found that sufficient demand existed to warrant a second hockey pitch, officers are aware that the impact of COVID has had significant impact on organised sport across Monash, including hockey which has seen a significant drop off in members and teams in 2021, of up to 20%.

In this regard, the urgency that existed in 2019 may no longer exist to the same extent. Alternatively, by building the second hockey

pitch, the club may be in a better position to capitalise on the opportunity and re-capture or surpass previous membership levels based on its increased capacity.

- 2) *Proceed with the proposal* – Council has previously resolved that it would only proceed with the project on the basis it received a significant financial contribution toward the project. The estimated capital cost of constructing a second hockey pitch including floodlighting and car parking is \$2.5 million exclusive of any pavilion upgrades or broader improvements to the site. Previous election commitments have been in the order of \$1 million. In this regard, a decision to proceed with the project would require Council funding of at least \$1.5 million if an equivalent election commitment was received exclusive of any costs associated with the accommodation of the existing user group to another location. The hockey club has indicated (as part of the feasibility study completed in 2019) that it would be prepared to contribute \$0.25m toward the project.

If Council were to proceed with the proposal, a decision on the future of the VSA would also be required. As previously discussed, the VSA could be retained on site and required to hire other grounds as many clubs already do, or it could be assisted to re-locate to another venue which provides facilities of a commensurate standard at least.

The difficulty for officers in resolving this issue is partly due to the non-traditional occupation of the reserve by VSA. In this regard, sporting endeavours and the use of the sporting field appear secondary to the operation of the organisation. Whilst important, sport is largely social at this point, however the organisation has plans to grow and develop its sporting endeavours beyond those on the adjacent pitch can accommodate which makes finding a suitable location commensurate with their vision problematic without significant financial support for planning and development.

### ***POLICY IMPLICATIONS***

Relevant Council plans, strategies and policies that impact on this proposal include:

*A Healthy and Resilient Monash: Integrated Plan 2017 – 2021* outlines Council's commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of the Monash community. Key pillars of the Plan relevant to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hockey Pitch proposal at Ashwood Reserve:

- **Active and Healthy:** Focuses include supporting people to remain connected and engaged in their community, ensuring that community needs, both now and into the future are central to the physical design of infrastructure, encouraging and supporting regular physical activity.

- **Engaged, Confident and Connected:** A city which actively listens, engages and values community wisdom in shaping its own future. Focuses include ensuring everyone has the opportunity to be a part of the community, being responsive, flexible and creative in responding to existing and emerging community needs, providing services and activities that are accessible and affordable to people from all walks of life, reducing barriers to participation, and pursuing partnerships that benefit the community.

*Monash Council Plan 2017 – 2021* outlines the key objectives and priorities Council has for the Monash community. Of particular relevance to the 2nd Hockey Pitch proposal at Ashwood Reserve is:

- Inviting open and urban spaces focusing upon improving public infrastructure, meeting places and open spaces, and providing inclusive, safe and inviting places for the community to use.

Others include, Monash Open Space Strategy (2018), Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan, Age Friendly Monash, Active Monash Capital Works Priorities Framework, Active Monash's Vision and Active Communities Framework and Council's Asset Management Policy.

### ***SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS***

There is a number of social implications that have been identified and subsequently need to be considered as a consequence of consultation on the proposal to install a second hockey pitch at Ashwood Reserve.

Primarily, a decision to proceed with a fenced synthetic pitch will have a number of consequences for local residents, including and not limited to a loss of open space and amenity, dog off leash area, informal soccer area, and intensification of use. Increased use of the site will result in increased noise, traffic and parking.

Conversely, if the hockey pitch were to proceed, the club and its members would generate significant community benefit through the provision of sport and social recreation.

The potential social implications to the VSA will be dependent on whether they remain on site or re-located to another location. Similarly, the capacity of the Waverley Hockey Club to accommodate its members and grow would be significantly increased if the project were to proceed.

### ***GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT***

A gender impact assessment has not been completed on the proposal: however, from membership data supplied by the club shows approximately 30% of its 500 members are female.

From the consultation undertaken there was good representation of both female (348 - 39.7%), male (478 - 54.6%), with four non-binary (0.05%) and 46 (5.3%) preferring not to say. The highest proportion of female respondents represented the Waverley Hockey Club or identified as hockey players.

The below table indicates the gender of the person and their relationship to the reserve.

<i>Interest</i>	<i>2021</i>		<i>Gender</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Waverley Hockey Club Member	241	27.6%	24.9%	32.6%
Local resident	216	24.7%	23.5%	25.9%
Hockey player	209	23.9%	28.1%	19.3%
Victorian Sikh Association Member	141	16.1%	18.7%	12.1%
Local resident overseeing Reserve	67	7.7%	4.8%	10.1%
Not stated	2		1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>876</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>348</b>

### ***HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS***

This report is in line with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities ACT 2006 and does not raise any specific considerations.

### ***FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS***

The estimated capital cost of constructing a second hockey pitch at Ashwood Reserve is to be at least \$2.5 million including ground floodlighting and car parking.

Further costs associated with the redevelopment include walking paths, pavilion upgrades, power supply upgrade, wayfinding signage, landscaping, fencing and drainage works.

Based on the findings of the feasibility study and ability of the hockey club to maintain the existing synthetic field, maintenance and renewal costs are sustainable.

**CONCLUSION**

This is a complex matter, and the needs of the various stakeholders will be hard to accommodate as:

- Any development of the site to accommodate a second hockey pitch will compromise the existing use by the Sikh community and local residents.
- An alternative site to accommodate the activities of the Sikh Association is not readily available and is also likely to include a significant financial investment by Council to provide comparable facilities.
- Any external funding provided for the development of the second hockey pitch is unlikely to cover the full cost of the development including car parking, landscaping, etc.
- The current hockey pavilion is ageing and will not meet the requirements of the additional use generated by a second pitch.
- While the addition of a second hockey pitch would be beneficial to hockey players at both a local and regional level, this has not been considered against other priority sports infrastructure projects.

While the detailed site planning and community consultation confirm that it is feasible to develop a second pitch on this site, on balance officers believe that the proposal should not be supported at this time due to the impact on other users and the uncertainty around any financial contribution required from Council to complete the project if other users were to be accommodated elsewhere. In this regard, it is recommended that Council:

1. Note the findings of the community consultation on the development of a second hockey pitch at Ashwood Reserve and the need to accommodate the Sikh Community Association at an alternative location if the project were to proceed.
2. Only consider a project funding proposal as part of any future budget process if at least \$2 million in external funding is received for Ashwood Reserve and funding toward costs associated with re-locating the Sikh Community Association from Ashwood Reserve are also received.
3. Advise all stakeholders including Waverley Hockey Club, Victorian Sikh Association, local residents and all local State and Federal members of parliament and candidates for the next State and Federal election that any election commitment for a second hockey pitch at Ashwood Reserve will only be supported by Council if a) it includes funding to relocate the existing tenants of the reserve; and b) it provides at least \$2 million toward the cost of the pitch, lighting and car parking.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1 – Data Compilation and Analysis Report by Metropolis Research Pty Ltd

Attachment 2 – Written Response from Victorian Sikh Association

Attachment 3 – Written Response from Waverley Hockey Club