

## 7.2.5 OAKLEIGH GOLF COURSE FUTURE PLANNING

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<b>Responsible Director:</b>	Russell Hopkins, Director Community Services

### RECOMMENDATION

**That Council:**

- 1. Approve the future development options (Attachment 1) and the Oakleigh Golf Course Options Overview (Attachment 2) for public exhibition and invite community feedback on the options.**
- 2. Consider the findings of the community consultation at a future meeting.**

### INTRODUCTION

This document provides an overview of the proposed Oakleigh Golf Course future planning project with a view to establishing the preferred future use and development options for the site based on community needs.

### COUNCIL PLAN STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

#### **Sustainable City**

Ensure an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable municipality.  
Prioritise sustainable transport options, including walking/ cycling paths and public transport.

#### **Inclusive Services**

Renew our community assets to deliver contemporary services.

#### **Enhanced Places**

Improving open spaces, bushland and street trees, including prioritising biodiversity and community engagement.

#### **Good Governance**

Ensure a financially, socially and environmentally sustainable organisation.  
Effectively communicate and engage with the community.

## BACKGROUND

The City of Monash is home to six golf courses – four private and two public courses. The Oakleigh and Glen Waverley Golf Courses are public golf courses owned and maintained by the City of Monash.

Oakleigh Golf Course is a 9-hole public course suited to novice or social golfers due to its short hole lengths and basic course configuration. Glen Waverley Golf Course is an 18-hole golf course that is suitable for all levels of golf.

Further to this, the catchment to the south of Oakleigh Golf Course through the City of Bayside and City of Kingston are dominated by private golf courses such as Huntingdale Golf Course and Metropolitan Golf Course, whereas the catchments to the east and north-west of the course have a higher proportion of public courses such as Glen Waverley Golf Course.

The City of Monash is forecast to grow to 249,287 residents by 2041. It is a culturally diverse demographic, with 45% of residents born overseas. The total land area of the city is 81.5 square kilometres, 512.1 hectares deemed as community space. Oakleigh Golf Course is located close to the western boundary of the City and straddles the boundary of the suburbs of Oakleigh and Chadstone. Oakleigh is forecast to grow from 9,921 residents to 16,341 in 2042, a 64.7% increase in 20 years.

### Oakleigh Golf Course (OGC)

The OGC is home to two clubs with a combined total of 144 members, Oakleigh Golf Club (now incorporating the Oakleigh Ladies Club) and Oakleigh Veterans Golf Club. Total golf rounds at the course have risen significantly in the past few years, rising from just over 21,000 in 2019/20 to 25,000 in 2021/22 and 30,000 in 22/23. This is reflective of broader trends in golf corresponding with its resurgence during COVID lockdowns.

Despite the recent increase in golf rounds, it is considered timely to consider the future of the golf course having regard to a number of factors including and not limited to, the long-term financial investment required to maintain the course, the provision of both public and private golf courses within the region, relatively limited access and pressures on open space due to population growth and demographic changes.

After undertaking analysis of possible future uses of the site, two potential development options have been identified as most feasible in meeting future community needs, specifically:

1. Retain the 9-hole golf course (with ninth hole shortened to allow for trail realignment to overcome safety concerns on the adjoining trail).
2. Transform the area to open space (eg. regional park) with no provision for golf.

The two preferred options have been developed as part of a preliminary planning for the golf course that includes initial concepts and cost estimates for each option as presented in Attachment 1 to this report.

## DISCUSSION

### Option 1 – retention of the 9-hole golf course

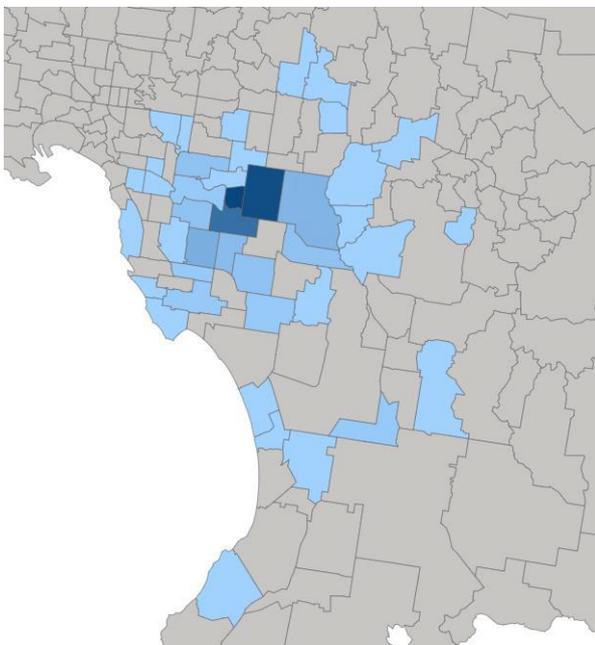
#### Participation

Use of Oakleigh Golf Course grew by 45% between 2016-17 and 2020-21, with rounds numbers rising again in 2021-22 and 2022-23. The number of rounds at Oakleigh Golf Course in 2016-17 and 2017-18 was slightly below 15,000 per financial year and considered poor. Following a change in management and increased programming at Oakleigh Golf Course, growth in the order of rounds of 4,000-5,000 per year was achieved in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

Golf experienced a well-documented increase in popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic, which can be seen in the rise in the number of rounds per day at Oakleigh Golf Course from 58 per day in 2019-20 to 83 in 2020-21. The increase in rounds per day has continued to rise and is now around 85 per day on average compared to full capacity, which can be estimated at approximately 16 rounds per hour for each hour of daylight.

The Oakleigh Golf Course is home to two golf clubs – Oakleigh Golf Club and Oakleigh Veteran’s Golf Club. The Oakleigh Golf Club (Men’s) and Oakleigh Ladies Golf Clubs recently merged to form the Oakleigh Golf Club. The Oakleigh Veteran’s Golf Club remains a separate entity to the Oakleigh Golf Club. The two clubs have a current joint membership of 144 (as of September 2023), with 79 members in the Oakleigh Golf Club (69 active members and 10 non-playing members) and 65 members in the Oakleigh Veteran’s Golf Club.

A participant survey was undertaken at Oakleigh Golf Course and Glen Waverley Golf Course between 15 and 21 March 2023 to collate a sample of course user residential postcodes. Oakleigh Golf Course attracted 374 users within the seven-day period, while Glen Waverley Golf Course attracted 757 users.



Map: Oakleigh Golf Club & Oakleigh Veteran Golf Club members

1  21

The breakdown of the membership by postcode shows an expected concentration of members that reside in suburbs close to the course, including Chadstone (21 members), Mount Waverley

(20), Hughesdale/Huntingdale/Oakleigh/Oakleigh East (15), Bentleigh East (6) and Oakleigh South (4). 58% of members live in postcodes/suburbs that are primarily within the City of Monash. Oakleigh Golf Club consists of 53% Monash residents and the Oakleigh Veteran's Golf Club consists of 63% Monash residents.

### Infrastructure

The course layout consists primarily of short, straight holes, with two par-4 holes and seven par-3 holes. The tees and greens are generally considered to be in good condition and the fairways in appropriate condition given the typical level of play at the course.

Drainage issues have been reported on holes 1 and 7, with water retention in some of the low-lying areas during rain. Course irrigation is due for renewal.

The clubhouse was originally built in or around 1980 with a pro-shop added a few years later. The facilities are considered fit-for-purpose and commensurate with the standards of the day, although ageing and will require renewal in the medium-term.

Under Option 1, the nine-hole course configuration and existing built infrastructure is retained. The ninth hole is shortened to allow for the realignment of the shared path at Park Road. The shared path is realigned at the maintenance depot to minimise the conflict between maintenance vehicles and pedestrians/cyclists. In addition to highlighting potential infrastructure upgrades and improvements, the option also includes an opportunity for the potential enhancement of areas of native vegetation.

## **Option 2 – Transform the area to open space (e.g. regional park) with no provision for golf**

### Participation

The population and demographic profile of the City of Monash and the broader residential catchment surrounding the Oakleigh Golf Course impacts current and future community needs. In general, population across the catchment serviced by Oakleigh Golf Course will continue to grow, generating demand for further community sport and recreation facilities and open space.

The City of Monash is forecast to grow by approximately 17% to 238,054 residents between 2021 and 2036. The demographic profile of the suburb catchment displays a higher level of cultural diversity than the average for Greater Melbourne, with higher proportions of people with overseas birthplaces and ancestry, particularly from Chinese, Indian, Sri Lankan and Greek backgrounds.

Within the broader catchment, 42.8% of residents were born overseas and 42.1% speak a language other than English at home. Cultural diversity is even higher for the City of Monash, with 48.8% of residents born overseas and 50.1% speaking a language other than English at home. The cultural diversity of the population catchment has potential impacts on the need for golf courses and facilities, as the Sport Australia State of Play Report (2019) determined that participation rates for people that speak a language other than English (1.9%) is less than half that of the total population (4.9%).

Whilst the Oakleigh Golf Course plays an important role in supporting golf participation, it provides limited opportunities for use by non-golfers who are becoming increasingly evident in the local area based on its changing demographic profile.

Open space provision in the suburbs serviced by Oakleigh Golf Course varies, but in general, there is a need for more publicly accessible open space. While Oakleigh currently has 4 hectares per 1,000 residents, other surrounding suburbs have current open space deficiencies, including Chadstone (2 hectares per 1,000 residents), Oakleigh East – Huntingdale (1.2 hectares per 1,000 residents) and Hughesdale (0.6 hectares per 1,000 residents).

It should also be noted that the Oakleigh and Glen Waverley golf courses are included in the total open space calculations (Hectares of Open Space) and contribute to the 2.5 Ha per 1,000 residents average across Monash and 4 Ha in Oakleigh. However, both courses are considered “restricted open space” as public access through the space is restricted, which means that publicly accessible open space gaps may exist in close proximity e.g. the north side of Oakleigh Golf Course in the Chadstone Precinct which has 1.7 Ha of open space per 1,000 residents.

Reliable data for open space and regional playground visitation is difficult to obtain. Parks Victoria report that almost 1 million people visit Jells Park annually. The City of Melbourne reports that Royal Park in Melbourne has up to 3,000 visits per week during peak times. The number of visitations to other regional parks across Monash including Waverley and Valley Reserve is estimated to be significantly higher than the average golf course attendance of 85 people per day and could well expect to attract several hundred thousand visits per annum.

The following provides an indication of likely participation rates in various activities within City of Monash based on *Ausplay data collated between 2015-2023 for adults*:

- Walking – 48.7%
- Fitness/Gym – 38.7%
- Running/Athletics – 17.3%
- Cycling – 11.7%
- Bush walking – 5.6%
- Yoga – 5.2%

The participation rate for adults in golf was not available in the top 10 activities for all adults but was shown to be 5% of people aged 25 and older.

### Sustainability

The site plays an important role in Scotchman’s Creek biodiversity and habitat corridor that could be further supported through the open space option. Initiatives such as the “skink-link” have generated significant community interest in the biodiversity outcomes of the Scotchman’s Creek and adjacent reserves which would further benefit through this option and the opportunities that would be presented.

### Open Space Network

The Scotchman’s Creek Trail provides an important active transport route to and through the site. Opportunities to enhance the connectivity and its safety would also be supported through the open space option.

It was identified that 492 recreational trail users were recorded during a 3-hour period during the Super Sunday Recreational Users – *Final Report – Monash Super Sunday 2022*, emphasising its importance in the open space network.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

### Option 1 – retention of the 9-hole golf course

Retention of the golf course will require an ongoing annual subsidy from Council of more than \$100,000 in addition to an annual capital works program to maintain course conditions.

Whilst the clubhouse and pro-shop facilities are suitable and fit-for-purpose for a course such as Oakleigh Golf Course, they are ageing and will require renewal in the medium term.

The maintenance areas, including a separate site office, are also described as being functional, however, along with the irrigation system will require upgrade in the medium term.

Total asset renewal is currently estimated at approximately \$20 million.

It should be noted that no funding is currently allocated towards the renewal/upgrade works of the Oakleigh Golf Course. Funding sources would need to be sought/confirmed before commitment to the project.

### Option 2 – Transform the area to open space with no provision for golf.

The major component of operating costs for the golf course and open space is labour followed closely by plant hire. Little to no material difference is therefore forecast if the golf course was replaced with well-maintained open space.

A difference could be achieved if the proportion of “well-maintained” land area were reduced. This potential saving could be offset by the reduction in green-fee income, which could therefore result in a short-term net cost to Council by converting the area to open space.

The level of operational savings would therefore be commensurate with the degree to which the area (m<sup>2</sup>) of golf course was retained as an area of passive open space, less the reduction in green fees/contract income generated from the course.

#### Capital Investment

Whilst preliminary in nature, the estimated cost to remove the golf infrastructure, re-align paths and create an area of passive open space is \$4.2 million.

A regional playground and supporting infrastructure are expected to cost a further \$4 million, whilst additional funding of up to \$2 million would be required to create additional paths for access through the site.

A total site investment of approximately \$11 million would be required to create an open space area with regional playspace infrastructure. Options for funding from external sources including State and Federal Government would be actively pursued.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Oakleigh Golf Course future planning and associated development priorities are also cognisant of and align with relevant Monash strategies and plans including but not necessarily limited to:

- Council Plan 2021-2025
- Municipal Public Health Plan 2021-2025
- Monash Open Space Strategy 2021
- Active Recreation Opportunities Strategy 2021

- Monash Playground and Playspace Strategy 2020
- Active Reserves Facility Hierarchy 2018

Combined these policies, plans and strategies highlight the key priorities and areas of focus for Council which focus on *improving the health and wellbeing of the community* through the provision of:

- safe and inclusive places,
- accessible and engaging activities and services, and
- opportunities for all members of the Monash community to be physically active and participate in community life.

## **CONSULTATION**

Monash Council is committed to retaining the site as open space for the community, with the potential to either 1) retain and the golf course, or 2) transform the course into a regional park. Community consultation and feedback will be an important component in any decision on the future use of the site.

It is envisaged, that following consultation, all community and stakeholder feedback will be captured in a Consultation Report and presented to Council for further consideration before a decision on the future of the golf course is made.

The timing and total cost of the project is subject to the findings of the consultation and could be subject to a decision to sunset the operation of the golf course in the future e.g. five years or the end of 2029/30 which would also include a potential transition plan to support existing golfers (if need be).

## **SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no social implications to this report.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS**

There are no human rights implications to this report.

## **GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Oakleigh Golf Course provides opportunities for both male and female participants to access golf at a public facility and at an affordable price.

While the golf participation report presents a sport that is primarily played by males, public golf courses such as Oakleigh Golf Course provide important opportunities for golf to remain accessible across gender, age, and socio-economic cohorts.

Oakleigh Golf Course is home to two golf clubs -The Oakleigh Golf Club (Men's) which recently merged with Oakleigh Ladies Club. The Oakleigh Veterans Golf Club remains a separate entity to the Oakleigh Golf Club. The two clubs have a current joint membership of 144.



A breakdown of the membership by gender shows The Oakleigh Veterans Golf Club is 100% male membership and the Oakleigh Golf Club has a large percentage of male members.

Independent of the future of Oakleigh Golf Course, retaining a public golf offering and programs that encourage female participation should remain a priority for the City of Monash.

## **CONCLUSION**

Approval is sought to proceed with community consultation that will exhibit the two future potential options for the Oakleigh Golf Course and test community sentiment towards these with the view of receiving a Consultation Report and final recommendation for Council consideration and determination at a Council meeting late 2023-early 2024.

## **ATTACHMENT LIST**

Attachment 1 – Oakleigh Golf Course Future Development Options (Option A & Option B)

Attachment 2 – Oakleigh Golf Course Options Overview

# OPTION A - NINE HOLE GOLF COURSE



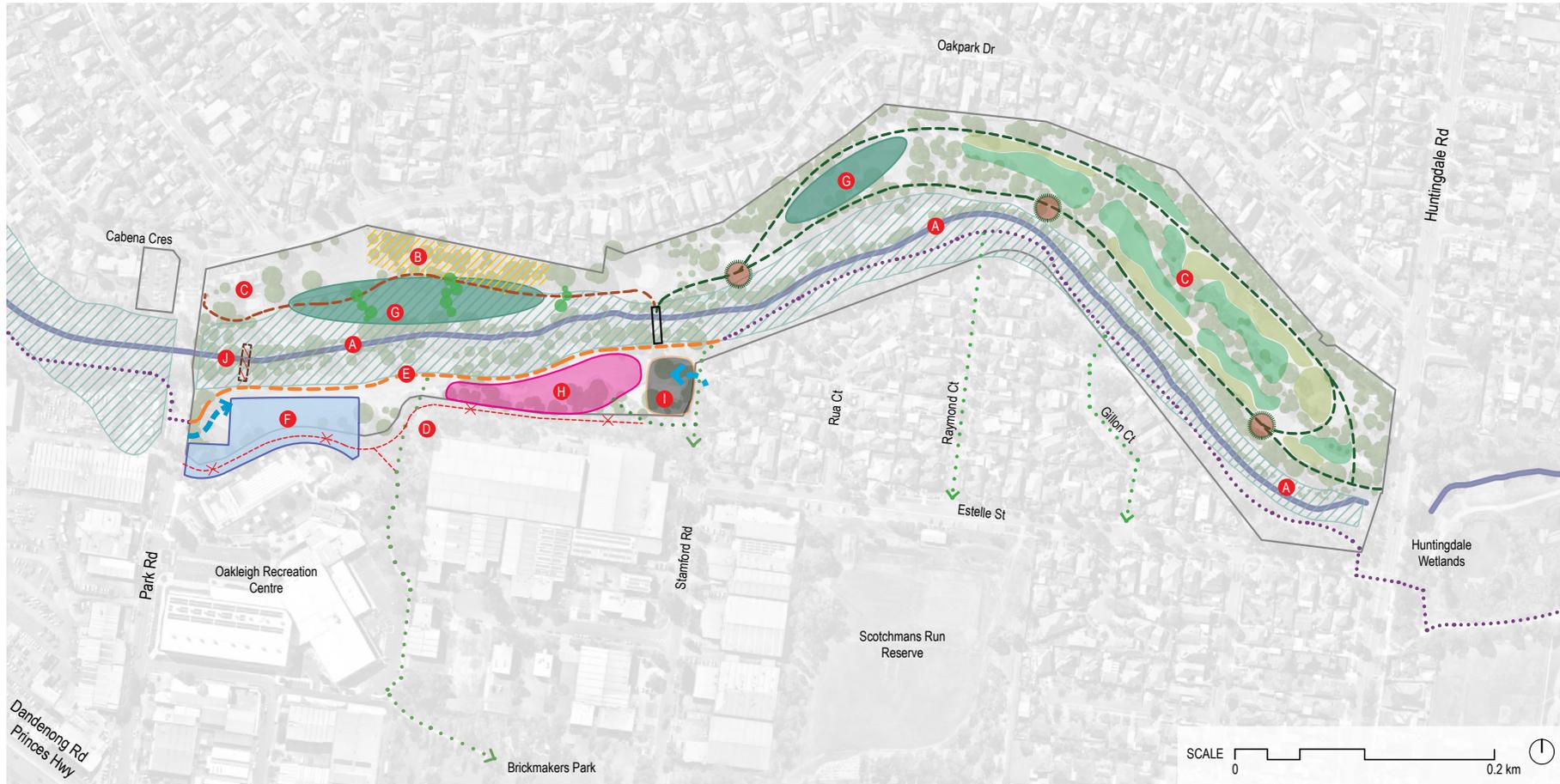
**EXPLANATORY NOTES**

- A** Realign Scotchmans Creek Trail to line up with existing pedestrian crossing and to reduce pedestrian conflict with maintenance vehicles entering the pool.
- B** Shorten the 9th hole to accommodate realignment of Scotchmans Creek Trail.
- C** Realign the Scotchmans Creek Trail along east side of Stamford Road to avoid depot entrance gate
- D** Protect remnant vegetation area.
- E** Ongoing vegetation and weed management works.
- F** Existing bridge subject to assessment and review.

**LEGEND**

- |  |                                       |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| Study Area                                   | Remnant Vegetation Patches            | Removal of Scotchmans Creek Trail                  |
| Scotchmans Creek                             | Existing Bridge                       | Proposed Dedicated Vehicular Access                |
| Land subject to Inundation overlay           | Existing Scotchmans Creek Trail       | Pathways & Connections to Nearby Public Open Space |
| Existing Canopy Cover - Predominantly Mature | Realignment of Scotchmans Creek Trail |  |

# OPTION B - REGIONAL PARK



## EXPLANATORY NOTES

- A** Ongoing vegetation and weed management works.
- B** Protect remnant vegetation area.
- C** Golf course infrastructure and clubhouse to be removed. Expansion of bushland areas, enhancement of habitat corridors and passive recreation opportunities.
- D** Remove portion of Scotchmans Creek Trail between Park Road and Stamford Road.
- E** New Scotchmans Creek Trail along creek line and above 1 in 100 year flood level.
- F** Area set aside for the potential future expansion of the Oakleigh Recreation Centre and interim parking solution.
- G** New passive public open space zone with opportunities for public events in the natural amphitheatre, potential cafe area for all users and the enhancement of habitat corridors.
- H** New regional playspace and public open space.
- I** New car park with approximately 20 - 25 spaces accessed from Stamford Road.
- J** Existing bridge subject to assessment and review.

## LEGEND

- |  |                                       |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| Study Area                                   | Existing Bridge                       | Pathways & Connections to Nearby Public Open Space |
| Scotchmans Creek                             | Existing Scotchmans Creek Trail       | Secondary Pathways & Connections (Sealed)          |
| Land subject to Inundation overlay           | Realignment of Scotchmans Creek Trail | Tertiary Pathways & Connections (Gravel)           |
| Existing Canopy Cover - Predominantly Mature | Removal of Scotchmans Creek Trail     | Proposed Dedicated Vehicular Access                |
| Remnant Vegetation Patches                   |                                       |  |

# FUTURE PLANNING FOR OAKLEIGH GOLF COURSE



Monash Council is considering two potential options for the future development of Oakleigh Golf Course.

## OPTION A – NINE HOLE GOLF COURSE

### DESCRIPTION

The nine-hole course configuration and existing course infrastructure is retained. The ninth hole is shortened to allow for the realignment of the shared path at Park Road.

The shared path is realigned at the maintenance depot to minimise the conflict between maintenance vehicles and pedestrians/cyclists.

Drainage on holes 1 and 7 is improved, and areas of native vegetation are enhanced.

**ESTIMATED COST: \$1.5 – \$1.7M**

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES	OPPORTUNITIES	RISKS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nine-hole golf course is retained and there is no loss of golf provision or offering</li> <li>Golf course drainage and condition is improved</li> <li>Shared path safety and connection improved at key conflict points</li> <li>Existing golf clubs and participants continue to operate from the site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No additional access to open space, play or recreation facilities</li> <li>Native vegetation adjacent to the first hole to continue to be impacted by golf</li> <li>Golf course will require additional renewal and capital investment to service existing golf participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grow golf programming options at the course to continue the recent increase in round numbers and participation</li> <li>Potential to diversify offering to incorporate non-traditional golf activities (e.g. disc-golf, foot-golf)</li> <li>Recent increased participation experienced during COVID-19 is currently being sustained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programming resources and cost to generate increased rounds and usage may not be sustainable in the long-term</li> <li>Recent increases in rounds since COVID-19 may not be sustainable in the long-term and require monitoring</li> <li>Ongoing subsidisation of course operation and maintenance costs is likely</li> </ul>

## OPTION B – REGIONAL PARK

### DESCRIPTION

Golf course infrastructure is removed and the site is transformed into passive open space to create opportunities for recreation and enhancement of bushland and habitat corridors.

Community recreation facilities are provided, including a regional playspace, car parking, improved shared path alignment and connection, and the potential for fitness equipment stations and path loops.

The clubhouse, pro-shop and maintenance depot would be removed from the site.

**ESTIMATED COST: \$4.9 – \$5.4M**

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES	OPPORTUNITIES	RISKS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant amount of additional accessible open space</li> <li>Need for a regional playspace in Oakleigh is met</li> <li>Increased active and passive recreation opportunities</li> <li>Shared path safety and connection improved</li> <li>Improved native vegetation and biodiversity</li> <li>Allows for potential future expansion of the Oakleigh Recreation Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of golf facility provision at the site</li> <li>Loss of golf participation and programming at the site</li> <li>Loss of Council revenue generation</li> <li>Golf provision and offering suitable for novice, junior and senior golfers is diminished</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential to support existing golf participants to transfer to Glen Waverley Golf Course</li> <li>Increased use of the site by the broader community for active and passive recreation</li> <li>Increased use of the site for biodiversity and revegetation programs</li> <li>Integration of open space, play and active recreation opportunities with Oakleigh Recreation Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing golfers at Oakleigh Golf Course may not transfer to other course and discontinue participation in golf</li> <li>Increased traffic and parking requirements will need to be managed to cater for broader community access</li> </ul>