

7.2.4 GLEN WAVERLEY BOWLS CLUB - COVERED GREENS PROPOSAL

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RECOMMENDATION

That Council provides in-principle support to the Glen Waverley Bowls Club (GWBC) by committing up to one-third of the total project cost of either scenario 1 or scenario 2 as outlined in this report for the installation of green canopy cover(s) over the new synthetic bowling green(s) and an undercover alfresco area at the Club.

INTRODUCTION

This report seeks Council's in-principle support to endorse a partnership funding approach for the Glen Waverley Bowls Club (GWBC) canopy project, whereby Council would contribute up to one-third of the total project cost to install canopies over one or two bowling greens, subject to the Club securing the remaining funding through external sources.

The Glen Waverley Bowls Club (GWBC) has been seeking Council support to improve their lawn bowls facility since 2021. The club has in-principle support from John Mullahy, State MP for Glen Waverley and Club Patron, and Dr Carina Garland, Federal Member for Chisholm.

At the 28 January 2025 meeting, Council noted that Glen Waverley Bowls Club (GWBC) is identified as Council's premier bowls facility with a municipal-wide catchment that is considered a priority site for future infrastructure improvements and government investment. GWBC has the capacity to support higher-level competition and approved events subject to Bowls Victoria requirements. While the Club primarily operates as a community facility; its size, standard of greens and affiliation with Bowls Victoria enable it to support competition and events extending beyond the immediate local catchment. The proposed upgrades would strengthen its capacity to accommodate regional level activity, host more events and increased usage.

State Government Funding of \$40,000 received in 2025/26 through the Local Infrastructure Support Fund was matched by equal contributions from Monash Council and the club to complete detailed design of the project, which is now tender ready. An artist's impression of the proposed development is included as Attachment A to this report.

The club now requires in-principle agreement from Council that it will contribute up to one-third of the cost of the project to enable the club to seek funding from state and federal governments to deliver the project.

COUNCIL PLAN STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

A healthy, safe and connected community

A community where all people have the opportunity to experience enhanced levels of social, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

BACKGROUND

Bowls offers a unique proposition to participants due to being a sport with few barriers to access. It is a low impact, non-contact sport that can be enjoyed at any stage in life, both socially and competitively, in a range of environments.

Each year in Victoria, people of all ages regularly participate and compete in the sport of Bowls:

- Casual and social participants (including barefoot bowls) – there is estimated to be at least 433,000 Victorians who play social and barefoot bowls annually, making it one of the strongest community sport activities in the State.
- Victoria's 506 Bowls Clubs in metropolitan and regional areas act as a central hub for community connection, providing vital opportunity for social engagement and recreation through healthy activity.
- There are 40,464 full members participating in formal structured competition throughout the year.
- Regular participants (more than four games annually in a structured competition) - 150,000+.
- Over 20% of all Bowls participants in Victoria are under the age of 40, with female participation experiencing the highest level of growth in social formats over the past decade.
- With 80% of regular participants over the age of 40, Bowls offers the opportunity to continue to develop new skills, stay fit, apply their sports IQ, hone talents and compete from Club to State and National Level.

Importantly, Bowls also provides older Victorians with more opportunities to continue to lead an active life in a non-confronting environment, no matter their skills. Bowls provides significant physical and mental health benefits for all Victorians. A La Trobe University study showed that a person who participates in Bowls is likely to be 12% physically healthier than someone who is not.

Bowls in Monash

There are four community bowls clubs in Monash, as well as one privately owned bowls venue at the Mulgrave Country Club.

The four community bowls clubs are:

- Glen Waverley Bowls Club (GWBC)
- Mount Waverley Bowls Club (MWBC)
- Oakleigh Bowls Club (OBC)
- South Oakleigh Bowls Club (SOBC)

A Monash Bowls Forum was held with bowls clubs on 1 December 2021. All four community bowls clubs and Bowls Victoria attended the Monash Bowls Forum, where clubs were encouraged to put forward suggestions about what needs to happen for the sport to thrive into the future. The key issues impacting the sport, as identified by the clubs at the Forum included -

- revenue generation and ongoing financial viability and sustainability,
- declining bowls membership and volunteering numbers, and an ageing member base; and
- public image and perception that the sport is for older adults.

At the 28 January 2025 meeting, Council noted that Glen Waverley Bowls Club (GWBC) was identified as Council's premier bowls facility with a municipal-wide catchment that is considered a priority site for future infrastructure improvements and government investment.

The rationale for positioning GWBC as Council's premier lawn bowls facility includes:

- GWBC has the largest bowling membership in Monash with approximately 40% being female.
- GWBC is located at Monash's premier sports ground, Central Reserve in the heart of Glen Waverley with 3 greens used for lawn bowls and 1 green dedicated to pickleball of which there are more than 150 members.
- Its geographic location is in the heart of Glen Waverley and is 5km away from the next nearest bowls club.
- Its location is on the edge of the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) Structure Plan Area and within the SRL Planning Area Declaration, and expected to experience significant population growth.
- The club has secured in-principle support from State and Federal members and their committee has formally expressed their willingness to work collaboratively with other clubs to consolidate bowls assets and infrastructure in Monash.

Having regard to the above and supported by Council's decision on 28 January 2025, Council secured \$40,000 in funding from the State Government Locals Sports Infrastructure Fund (LSIF) in the 26/27 financial year matched by \$20,000 of Council funding and \$20,000 from the Glen Waverley Bowls Club to complete a detailed design for green canopies and associated works for Greens A and B.

Generally speaking, it is not feasible for Council to fund similar scale developments across all four bowls clubs – the strategic identification of a premier level bowls venue in Monash is warranted to help prioritise a site for future development and investment, and more broadly enhance the overall sustainability of Bowls in the city.

Refer to Attachment A – Glen Waverley Bowls Club Final Concept Plan.

Covered bowls greens

Installing a canopy over a bowls green delivers a combination of participation, health, financial and sustainability benefits that are particularly important given Victoria's climate, ageing participant base and competitive sport environment.

Industry experience demonstrates that clubs with covered bowling greens enjoy the following benefits:

1. Increased Participation and Membership Growth - Bowls Victoria case studies show membership and participation increases of 100–500% following canopy installation at comparable metropolitan clubs.

2. Improved Health and Safety Outcomes - Canopies provide protection from harmful UV radiation, directly addressing Victoria's high skin cancer risk. Shelter from rain, wind and heat reduces physical stress, dehydration and heat-related illness, particularly for older participants

who make up the majority of bowls players. It also enables people to remain physically active in a low-impact, non-contact sport for longer, supporting healthy ageing.

3. Greater Financial Viability and Club Sustainability - Year-round use supports increased membership revenue, social participation fees, bar, catering and function income, expanded event-hosting opportunities, and greater use by community groups. Covered greens enable clubs to deliver a broader range of programs, including night and winter competitions, community events, and school activities, ensuring facilities remain active and financially sustainable throughout the year.

4. Asset Protection and Operational Efficiency - Covered greens experience less weather damage, reducing long-term maintenance and disruption. The converted synthetic greens reduce water use, lower fertiliser and chemical inputs, and improve environmental sustainability.

5. Strategic and Community Benefits - Supports Monash Council's objectives for healthy ageing, community connection and inclusive, accessible sport and role as a community hub.

DISCUSSION

Future of bowls in Monash

The City of Monash currently has no covered bowls greens and is therefore among the few LGAs in metropolitan Melbourne with bowls clubs operating without canopy covers. In contrast, most neighbouring municipalities have invested in covered greens, providing safer and more reliable year-round playing conditions.

Without an all-weather cover in Monash, the long-term viability of bowls is at risk, with members increasingly choosing nearby clubs (including Chadstone and Dandenong) that offer canopy protection from harsh UV exposure and enable play in all weather conditions. If covered greens are not delivered in Monash, bowls participation is likely to continue to decline and the sport risks effectively "dying out" locally.

The Glen Waverly Bowls Club has been advocating strongly for external funding with their local Members of Parliament; however, indications are that State or Federal funding is unlikely to be secured without a local government co-contribution or commitment. The club therefore requires further support and an in-principle funding commitment from Council to strengthen its case and assist with its chances of securing external funding. The GWBC secured Council and Sport & Recreation Victoria support for funding to develop a plan for a strategically identified project as included in Attachment A. The club also contributed \$20,000 toward the cost of this project to design covered greens as a statement of its commitment.

The nearest covered green to GWBC is approximately 8km away and significantly less for other clubs in Monash making GWBC the ideal location for Council's first covered green to protect the integrity and ongoing viability of the sport in Monash.

It is important to highlight that the South Oakleigh Bowls Club (SOBC) also continues to advocate for funding to install a covered green; however, no feasibility or detailed planning has been completed for this project.

Officers understand the SOBC is seeking up to \$2M from the State Government to enable it to install a cover over its synthetic green, upgrade the club house and facilities. Unlike GWBC this project currently has no design and has no formal costings to inform its feasibility with further work required to understand if this is possible at the site, and to determine the scope and scale of any future redevelopment. Officers will continue to engage with the club on its investigations and opportunities for future funding.

Other clubs within Monash including the Oakleigh Bowls Club and Mount Waverley Bowls Club are expected to continue operate, however under increasingly more pressure to remain viable. Club led initiatives to amalgamate or co-locate should be supported by Council as a way to pro-actively support the sport and to retain and protect individual club history, formal recognition of life members and the contribution of volunteers from past.

Strategic Direction

As detailed in Bowls Victoria's Rolling Toward 2030 Plan, the best approach to maximise the value of Bowls for Victorian communities, while supporting participation growth and the financial health of clubs, is to provide covered greens at existing facilities.

According to Bowls Victoria, the impact of covered greens in attracting new participants to the sport and engaging people in healthy activity across all age groups is significant. For example:

- The installation of two covered synthetic greens at Narre Warren Bowls Club in 2021 has seen participation soar from approximately 400 to over 2,500 (an increase of 575%) through the provision of more opportunities for all ages to play across more social and competitive formats at any time of year.
- The installation of a single covered synthetic green at Karingal resulted in a 100% membership and 200% participation increase, even during the COVID period.
- The installation of a single covered synthetic green at Dandenong resulted in a 100% membership and 200% participation increase, even during the COVID period.

In considering the long-term future of bowls in Monash, it may be beneficial to explore options for consolidating existing bowls assets and resources, with a view to strategically supporting two key clubs and directing future Council funding accordingly. However, it is important that any approach prioritises sensitivity and respect for all clubs involved, acknowledging their unique histories, contributions, and the value they bring to the community.

Current evidence suggests that securing State or Federal funding is improbable without a firm commitment from Council. Accordingly, the GWBC Club seeks in-principle support from Council for its project to enhance the GWBC's chances of receiving external funding. Officers do not recommend providing in-principle support to the SOBC at this stage, until feasibility work has been completed to inform a future project.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

An opinion of probable cost to install two green canopy covers over new synthetic greens, and construction of a new undercover alfresco area at GWBC is approximately \$8.1M inclusive of all investigations, fees, contingency, and escalations.

Subject to the amount of external funding received, this project could be scaled back to cover a single green potentially reducing the construction cost to \$4.574M.

The next stage of the project is to secure funding for construction. It is proposed that Council commit to supporting one-third funding on the basis the club is able to secure external funding for either scenario. External funding may include federal, state or even self-funding.

Proposed funding scenarios for construction of canopy at Glen Waverley Bowls Club

Scenario	Canopy cover option	Estimated cost	Funding source A	Funding source B	Council funding
1	Green A & alfresco Area	\$4.57M	\$1.52M	\$1.52M	\$1.52M
2	Green A, alfresco & Green B	\$8.1M	\$2.7M	\$2.7M	\$2.7M

Council's forward financial commitment therefore is expected to be approximately \$1.52 million under scenario 1 where just 1 green is covered, or \$2.7 million under scenario 2 where both greens are covered.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The recommendations in this report are consistent with Bowls Victoria's Rolling Toward 2030 Plan and align with relevant Monash strategies and plans including but not necessarily limited to:

- Municipal Public Health Plan
- Monash Open Space Strategy 2021
- Monash Bowls Discussion Paper
- Active Reserves Facility Hierarchy.

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

GWBC has consulted widely within the club and broader bowls community on the design and installation of green canopy covers. The club has provided regular updates to local stakeholders

including Council and state and federal members of parliament. Community Consultation to inform the local community on the design and proposed installation of the canopies would be undertaken when funding is confirmed.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Covered synthetic greens maximises the value of bowls and is particularly valuable to older participants through:

- Enabling all weather play and healthy activity throughout the year, helping to address and reduce significant health issues.
- Providing important shade from sun to counter the incidence of skin cancer (melanoma) and other health conditions.
- Providing greater year-round opportunities for regular social connection, which offers proven capacity to sustain and improve mental health.
- Enabling continued participation in competitive sport.
- Providing protection from the elements for officials, coaches, and volunteers.
- Maintaining year-round social connections.

Broader social and community health benefits include:

- Create capacity to expand both the social and competitive bowls offering to meet the preferences of people of all ages and skills.
- Extend capacity for evening participation (and outside of traditional working hours) meeting the needs of people with different levels of time availability and preference.
- Provide greater capacity to deliver programs and competition for all abilities bowls - blind, deaf, para-ID and para-physical bowlers.
- Provide for extended use by schools in all weather conditions.
- Provide greater capacity to offer the Bowling with Babies program, providing new mothers with important means of connection and recreation.
- Cater to people of different levels of health and fitness through offering a wider range of programs. Enhance bowls clubs' proven ability to play a key role in providing social opportunities through engagement in sport and healthy activity.
- Capitalise on the low cost and lack of barriers to entry of the sport and providing more opportunities for all to participate.
- Expand opportunities for regular social connection, which offers proven capacity to sustain and improve mental health.
- Provide an inclusive non-collision sport option for younger people, with opportunities to play for fun (e.g. Roll Up program) or participate in development pathways and competition to elite level.
- The failure to install a canopy cover over a bowling green at GWBC places the club's ongoing viability at risk.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

There are no human rights implications to this report.

GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A Gender Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of this work because this service is considered to have a direct and significant impact on the Monash community.

In 2018, female members represented 36% (240 female members) of the total bowls club membership in Monash clubs.

In 2022 this had dropped to 27% (87 female members). GWBC at 43% female membership, has the highest percentage of female participation of Monash bowls clubs. It is expected that the installation of canopy covers at GWBC will significantly increase female participation and overall membership at the club.

CONCLUSION

GWBC is considered Monash's premier bowls facility. To support the long-term viability of the GWBC, expand participation opportunities and ensure the future sustainability of Bowls in Monash, it is recommended that Council provide in principle support to fund up to one-third of the cost to install two canopy covers over synthetic greens and undercover alfresco area to ensure bowls has a future in Monash.

ATTACHMENT LIST

1. Attachment A - Glen Waverley Bowls Club Final Concept Plan [7.2.4.1 - 1 page]

Glen Waverley Bowls Club Final Concept Plan



Option	Canopy cover option	Estimated cost
1	Green A & alfresco area	\$4,574,000
2	Green A, alfresco & Green B	\$8,100,000

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