

# Freeway Reserve (Mulgrave)

## Masterplan Project

### Project Summary

#### Project Background

In December 2015, Monash City Council commenced a project to prepare a masterplan for Freeway Reserve. The reserve is located in Mulgrave between the Monash Freeway and Wellington Road, adjacent to Mazenod College. It is a Council-owned and managed asset.

The reserve comprises of three soccer pitches, two cricket ovals, cricket practice nets, an archery range, associated pavilions and clubrooms to support the sporting uses, three car parks, and a walking track around the perimeter of the reserve that contains ten fitness stations. The groups that currently regularly use the reserve's sporting areas are the Waverley City Archers, the Brandon Park Soccer Club (which incorporates the Sahagian Sporting and Community Club), the Mt Waverley Mulgrave Cricket Club, the Wheelers Hill Cricket Club, the Notting Hill Brandon Park Cricket Club, the Glen Waverley Cougars Cricket Club, the Monash Warriors Grid Iron Club (Juniors), and Mazenod College. The reserve is also a popular open space and recreational area for local residents from Mulgrave and Wheelers Hill, particularly as a destination for personal exercise (walking and jogging) and for dog exercise (it is a designated dog off-leash area).

Freeway Reserve also functions as an important stormwater retarding basin for the surrounding area. To this end, the reserve is also referred to the Mile Creek East Retarding Basin, with the hydraulic functions of the reserve being the management responsibility of Melbourne Water. One of the triggers to undertake the masterplan is the planned works by Melbourne Water to strengthen the embankment that run along the western and southern boundaries of the reserve. These works will be planned to commence later this year and will be project managed by Melbourne Water.

#### Project Aim and Project Considerations

The overall aim of the masterplan is to establish clear directions for the future use and development of Freeway Reserve for the next 10 years. Several factors and considerations were identified for investigation during the project, and these included:

1. What impacts (if any) might occur on the community sporting and recreational uses of the reserve from the works to upgrade the Retarding Basin's retaining walls.
2. To assess the general adequacy of the existing buildings and facilities to meet the current and future needs of user groups, other potential user groups, and residents.
3. Identify opportunities to increase the sporting and recreational uses of the reserve, particularly by girls and women.
4. Investigate opportunities for safer and more efficient traffic and pedestrian movements throughout the reserve.
5. Improve the landscape amenity, where appropriate.

#### Project Methodology

The project is now at the stage in the planning process where a draft masterplan is ready to be considered by all stakeholder groups, including local residents and the reserve user groups. The project has involved several phases to arrive at this point.

An important start-up task was to identify and then understand any likely impact on the reserve and its functions from the works being undertaken by Melbourne Water to strengthen the retaining walls. Discussions held with Melbourne Water have confirmed that there will be no reduction to the total area of the sports playing fields inside the retaining walls, and no permanent changes to the perimeter walking path that runs along the top of the embankments, despite their actual height being increased by 0.3 metre. In fact, the surface of the path in these sections will be improved.

An important start-up task was to identify and then understand any likely impact on the reserve and its functions from the works being undertaken by Melbourne Water to strengthen the retaining walls. Discussions held with Melbourne Water have confirmed that there will be no reduction to the total area of the sports playing fields inside the retaining walls, and no permanent changes to the perimeter walking path that runs along the top of the embankments, despite their actual height being increased by 0.3 metre. In fact, the surface of the path in these sections will be improved.

One unfortunate outcome of the new guidelines for the management and maintenance of retaining walls situated in urban environments (such as Freeway Reserve) is the need for all trees to be removed from both sides of the embankments. This ensures the integrity of the embankment and provides the best level of safety. Trees weaken retaining basin walls and must be removed to ensure they are delivering the best protection for communities. Offset planting will occur in other areas of the reserve and along Wellington Road.

The subsequent planning for the reserve has progressed with consideration of this advice from Melbourne Water that there will be little real impact on the current function and uses of the reserve. The consultant team undertook a detailed site review of Freeway Reserve to identify any constraints or issues with existing facilities, spaces and landscape environments, and to also identify any improvements and directions that might be appropriate for the reserve.

The second phase involved consultation with reserve user groups, potential new user groups, residents and visitors to the reserve, other agencies and organisations, and Council representatives. The consultation occurred primarily between January and April 2016, and included valuable input from 191 Mulgrave and Wheelers Hill residents who completed a survey questionnaire, and 88 reserve visitors who were interviewed. Both of these community engagement processes were designed to seek information about residents' and visitors' current use of the reserve and any ideas they might have for improving it.

The third phase in the planning process was to assess issues raised and to investigate what options were possible to improve the overall usability of the reserve for sporting groups, local residents and other visitors to the reserve. Several preliminary concept plans were prepared, with each being an important step in the process to develop the draft masterplan.

## Key Issues and Stakeholder Input

The research and consultation carried out identified the following issues and opportunities for Freeway Reserve:

- The reserve appears to have a good balance between dedicated sports facilities and passive / open space areas, the latter supplemented by the high value placed on the perimeter walking path by residents.
- Freeway noise impacts somewhat on the amenity of the reserve, however, there is a good base provision of trees to assist in dissipating the noise.
- The sporting fields have an uneven spread of sub-surface drainage and irrigation, which contributes to the patchy surface quality, and inconsistent turf species.
- The changing pavilion servicing the sporting fields is currently being upgraded to become fit for purpose, whilst the social rooms leased to the Brandon Park Soccer Club and the Sahagian Sporting and Community Club are in excellent condition.
- The clubrooms used by the Waverley City Archers are inadequate for its current use, with key issues being its size, the lack of storage, and the poor provision for toilets and change.
- There is only limited shade or shelter throughout the reserve, and no playground or any equipment provided for BBQs and picnics. Not all existing seats in the reserve meet current standards and they also vary in age, type and form. There are no drinking fountains / water points for people or dogs.
- Vegetation throughout the reserve is mostly planted indigenous vegetation, with a mix of remnant vegetation and regeneration areas.
- The perimeter walking path is approximately 1.5km in length. The path surface is predominantly gravel, except for the section that is a dedicated 'shared' pathway between Kernot Avenue and the car park entry adjacent to the Monash Gardens aged care facility, which is sealed concrete.

- The height and grades of the embankment limit direct access opportunities, in terms of both getting up to the path and down to the sporting fields, and also into the reserve from Wellington Road.
- The roadway and car parking areas were recently upgraded by Council (2013/14). There are three main car parks that accommodate approximately 120 car parking spaces. Some of the user groups indicated that there is insufficient car parking on some event days (winter), and that vehicles which park along the roadway negatively impact traffic flow.
- Eight of every 10 residents who completed the survey rated the quality and condition of the reserve as either excellent, very good or good.
- Residents' main uses of the reserve include 'to exercise', 'to walk the dog', 'to sit and relax', and 'to play casual sport.
- Residents said that the best things about the reserve are the walking path, it is 'easy to get to', the size of the reserve, and the trees and bushland.
- Residents' main suggestions for improving the reserve, include the install a playground, provide picnic areas, improve the walking path, and improve/ increase the number of fitness stations. Interestingly, 23 respondents suggested to 'do nothing, it is fine how it is'.
- The user groups identified the following issues – floodlighting needs to be expanded, the clubroom no longer meets their needs (Waverley City Archers), some constraints with car parking and traffic flow, and lack of shelter for spectators.

## Key Directions Proposed in the Masterplan

The key strategic directions proposed in the Freeway Reserve Masterplan are listed below (in no specific order or priority). This should be read in conjunction with viewing the illustrated masterplan drawing.

### Sporting and Recreation

1. Realign the two concrete wickets to achieve minimum 60m radius cricket ovals and three full size soccer fields (100m x 68m, with 3m run-offs).
2. Improve the condition of the playing surface of the sports fields by completing the installation of sub-surface irrigation and drainage, and conversion of the playing surface to warm season grasses.
3. Replace the open swale across the northern section of the playing fields with underground drainage, and remove the cricket practice nets. Regrade and oversow the area to create a new overflow sports training area that will also be suitable for unstructured recreation activities.
4. Install new floodlighting on the overflow sports training area (two new light poles).
5. Install a new two bay cricket practice facility and soccer goal storage infrastructure on the eastern side of the southern soccer field.
6. Construct a new terraced seating area with shelter within the western embankment, and adjacent to the sports fields.
7. Relocate the archery range 10m east to enable up to two additional permanent targets to be installed.
8. Provide a new or expanded clubroom for the Waverley City Archers (approx. 200sqm).
9. Undertake a feasibility study to investigate the provision of a new shared, joint-use indoor archery range and fencing facility in the reserve (approx. 600sqm). The feasibility study should include assessment of the need, the optimal layout and configuration of the indoor spaces, optimal site, likely capital and operation costs, and optimal management arrangements.
10. Install 10 new fitness stations along the length of the circular path.
11. Install two new sheltered picnic facilities: one in the northern section of the park, and one in the southern section. Both to have a dual function as picnic shelters and spectator/ cricket scorer tables.
12. Provide a new exploratory play opportunity for children adjacent to the proposed new sheltered picnic facility in the northern section of the park.

### Traffic Management

13. Form parallel parking along the southern side of the access road (up to 28 spaces), and install bollards along the northern edge to facilitate uninterrupted two-way traffic flow.
14. Install a splitter island on the access road at the point where the road curves, to keep vehicles travelling in opposite directions separated, and to provide a safe crossing for pedestrians.
15. Construct additional car parking (approx. 45 additional car spaces), and change the vehicle flow through the middle and southern car parks to one-way.
16. Construct a new crossover access into the reserve from Wellington Road for use by emergency vehicles and other authorised vehicles.

### Pedestrians and Access

17. Construct three new pedestrian/ cyclist access points into the reserve to the circular path in the southwest corner: two to be stair access; one to be ramp access.
18. Construct a new path inside the proposed new parallel car parking along the reserve access road between Kernot Avenue and the sports buildings.
19. Construct stair access down the inside of the embankment in two places: at the southwest corner; and as part of the proposed terracing within the western embankment.
20. Construct a new DDA compliant path between the archery clubrooms and the shooting line.

### Other

21. Consider converting the triangular vegetated area in the northern corner of the reserve into an ephemeral wetland with new path and boardwalk viewing platform.
22. Strengthen the planting along the Wellington Road boundary.
23. Install new and upgraded signage throughout the reserve, including directional and regulatory signage. Where appropriate, consider installing some interpretive signage throughout the reserve that can provide information about the water detention and water management functions of the reserve.

## **Masterplan Implementation and Cost**

The improvements proposed in the masterplan are yet to be costed. A prioritised and costed implementation plan will be prepared following the finalisation of the masterplan.