



10.2 **SPORTSGROUND CONDITIONS - RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION**

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To respond to Council's Notice of Motion 14.2 Port Phillip Sporting Fields carried on the 7 September 2022 regarding the condition of Council's sportsgrounds and outcomes of the review of maintenance practices

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Notice of Motion, requested that Council:

Reviews the current condition of Council's sporting fields at JL Murphy Reserve (including the baseball field), North Port Oval, Lagoon Reserve, Peanut Farm, Alma Park and Elwood Foreshore, and reports back to Council on the current condition of these same sporting fields.

Reviews the current maintenance schedule for all Council sporting fields listed above, and reports back to Council on the adequacy and effectiveness of this current maintenance schedule including a review of the scheduled verses actual maintenance with regards to these sporting fields.

- 2.2 Between July 2022 and October 2022, Officers engaged an independent turf agronomy and sportsground consultancy to undertake site assessments of all sportsgrounds including those specifically identified in the Council resolution. Soil condition samples were taken and analysed for each ground and recommendations were made for short and long term improvements which could be implemented to improve surface conditions.
- 2.3 The review has found varying conditions of subsurface profiles, drainage systems, grass root profiles and surface grasses which are impacting the surface condition. The data from the soil profiles has highlighted that the current maintenance program and contract is no longer fit for purpose, given the demand and usage of our sporting fields. The current contract has limited mechanisms to drive improvements in performance.
- 2.4 This report outlines Council's response to the concerns raised by the community and provides information on short-term improvements and the longer-term plan to ensure that Council's sports field maintenance services are more responsive to climatic conditions and provide transparent and effective levels of service moving forward.
- 2.5 Council is the custodian of 14 sportsgrounds in the municipality with these sports fields maintained through a contracted arrangement as part of a broader open space contract. The Open Space Maintenance Contract commenced on 1 September 2018 for an initial term of three (3) years and seven months with an option to extend for two (2) years and then a further two (2) years making the maximum contract length seven



(7) years and seven (7) months. The contract option of two additional years was executed on the 1 April 2022 ending 31 March 2024.

- 2.6 Officers have extensively reviewed the existing contract, the service level agreements, existing system data, commissioned reports, collated new data and reviewed several key specifications details. The overarching findings of this review included the following observations and interventions:
- 2.6.1 There is a requirement to improve the current maintenance program and to ensure that the scheduled vs actual maintenance is no less than 95%.
 - 2.6.2 There are deficiencies in the contract specification that do not sufficiently address the changing service levels and community expectations related to sportsground usage
 - 2.6.3 The existing contractor is currently responsible for planning and implementing annual turf management plans under the lump sum contract portion of the contract. This is not best practice.
 - 2.6.4 Internal contract management practices require improvement to effectively ensure adherence to the prescribed requirements of the specifications
 - 2.6.5 Council intends to test the market via a new public tender process, to be commenced this financial year, to ensure the new specifications and contract structure is one that is fit-for-purpose delivers value for money to the community and enables Council to pivot efficiently if changes to usage and/or community expectations shift. Council will then be able to consider the exercising of the final option under the current contract or moving to a new contract.
 - 2.6.6 Additionally, officers are further increasing the utilisation of data and OneCouncil system to ensure activities undertaken outside of the lump sum contract payments are necessary, proportionate and provide greater community benefit.
- 2.7 In order to address the above findings and implement the recommendations, the following actions are either underway or will be implemented in the coming months:
- 2.7.1 A vacant position was re-allocated to allow a fulltime Turf Management Officer, this position was filled in December 2022. The officer provides greater internal knowledge of turf management practices and now leads the turf management plans which are reviewed quarterly. Clear oversight of maintenance practices aims to provide improved accountability of the contractor's adherence to the specifications.
 - 2.7.2 Investment in immediate rectification works has occurred at a number of grounds, with over 1,100m² of new turf laid.
 - 2.7.3 A budget was allocated in the 2022/23 FY, for the collection of data to support the development of a specification for a new contract. Further, a portion of the funding will be utilised for the engagement of independent expertise to provide support to officers in the development of the specification and procurement approach to investigate the market prior to the expiration of the contract on 31 March 2024.
 - 2.7.4 Improved contract management processes and greater utilisation of Council's systems will be implemented to effectively deliver the specifications and to



enable officers to provide greater reporting and adherence to the requirements of the contract.

- 2.7.5 Council's website will be updated to ensure sporting organisations have up to date information on sporting grounds maintenance programs.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Notes that independent assessments of the quality of Council's sporting grounds have been completed and that whilst they represent condition at a moment in time, a number of sites are not meeting stakeholder expectations.
- 3.2 Notes that a detailed review of the specification and operation of Council's contracted sportsground maintenance service has been undertaken.
- 3.3 Notes that a number of improvement initiatives have been implemented and are continuing to be rolled-out to address deficiencies in maintenance that are contributing to poor outcomes at sportsgrounds.
- 3.4 Notes that an investigation has commenced to provide a comparative assessment of the options of entering into a new maintenance contract(s) or exercising the final two-year extension of the current maintenance contract. Further noting that this will be presented to Council for decision before October 2023.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

- 4.1 Council's various sportsgrounds are utilised for a variety of activities such as school use, passive recreation, social interactions including "dog off leash" areas, formal sport training and various levels of competition. Sports field service levels aim to provide an acceptable level of suitability for different sports and standards, dependent on the level of usage and the competition standards.
- 4.2 Council's population and participation levels are increasing, especially in junior sport and with greater participation of women and girls in traditionally male dominated sports. This trend is expected to continue to grow further with the increased population as a result of Fishermen's Bend development including new schools in this precinct.
- 4.3 Council's Sport and Recreation Strategy 2015-2024 "Getting Our Community Active" estimated that there were an estimated 20,000 sporting clubs' members within the City of Port Phillip.
- 4.4 Mixed uses of sporting grounds such as "dog off leash" areas are currently under review through. A separate briefing will be provided to Councillors in February on this review and the results of the initial round of community engagement. Approximately 90% of service requests received by Council about sporting grounds are attributable to damage to the playing surface caused by dogs. These complaints are generally raised by sporting club members, players or parents of children playing sport.

Ground Conditions

- 4.5 The purpose of engaging the independent turf agronomy and sportsground assessment was to determine the current condition of the Council's sportsgrounds, quantify the extent of any problems and issues that exist, and to provide a plan of work required in both the short term (maintenance and usage practices) and long term



(capital works), in order to address these issues and produce suitable playing surfaces capable of coping with current and projected levels of use.

- 4.6 It is noted that the assessments and subsequent condition ratings should be read as a snapshot in time, as conditions may change regularly and rapidly due to factors such as weather and usage. The conditions of each ground at the time of inspection and assessment has been outlined in Table 1.
- 4.7 Further, as outlined in this report, Council officers will begin the process of engaging a third-party consultant to undertake the first of the quarterly ground condition assessments in February 2023, with all identified changes to individual turf management plans to be implemented.

4.8 Table 1- Sportsground Condition

Ground Name	Soil Profile Condition	Surface Condition	Turf Condition at time of assessment	Date of report
Wattie Watson	Excellent	Excellent	Good	October 2022
Esplanade Oval	Average	Poor	Poor	October 2022
Head Street A	Average	Poor	Poor	July 2022
Head Street B	Average	Average	Average	October 2022
JL Murphy Pitch 1	Good	Excellent	Excellent	October 2022
JL Murphy Pitch 2	Average	Poor	Average	July 2022
JL Murphy Pitch 3	Average	Good	Poor	October 2022
Lagoon Reserve	Poor	Good	Average	July 2022
Peanut Farm	Poor	Poor	Poor	July 2022
Alma Park Oval	Poor	Good	Good	July 2022
JW Woodruff Oval	Average	Excellent	Excellent	October 2022
AT Aanensen Oval	Average	Excellent	Excellent	October 2022
GS Williams Oval	Average	Excellent	Excellent	July 2022
Northport Oval	Good	Excellent	Good	July 2022



- 4.9 The condition rating is based on the following methodology:
- 4.9.1 Turf condition, including surface cover, turf density, health and vigour and evenness of cover
 - 4.9.2 Surface condition, includes surface levels, soft areas, holes and cracks, rutting, sunken trenches and animal or bird damage
 - 4.9.3 Soil conditions, including extent of compaction, thatch, soil layers
- 4.10 A rating from 1 to 10 was recorded for each turf criteria assessed, where a rating of 10 indicated excellent or no issue and a rating of one meant there was a major issue on the surface. The condition rating is calculated and the total score of all criteria assessed was divided by the maximum possible score then expressed as a percentage.
- 4.11 The majority of sportsgrounds have inherent deficiencies with the original pitch construction, including:
- 4.11.1 poor soil conditions
 - 4.11.2 lack of sub-surface drainage
 - 4.11.3 susceptibility of the surface becoming wet and saturated and easily damaged during, and immediately after rain and irrigation events
 - 4.11.4 Generally, a sportsground with poor soil properties and a lack of subsurface drainage would cope with no more than 15 to 20 hours per week. The total hours of use before a surface deteriorates is expected to be even lower during a rain event on grounds where these deficiencies are present
 - 4.11.5 As an example, Head St A sportsground, which is in poor condition, currently has an allocation of 34 hours during the winter season, which is significantly contributing to the limited carrying capacity of the playing surface before the ground deteriorates
- 4.12 The independent reports identified that many sportsgrounds assessed required a full reconstruction in order to address the inherent deficiencies associated with the grounds. Council's ten-year financial plan outlines at a high-level Council's planned investment program. This is under review as part of the annual budget process which takes into account community and stakeholder feedback, ground condition, ability to deliver the projects around use of the sites and availability of materials, consultants and contractors.
- 4.13 In addition to planned reconstructions and significant capital budget allocations, funding will be made available via annual renewal budgets for smaller items that will contribute to improving sportsgrounds performance, while also supporting improvements to the broader amenities at the locations. These works may include items such as irrigation upgrades, lighting improvements, general amenity and safety improvements.

Maintenance Regime and Improvements

- 4.14 Council's contract for sportsground maintenance (and other open space maintenance) was written in 2017 and entered into in 2018. Whilst it was arguably fit for purpose at the time, it is no longer appropriate. Most of the contract is a 'lump sum' with highly prescriptive requirements, for example mandating the frequency of grass trimming, etc. The sportsgrounds maintenance section is different, it requires the contractor to prepare a turf management plan for each site and for them to implement it. These turf



management plans are meant to identify turf management activities such as frequency of mowing, application of fertiliser, over-sowing, weeding, herbicide application, etc. It is these turf management plans which Council holds the contractor accountable for delivery. The contract in essence requires the contractor to identify issues with the sportsgrounds, prepare turf management plans and implement them.

- 4.15 In November 2021, an independent consultancy was engaged to undertake a review of the broader Open Space Maintenance Contract. This review quantified that the contractor delivered approximately 92% of scheduled works (including those in turf management plans for sportsgrounds) over an average year of a contract. The outstanding 8% was attributable to weather issues, equipment and staff availability and other unforeseen issues.
- 4.16 Fifteen (15) improvement recommendations were made in relation to performance. Although these recommendations were not directly applied to sportsground maintenance, they are and/or have been implemented with the intention of improving maintenance for all services in the contract specification.
- 4.17 As part of core contract management, officers undertake auditing programs to determine the scheduled vs actual maintenance. The results of the inspections identified that maintenance activities outlined in the contract specification, were delivered in accordance with the specification, at a rate of around 80%. As the completion of scheduled maintenance (including sportsground maintenance) is contained within the lump sum, there is very limited options available to Council contractually to financially incentivise adherence to agreed programs.
- 4.18 The condition of many of Council's sportsgrounds clearly make the case that there are opportunities for improvement regarding the performance of the maintenance program. The following has been undertaken to improve outcomes in the short-term including;
- 4.18.1 Quarterly review and updating of Turf Management Plans – This is currently contractually required annually.
- 4.18.2 Utilisation of external experts (soil testing) to enhance contractor accountability and provide greater flexibility to adapt to challenges
- 4.18.3 Significant renovation works, including the installation of 1,100m² of turf
- 4.18.4 Funding allocated in 23/24 financial year for irrigation and amenity upgrades to sportsgrounds
- 4.19 A fundamental issue with the contract has been the reliance on the contractor for all knowledge and expertise for sportsground maintenance. In response, in December 2022, a vacant position was reviewed allowing Council to appoint an internal Open Space and Turf Management Officer into the Parks Team. The appointed officer brings extensive experience in turf management and will be responsible for the delivery of consistent and effective maintenance programs at Council's sportsgrounds. Having consistent ground condition data and internal knowledge will enable regular reviews of the turf management practices, providing additional oversight of Council's maintenance contractor.
- 4.20 The aim is to improve contract management practices and communication over the remaining life of the extended term whilst Council officers review the contract and investigate the market.



Contract Review

- 4.21 The current contract extension expires on 1 April 2024. Under the terms and conditions of the contract, six (6) month's notification must be provided if the final 2 (two) year extension is going to be executed.
- 4.22 Noting that the current contract is not entirely fit for purpose, officers are currently reviewing the contract specification with the intent to investigate the market for alternate offerings. The intent is to bring these options before Council for consideration ahead of the six (6) month notification period under the current contract.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 An independent turf agronomy and sportsground consultancy was engaged to undertake the assessments of all sports grounds with a specific focus on turf quality.
- 5.2 The Open Space & Recreation team, with support from the Assets and Parks teams, have been engaging extensively with the various clubs on the short-term rectification works and changes to the maintenance programs. Officers have worked with the clubs to ensure that changes are effectively communicated and to minimise impacts of club operations and ground usage.
- 5.3 Sports clubs have provided regular feedback on where they have concerns with the outcomes being achieved. Where possible, officers have worked with the clubs to address these concerns. Clearly, the independent assessment identifies that these interventions are required and given the scale of the challenge, that a different maintenance regime needs to be considered.
- 5.4 Council officers will investigate updating Council's website to provide up to date information on our turf management maintenance program

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Council is contractually obliged to notify the current contractor of its intent to either execute the final year extension or to exit the contract by October 2023.

7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 The existing budget allocation is likely adequate to maintain sporting grounds to acceptable standards for play, however it does not consider or provide budget for additional uses such as "Dog off Leash". Example; under the current contract divots or surface holes are repaired once per week, usually done on Thursday or Friday, which triggers regular feedback from clubs, who believe the service level should be daily, because of the damage done by dogs. This change in requirement adds cost to the delivery of the maintenance contract.
- 7.2 Council's current rates and lump sum for maintenance of open spaces was set through a market process in 2018. These prices have been subject to indexation since that point but are considered to be highly competitive. It is likely that prices for the same scope of works as currently specified will be significantly higher.
- 7.3 Council officers intend to investigate the market in the coming months and use the market investigation process to provide comparative financial assessments of the current specification and the options for improved outcomes. This will enable Council to clearly consider whether retaining the existing contract (through the exercising of the last extension) or moving to a new contractor (under a new specification) is most advantageous to Council and represents best value.



- 7.4 Improved delivery of new, upgrade and renewal work to Council assets is essential from a community expectation and financial point of view and is in accordance with Council's Enterprise Asset Management Plan and Policy. As per the Enterprise Asset Management Plan (EAMP), Officers have begun the process for development of the portfolio specific Asset Management Plans (AMP). The previously endorsed Public Space Asset Management Plan was completed in 2017, since that time there has been significant development and improvement of Council's Asset Management maturity across the organisation's portfolios.
- 7.5 The development of an updated Public Space AMP, which will include specific sub-plans for portfolios such as sportsgrounds, has begun and is due for completion this year. This undertaking is a significant piece of work and will be critical in the development of the new specifications and will be developed with the intention of reflecting the current and future service levels, community expectations and identifying the necessary maintenance and capital investments required to deliver high performing assets for the long term.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 Activities in the sportsground maintenance program have been scoped to consider their environmental impacts and their role in helping Council achieve its sustainability targets
- 8.2 Officers are reviewing our irrigation practices to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our systems and seeking to decrease reliance on potable water in line with Council's Act and Adapt Strategy.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 The maintenance of sportsgrounds has strong community impacts for the use of the space for various activities
- 9.2 Customer request data assists Council in identifying shortfalls in service levels and ensuring accountability both internally and with the contractor. The request data over the past twelve months identified:
- 9.2.1 72 requests received for Sporting Ground General Enquiries. These requests were varied in purpose or issue. JL Murphy Reserve and Peanut Farm accounted for 25 of these requests.
- 9.2.2 28 requests received for Sport Fields Mowing and Maintenance, with the top site being Peanut Farm with six (6) requests.
- 9.3 Further, some examples of specific site customer request data were reviewed for Lagoon Reserve and JL Murphy Reserve, as outlined below:

9.4 Lagoon Reserve

50 requests received over the past twelve months, with the breakdown including:

- 4 x Dog attack
- 2 x Dog not under effective control
- 2 x Dog waste enquiry
- 2 x Customers enquiring whether the dog park will be retained as part of the development
- 8 x Parks and reserve maintenance enquiries
- 3 x Tree trimming



9.5 JL Murphy Reserve

9.6 53 requests received over the past twelve months, with the breakdown including:

- 9 x Sporting ground enquiries
- 8 x Sports and recreation general enquiries
- 11 x Parks and reserves maintenance enquiries

10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

10.1 **2- Liveable Port Phillip-** Places for People-Public Space Strategy 2022-32 “ Provide high quality and unique parks, streets, open spaces and foreshore for the enjoyment of our community and visitors

10.2 **3- Sustainable Port Phillip-**Act and Adapt-Sustainable Environment Strategy 2018-28
• investment in water sensitive urban design (WSUD) and irrigation upgrades, including at key sports fields and parks, to reduce contaminants in water entering Port Phillip Bay and to optimise Council’s potable water use

11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE.

11.1.1 Works will continue on an ongoing operational basis to ensure improvement to sportsground performance is consistent.

11.1.2 Annual turf management plans will be updated quarterly to ensure we are implementing best practice on existing conditions. The quarterly reports for 2023 will begin in February.

11.1.3 Contract review will continue with incremental improvements to existing contract negotiated with our current contractor.

11.1.4 A new asset management plan specifically for sporting fields will be developed.

11.1.5 Council will prepare a new specification and investigate the market from suitably qualified contractors.

11.1.6 Council will be presented with the analysis of the new procurement process against the existing contract extension option for decision ahead of the six month advisory notice under the current contract.

11.2 COMMUNICATION

11.2.1 Improvement to the way we communicate our on-going maintenance programs with sporting organisations will be investigated, including updating our webpages and the use of social media platforms.

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

12.1 No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any material or general interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil