

2.1 REDEVELOPMENT OF DAVIES RESERVE ATHLETICS TRACK

(JG)

Responsible Director: Julie Salomon

RECOMMENDATION*That Council:*

- 1. Endorses the Oakleigh Little Athletics facility as a local facility and proposed renewal of the Davies Reserve athletics track and inner sports field at Davies Reserve with a new natural grass (turf) surface and installation of new polyurethane surfaces to the jump runways;*
- 2. Formally advises the Oakleigh Little Athletics Club and Little Athletics Victoria of the proposal to renew the Davies Reserve athletics track and inner sports field at Davies Reserve with a new natural grass (turf) surface and installation of new polyurethane surfaces to the jump runways;*
- 3. Subject to the final feedback received from the Oakleigh Little Athletics Club, Little Athletics Victoria and the community, refers the project to forward capital works for consideration to be funded from the annual sports ground redevelopment program in 2020/2021 or subsequent years as determined by Council; and*
- 4. Directs officers to pursue funding opportunities from State and Federal Government and other external sources.*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to consider the future of the Davies Reserve Athletics Track and Jumps Surfaces, options to renew and, to nominate a preferred option for final consultation with the Oakleigh Little Athletic Club (OLAC) and Little Athletics Victoria (LAV).

BACKGROUND

Davies Athletics track is situated off Talbot Avenue in Oakleigh South and is home to the Oakleigh Little Athletic Club.

The site consists of an eight lane 400 meter running track, dual double ended long/triple jump runway strips along the outside of the main straight and a single ended, disused pole vault runway with a long/triple jump pit at the opposite end. Inside the south east bend is a javelin runway plus a square shaped high jump area. Inside the north end are opposing twin shot put circles with a scoria landing area, plus two, side by side discus

throwing circles complete with a joint cage. A further discus circle with a safety cage is also located in the south east corner, adjacent to the high jump area.

The reserve also includes a sports pavilion, sportsground lighting for the track infield area and a half-court basketball court which was installed approximately 18 months ago. Spectator shade, BBQ, neighbourhood playground and a fitness station are located near the pavilion, in addition to an informal area of open space used for car parking. A scout hall (Wirringga) and limited area off-street parking is located in the south-east corner.

The track and jumps runways were constructed many years ago with a rubberised asphalt mix (bitumen) and these have become brittle and are fast approaching the end of their useful life.

The OLAC has approximately 100 members and in recent years has experienced moderate membership growth after dropping to as few as 30 members. The club currently utilises the facility three evenings a week and every Saturday and Sunday during the summer seasonal allocation period. The facility is also currently hired approximately 30 times per year by local schools. Monash schools receive free access to the facility which encourages use of the facility and sustainability of school sports programs.

The OLAC and LAV have over the past twelve months written to Council and met with officers to express their concern with the state of the track and jumps surfaces at Davies Reserve. The club is primarily concerned by the general condition of the track and risk of injury from falling on it. Neither the club or LAV have the capacity to contribute to the cost of the upgrade.

Officers subsequently conducted a review of local little athletics, trends across the sport and local opportunities as an alternative to renewing the track. Concurrently, sports surface experts were consulted and engaged to undertake a condition audit of the facility and provided findings and recommendations with regard to the track surface.

Condition Audit Findings

A summary of the findings of the independent condition audit completed in August 2018 are highlighted below:

- The track has aged to a point where it has become brittle. Hurdles and running spikes are no longer permitted;
- The rubberised asphalt is worn, showing stress to all eight lanes with separation of the asphalt seams, tree root damage/heaving, cracks and water ponding evident. There is also dirt within the separated and cracked areas with weed growth. In some areas, the track is uneven and has subsided;
- The drainage system is poor; and
- The field facilities and supporting infrastructure are also aged and are not compliant with current International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) standards;

In conclusion, the audit determined that the track is at the end of its functional life and needs to be replaced within two to three years. In accordance with the findings, Council has undertaken additional patching works to ensure the track safe and fit for summer little athletics. Regular inspections and repairs will be undertaken in the interim period.

PURPOSE/DISCUSSION

The athletics track at Davies Reserve is best positioned to host little athletics, recreational running, school athletics carnivals and low-grade athletics events due to the proximity of higher quality athletics tracks nearby (such as Duncan McKinnon Reserve, North Road Murrumbeena – Approx. 4.5km). There is a strong preference from OLAC, LAV and local schools that the Davies Reserve Athletics Facility be retained as an athletics venue to cater for local residents, community and local schools looking for a low cost alternative.

It is also important that this facility remains open to the public at all times and is sympathetic to its surroundings and a growing residential population base in an area that has a comparative undersupply of public open space.

In this regard, a decision on the future of the track and Council's position is required to enable appropriate consultation with users, planning and timely redevelopment to occur.

In response to the condition audit report, a range of options were considered including:

1. Decommissioning the track and little athletics facility and return the site to open space. Despite having relatively low numbers, OLAC is confident that it has a viable future, particularly with improved facilities. The track plays a role in the provision of athletics facilities for the area, particularly for local schools. The infield is currently used for soccer training overflow and has capacity to play a greater role with an improved surface and better facilities. In this regard, the option to decommission the facility is not recommended.
2. Installing a new polyurethane track surface and install a new natural turf soccer pitch within the infield. The cost estimate for this option is \$2.1M.

A commitment of this nature would place additional pressure on Council to also upgrade supporting infrastructure at the site to a commensurate standard and ensure it is compliant and able to accommodate usage. It may also trigger the need to review costs and charges and may impact on the facility's attractiveness as a low cost alternative.

Whilst this is the preferred option for the athletics club, due to the proximity of comparable facilities, potential impact on usage and the general lack of facilities at the reserve including parking, this option is not recommended.

3. Returning the track and inner sports field to a natural grass surface and installing a new polyurethane surface to the jump runways. This option is considered

suitable for the level of competition and provides the added benefit of creating a full sized oval and being sympathetic to its surroundings. Examples of much larger little athletics clubs successfully operating on grass exist including Camberwell – Malvern at Righetti Reserve, Glen Iris.

The cost estimate for this option is \$1.6M and provides a number of benefits when compared to option 2, including projected cost savings of \$0.5M and improved residential and aesthetic amenity in an area with low open space. This option also allows for the use of the infield area at all other times, is commensurate with the level of use and would therefore encourage local schools, particularly to continue using the site as a low cost alternative to host school sports.

In discussion with committee members from OLAC and LAV, both groups have indicated that they are agreeable to improving the functionality, accessibility and flexibility (i.e. multi-use) of the athletics surfaces to ensure the future sustainability of athletics at Davies Reserve. On this basis, indicative support has been received for redeveloping the track into a natural turf surface.

On this basis, returning the athletics track to a natural turf field is the recommended option. It should be noted that following consultation with the community, features such as (but not limited to) shade structures, seating and public toilet facilities may also be considered.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The total cost of returning the track and inner sports field to a natural grass surface and installing a new polyurethane surface to the jump runways is estimated at \$1.6M. A more detailed cost estimate will be required following the finalisation of the consultation with the club and community to finalise the scope of works. Any changes to scope will be relative to both options to renew the track.

In this regard, the Davies Reserve oval reconstruction could be programmed as a priority in the forward capital works program, specifically within the 2020/21 capital works program to enable track renovation works to be completed within the timelines proposed in the audit report.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This report and the recommendations contained therein have been informed by and are consistent with:

1. *Council Plan 2017-2021*

Inviting Open & Urban Spaces

We will continue to improve our public infrastructure, meeting places and open spaces, providing inclusive, safe and inviting places for community use.

An Inclusive Community

Our people and our communities are healthy, connected and engaged.

2. *A Healthy and Resilient Monash: Integrated Plan (2017-2021)*

Priority 1: An Active & Healthy Monash

A city dedicated to optimal health and wellbeing for its community. Promoting physical activity is a clear priority and the provision of quality, relevant and exciting play spaces is fundamental to getting our community physically active. Future plans, designs and improvements for Davies Reserve are aimed at delivering high quality recreation facilities that will increase participation in physical activity.

3. *Open Space Strategy (2017)*

The principles that underpin the Open Place Strategy and pertain to Davies Reserve include:

Equitable access to open space

All residents – regardless of where they live, their age, gender, income, ethnicity, education or ability – have the right to access at least a core suite of open spaces near where they live.

Diversity of opportunities and experiences

To ensure the widest range of residents can use and benefit from open space, a wide variety of open space functions and landscape setting types are needed. A diversity of activities, facilities and experiences is required within each park and suburb and across the open space network as a whole.

Quality (fit for purpose)

Quality can only be sustained by consciously identifying the function of an open space and measuring how well each space meets the requirements and agreed core service levels for that function.

Sustainability

Sustainable design, development and management of open space require a balance of local and broader efforts to meet human needs for the long term without destroying or degrading the natural environment or the value of the resource.

Dependency

Some people, activities and assets are by nature dependent on the inherent natural qualities of open space resources, whereas others are not. As a priority open space should support activities and users who are more dependent on it.

Environmental protection enhancement and appreciation

As private space decreases, the protection of canopy trees, habitat, flora and fauna and waterways in public space, and the interpretation and appreciation of those values is central to the open space estate.

4. *Asset Management Strategy*

The purpose of this Asset Management Policy is to guide sustainable management of Council's assets to meet current and future community needs. The City of Monash will aim to provide assets that support the provision of best value services. Council assets will be accessible, safe and suitable for community use. The approach to asset management will balance competing social,

environmental and economic needs for the benefit of current and future generations.

5. *Active Monash's Capital Works Prioritisation Framework (February 2018)*
Identification of Capital Works Priorities using a transparent and equitable framework, endorsed by Council, which is informed by current building condition, usage and community need. Davies Reserve track and field surfaces are considered a priority for redevelopment.

CONCLUSION

It is recommended that Council advise both the Oakleigh Little Athletic Club and Little Athletics Victoria that its preferred option is to renew the Davies Reserve athletics track and inner sports field at Davies Reserve with a new natural grass (turf) surface and install new polyurethane surfaces to the jump runways.

This option provides Council with a cost-effective and accessible solution suitable for Davies Reserve that can be considered for funding from Council's annual sports ground redevelopment program in the 2020/2021 financial year or subsequent years.