

Knox Hockey Facility – Community Engagement Summary

Purpose

The purpose of the initial consultation was to seek feedback from adjoining residents on a proposal to develop a synthetic hockey pitch on the existing active open space area of Benedikt Reserve, Scoresby.

A letter was distributed along with a high level site plan indicating possible siting of the pitch and associated infrastructure including lighting, pavilion redevelopment options and car parking options.

The purpose of the discussion with the community was to make them aware of the proposal, get their initial impressions and determine the level of interest and support the community may have for the proposal.

Process

The initial consultation approach was to be undertaken early in 2020 but was postponed due to COVID 19 restrictions and was not able to be undertaken again until early 2021. Consultation activities were structured to ensure that social distancing and COVID Safe conditions could be maintained.

Letters were sent to 400 residences surrounding the reserve via Australia Post in mid-January 2021, inviting residents to a COVID Safe drop-in discussion about the initial proposal. Posters were also installed on the doors of the Pavilion and the external wall of the Public toilets.

No online channels were used to promote the consultation to ensure that the reach was primarily local and controlled to ensure that the numbers of people in attendance were able to be managed in a COVID Safe manner. The letters to residents also asked people to nominate a preferred date and time via email or telephone to ensure that officers could safely manage the number of attendees.

The discussions with the community were undertaken on the evening of Wednesday 27 January and on Saturday morning 30 January 2021. These sessions were attended by 15 people each.

The drop in sessions provided an opportunity for those in attendance to be informed about the proposal, ask questions and provide their feedback. Information was also provided about next steps and further opportunities for community input into the design of facilities to manage impacts of the amenity of the local community.

Following the drop in sessions at the Reserve some residents formed a group opposing the proposal and developed a petition to Council. This raised further awareness of the proposal and resulted in more feedback to Council. This feedback has been taken into consideration.

Subsequently a project page has been created on Council's Have Your Say platform to provide information about the proposal for interested residents beyond the initial consultation area. Residents can subscribe here to receive updates on the proposal.

Background

Benedikt Reserve has historically been an active recreation reserve, previously accommodating Tennis, Lacrosse, Cricket and Australian Rules football and continues to accommodate training for football and junior and lower grade cricket competition and training. In more recent years, the former disused tennis courts have been removed and replaced with a casual tennis/ multipurpose

area adjoining the upgraded playground in line with the Council endorsed masterplan. The Lacrosse Club folded due to diminishing membership and no competitive sport is played on the northern field. However the sports lights remain operational and are utilised by clubs for pre-season training purposes.

The sporting pavilion and public toilets, whilst old are still functional. They may require replacement or upgrade if the hockey facility were to progress.

The masterplan (completed in 2013) for the reserve has generally focused on the non-structured area and the improvements to the reserve have successfully encouraged much greater passive use of the reserve.

Community feedback

The COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on movement of people has renewed community interest in and importance placed on neighbourhood open space. This has resulted in significant community interest in the future of Benedikt Reserve and open space more generally.

749 emails have been received by officers; 371 outlining concerns for the development and the impact it may have on the community and 378 supporting the need for the Hockey Club to have a new home.

A petition was received on 22 March 2021 with 537 signatures requesting that: “Knox City Council forgo the development at Benedikt Reserve; which Council has been considering developing to accommodate the re-location of the Knox Hockey Club.”

Key issues

A summary of the key issues that have been highlighted by this feedback are outlined below:

- Hockey Club - general support for Council to continue working with the Hockey Club in its endeavours to find a new home
- Loss of open space – many people perceived that the addition of a fenced but publicly accessible synthetic hockey field equates to a loss of open space.

It is acknowledged that there is a perception of the loss of open space – the proposed facility would not reduce the open space although a level of fencing is required to ensure that the facility isn't damaged by vehicles and motorbikes and to ensure that the safety of other park users is protected. It is proposed that the facility would be gated and that the general public could use the surface in much the same way that the existing grassed area is currently used.

- Loss of amenity – concerns that the development would limit use of the reserve, particularly for passive recreation and play on the open areas of the Reserve.

The facility would be available for general public use although it would be limited to times that the club or other booked users, such as the local schools, are not using the facility. This is similar to the way the reserve is currently managed when the cricket, football or formerly the lacrosse club used the reserve.

- Increased noise – the Reserve does not currently have a resident sporting club; it is used for overflow training and as a secondary cricket ground. Residents are concerned that the addition of a hockey club to the site, weekday evenings and weekends, will result in much more noise for greater periods of the week particularly from whistles.

The reserve has traditionally been used for competitive sport and the noise emitting from the hockey pitch will be similar. The increased use of the reserve for sporting uses will increase the level of noise. The use of the reserve during the week would be predominantly for training with some midweek competition and the majority of competition undertaken on the weekend. Hockey is predominantly a winter sport as such the facility whilst still being used during the summer months the use would be much more limited, providing much greater access to the general community.

Should the facility be approved Council would work closely with the Knox Hockey Club to develop a management approach to minimise noise and community impact from their activities. Council would also consider a landscaping response to limit the impact of noise from the site.

Increased activity can also have the benefit of natural surveillance to reduce any anti-social behavior or vandalism.

- Car parking – residents were concerned that there would not be sufficient parking at the reserve and not supportive of the proposal to increase parking at the reserve.

If a facility were to proceed, increased car parking will be required at the reserve. The draft plan identifies the site of the former tennis courts as a possible site for increased parking capacity. However, car parking at the site would need further investigation and more appropriate options may be developed. Council and the Club would also consider alternative offsite parking options for competition days when larger numbers of cars would be expected.

- Increased traffic – significant concern was expressed regarding any additional traffic to the area. Many perceived that traffic was already an issue that Council has not effectively addressed previously at this site.

Traffic volumes would increase marginally at peak use times. If the facility is approved during the detailed design process a more in depth traffic management plan would be developed which would identify options for managing this impact.

- Impact on wildlife – several residents highlighted the birdlife and the impact that any new development would have on them.

It is not envisaged that there will not be any loss of trees as a result of the proposed development and whilst there will be less natural turf the impact on birdlife will be minimal to the existing uses of the reserve such as cricket, dogs (off lead) and football training.

- Impact of sports lights – there was concern that any upgraded sports lights would have a spill impact on the immediately surrounding residences.

The existing sports lights at the reserve are not up to standard and would be replaced with vastly improved lighting that is efficient and highly focused. Spill from the new generation LED lighting is minimal and should have little to no impact on adjoining residents. A detailed

lighting plan would be developed during the detailed design phase to ensure that this was the outcome.

- Fencing and development of the site – comments suggested that the proposal was not in keeping with a community reserve and that the fencing and overall development of the site would be detrimental to the amenity of the area.

The development of a facility on the site would change the look and feel of the site. Intelligent design (usually black to blend in) of the fencing and related sporting infrastructure would minimise the aesthetic impact and maximise accessibility for the sporting and community use of the site.

- Public toilets – the condition and lack of opening hours of the public toilets at the Reserve was also raised.

The initial proposal does not include the development of a new pavilion on the site. The existing pavilion would be utilised and redevelopment would be a future consideration. However as the pavilion does not have adequate toilet facilities the existing public toilets condition and access would be reviewed to ensure that they meet appropriate community and club needs

Council will continue to update the community on the progress of the project on the **'Have Your Say'** platform.