
7.1 NARC - CONCEPT DESIGN STAGE - COMMUNITY CONSULTATION FINDINGS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To report on outcomes of the community consultation and engagement process on the proposed concept designs for the Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre (NARC).

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 81% of the 401 survey respondents rating the proposed new designs as good – excellent. While 95% respondents stated they strongly support Council's aim to achieve 6 Star Green Star rating through ESD initiatives proposed.

The design process is continuing, utilising the community feedback that has been received to further define and shape the project. Changes made as a result of the community consultation will be done so ensuring that the project is delivered within budget and will be communicated to the community to ensure the consultation loop is closed.

Recommendation

That Council:

- (1) Notes the findings of the community consultation of the proposed concept design for the new Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre
 - (2) Notes that the design process is continuing, utilising the community feedback that has been received to further define and shape the project. Changes made as a result of the community consultation will be done so ensuring that the project is delivered within budget.
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BACKGROUND / KEY INFORMATION

Previous Council Resolution

On the 6 April 2020, Council resolved **That** Council:

- (1) *Endorse the concept design for the Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre and continue engagement with key external stakeholders and community.*
- (2) *Council receive a Council report on the outcomes of the consultation and engagement with key stakeholders and community members.*
Minute No 20-037

At its meeting held on 24 June 2019, Council resolved **That** Council:

- (1) *Awards Contract No. CT2018148 for the Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre principal design consultant services to Warren and Mahoney Architects Australia for the contract sum of \$2,958,840.50 (incl. GST).*
- (2) *Approves a contingency amount of \$591,768 (incl. GST), being approximately 20% of the contract amount, to be used if required for variations and other unforeseen items as part of the Contract No. CT2018148.*

- (3) *Authorises the Chief Executive to finalise and execute the contract documentation on behalf of the Council.'*
Minute No 19-113.

On 14 October 2019, Council endorsed the 10-year capital works funding strategy, which included the Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre (Minute No 19 – 229).

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

Consultation

The four-week consultation methodology was amended to take account of the mandatory COVID-19 shutdowns recognising that face to face consultation could not occur during this time.

Despite the restrictions, a wide range of interviews and workshops with key stakeholder community groups were still achieved (some just prior to the shutdowns).

The following stakeholders were engaged:

- SRV
- State Sporting Associations
- External Management Companies – Facility Operators
- Royal Life Saving Society Victoria
- NARC membership base
- Northcote Swim Club
- Northcote Water Polo Club
- NYPD Water Polo Club
- Jara Sport Triathlon Club
- Melbourne Physiotherapy, Pilates and Fitness Group
- Clifton Street Children's Centre
- Local Darebin Schools and current school carnival schools
- Council Advisory Committees
 - Sexuality, Sex and Gender Diversity
 - Darebin Disability
 - Darebin Women's
 - Interfaith Council
 - Education Committee
- Broader community

Wurundjeri Cultural Consultants and Office of Victoria Government Architects have been involved in the development of the concept plans and will remain engaged throughout further design development.

A report detailing the consultation activities and all results can be found at **Appendix A**.

Communications

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the final round of consultation was conducted through either digital means or via hard copy and or phone conversations. All the relevant information on the NARC project was located on the dedicated Darebin 'Your Say Page'.

Information on how to find the dedicated NARC project webpage was advertised via:

- Website – Council and YMCA
- Social media – Council, Darebin Leisure and YMCA
- Leader articles
- Resident letter box drops within a 1km radius of the site (4,500 residences)
- Email to existing facility user groups, members, and key stakeholders

Feedback on the proposed concept plans was received via:

- Online survey via the project page
- Hard copy
- Email
- Phone and virtual meetings via MS Teams

ANALYSIS**Alignment to Council Plan / Council policy**

Goal 2 - Opportunities to live well

2.2 We will expand opportunities for participation and social connection through sport, physical activity, arts, culture and other leisure activities.

Council Plan Big Action Item – Renew the Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre to give new life to a facility that supports the health and wellbeing of our community.

Environmental Sustainability Considerations

The NARC redevelopment project is on track to deliver a 6 Star Green Star rated facility (understood to be the first in Australia for an aquatic centre). To achieve this, the project has joined the Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA) Future Focus pilot program. This enables access and input into the new credit points system for the Green Star accreditation program, which is currently being updated. Council's Environmentally Sustainable Developments Officer has provided advice throughout the concept design process.

Council's ESD team has been engaged via the consultation workshops and will continue to contribute to the project to ensure climatic response considerations is incorporated into the future design and operation of the facility.

Climate adaptation workshops led by the project's ESD consultants have been held providing input to design. These workshops have focused on how the new facility can be designed to adapt with the changing climate. Risk categories identified and investigated include; temperature, bushfire, precipitation, flood, wind and storm. These risks have then been rated against current, 2030 and 2050 and 2070 predicted climatic occurrences and likely consequences. Adaptation responses and mitigation strategies have been identified within the risk matrix and developed throughout the workshops.

Some of the sustainable initiatives considered in the project are:

- High performance building envelope and double glazing
- All-electric heating, cooling and hot water system using air source heat pumps
- Airtight facade that will be tested upon completion
- Heat recovery ventilation that reuses otherwise wasted heat
- Solar panels covering the roof (currently targeting ~500kW), with battery storage
- Carbon neutral building in operation with 100% green power
- Efficient fixtures and fittings on all sanitary ware, taps, showers, toilets etc.
- Rainwater harvesting for the swimming pool and landscaping
- Grey water re-use for toilet flushing
- Ultra-fine filtration to swimming pool to minimise water consumption
- Timber structure (Forest Stewardship Council) to the pool hall, significantly reducing the embodied carbon of the development
- Electric vehicle charging stations
- Skylights within the pool hall to improve daylight amenity and establish greater connection to outdoors
- Predominantly native landscaping to reduce water needs and improve biodiversity
- Pool covers to be used when the building is not in operation to save energy
- Approximately 65 bicycle parks (numbers TBC once occupancy figures agreed)
- LEDs throughout with daylight dimming

Climate Emergency

As part of the green star certification process, the NARC aims to deliver several key sustainability outcomes including reduced energy consumption, improved sustainable transport outcomes, improved indoor environment quality, reduced reliance on potable water and use of recycled materials and products.

Traditionally, gas has been used as the main energy source for heating public pool water. There are currently no public facilities that are using alternative form of energy source for the heating the pool water other than geothermal heating, which is not a viable option for the site. This innovation presents a challenge in the industry. As part of the engineering design, the pool water would be maintained at the required temperature with the use of electric heat pumps, however there is a challenge during start-up.

The project may need to use gas for the start-up load to heat the massive amount of pool water, but this is still to be determined. Once the water has reached the required temperature electric pumps would be used to maintain it. The start-up load would only be required during commissioning and after a major power outage.

Equity, Inclusion and Wellbeing Considerations

An Equity Impact Assessment has been completed for this project with a focus on the design, construction and operational phases of the project.

Equity and inclusion considerations raised in the Equity, Inclusion and Wellbeing Planning and Audit Tool meetings and the audit process have directly influenced facility design and hence

the future operations and programming of the facility. Universal design principles will be used throughout the entire facility.

Specifically, the inclusion of a quiet room that can be used for prayer, respite for those on the autism spectrum and breastfeeding parents was a welcomed inclusion by key stakeholders and Advisory Committees throughout the consultation process. The warm water pool, being separated from the main pool hall in the proposed plans, allows for gender specific programming. Additionally, the designs of the change rooms to include a range of facilities from men's and women's, family, gender neutral, accessible and changing places, provides choice and promotes inclusion to all patrons of the facility.

Cultural Considerations

The Creative Culture and Events Department has been engaged via the consultation workshops and will continue to be engaged through future stages of design to ensure that arts and cultural considerations can be incorporated into the design and operation of the facility, including Aboriginal considerations.

A meeting with the Wurundjeri Cultural consultants has been arranged and will reflect on the design of how the new facility in its built form can pay respect to the Traditional Owners. In accordance with advice from Creative Culture and Events, it is intended to engage an artist to curate and scope the public art opportunities in this project.

Economic Development Considerations

The Economic Development Team has been engaged via the consultation workshops and will continue to be engaged through future stages of design to ensure that the economic benefits of the project can be maximised and realised.

An economic impact assessment report will be completed at the end of schematic design stage, which will model the economic benefits and jobs created as a result of the new facility once in operation over a 10-year period from 2024-34. This will cover employment on-site during and post construction and may also include jobs generated in the broader precinct by the spending of facility users and visitors/spectators. Estimates will be made of the regional income that is generated by the current centre and that associated with the operation of the new NARC facility.

Financial and Resource Implications

Council has established a budget of \$63.5m to design and construct the NARC. The Council engaged quantity surveyor, Currie and Brown, has costed the concept design, which is costed at \$63,494,700. Below is the summary of the cost plan.

COMPONENT	Budget (Excl. GST)
Building works	\$26,408,556
Aquatic works	\$15,330,150
External works and services	\$4,082,776
Total Building, Aquatic and External works cost	\$45,821,482
Contingencies	\$6,873,222
Total construction costs	\$52,694,704
Other project costs	\$4,498,419
Total project end cost (excl GST) at today's cost	\$58,996,281

COMPONENT	Budget (Excl. GST)
Escalation costs (till March 2021)	\$4,498,419
Total estimated project cost (excl GST) including escalation	\$63,494,700

This cost plan is based upon on concept designs and the plan is high level, conservative and includes 5% design and 10% construction contingencies. The design process is continuing, giving consideration to how the community feedback can be incorporated into the project within the project budget of \$63.5m.

Legal and Risk Implications

A Risk Management Plan has been prepared by the project working group and is monitored and updated on a regular basis. Aquatic centres have complex infrastructure and services and a pro-active risk management approach has been adopted to manage and mitigate risks.

The following due diligence works have been completed to assist with the NARC redevelopment project:

- Asset condition audit by Macutex dated Feb 2016
- Infrastructure services report by Cardno dated July 2018
- Arborist assessment by Homewood Consulting dated April 2018
- Environmental and geotechnical site assessment by Meinhardt dated May 2018
- Transport and traffic due diligence report by Cardno dated April 2018
- Strategic and statutory due diligence report by Calibre Group dated April 2018
- ESD and Green Star Strategy by Cundall dated April 2018
- Hydraulic modelling by Cardno dated April 2018

Architects and sub-consultants have reviewed the information and additional due diligence works has been completed or are currently being conducted in the following areas:

- Building condition audit
- Environmental and geotechnical site assessment
- ESD and Green Star pathway
- Hydraulic modelling and early involvement with Melbourne Water.

Operational Impacts

All internal stakeholder departments have been engaged via the consultation workshops and will continue to be engaged through future stages of design to ensure alignment to Council Plans, Policies and Strategies are adhered to within the final design and have minimal impact on future operations on other departments.

DISCUSSION

Throughout the four-week consultation period, a total of 401 completed surveys were received and over 1,000 hits on the Your Say website per day.

The following information provides details on who was responding to the survey:

- 67% of respondents were female
- 55% were aged between 30-49, with a further 18% aged 50-59
- 50% were from 3070 (Northcote) postcode

Overall design information is summarised below:

- Overwhelmingly, 81% rated the proposed new designs were good – excellent
- 94% the design would be a good fit for the neighbourhood
- 95% respondents stated they strongly support Council's aim to achieve 6 Star Green Star rating through ESD initiatives proposed

Travel options to facility:

- 55% indicated most likely to travel by car to the facility, with 43% indicating active transport (walk or bike) option.

Reason for Facility Use:

- Overwhelmingly, 64% would use NARC as it was close to home, 47% to use outdoor pool and 41.5% to attend health and wellness fitness program.

Key Findings from Community Consultation:

Overview

Council should be commended on the environmental focus and how the proposed design of the centre provides a free-flowing open contemporary aquatic and leisure centre.

ESD

Council's ESD initiatives included within the project and target to achieve 6 Star Green Star rating under Green Building Council Australia tool was overwhelming supported by the local community.

Outdoor Aquatics

Concerns were raised over the design of the outdoor pool area, particularly the reduction in the number of pools, with now only having the 50m pool and splash deck, and the impact this will have on young families in peak times over summer (27%).

In response to the community concern, officers provided the following response, which was also available in the FAQ's for the project:

In the development of the concept plans, Council considered a range of pool configurations to meet the needs of all ages and ability, as well as the long-term commercial viability of the facility against the ambitious target of a high performing, environmentally friendly facility. Two leisure water areas will be provided for young people of all ages.

The indoor aqua play area will be based on a zero-depth aquatic playground and will include a range of interactive play features. The outdoor area will be more nature based and will provide a free form area for play and cooling down during the warmer weather. Both areas will provide a fun and exciting environment for young people.

The design team is confident that the outdoor area will allow for and facilitate families to talk and meet as their children play and will be designed to effectively zone or separate different uses so that different age groups have their own spaces, allowing different types of play. As

the design progresses the team will be testing the design of the outdoor play area to ensure it meets the needs of the community in the years to come.

Schools, user groups (swim, water polo and triathlon clubs) and community all expressed the importance of adequate weather protection (shelter and shade) for events, carnivals and daily activities. In addition, separate school change rooms, outdoor pre rinse showers, lockers and storage for the user groups were raised as consideration in development of further designs.

The user groups also raised concerns about the functionality of the 50m pool and long-term flexibility of programming spaces without the inclusion of a boom or swim wall. This was also supported by the State Sporting Associations. By adding this fixture, it would ensure maximum flexibility and functionality to program the space to meet maximum occupancy in peak times; by separating the 50m pool into 2 x 25m sections whilst water polo was in operation, the pool could still maintain 10 lanes of 25m for community access.

Indoor Aquatics

Indoor Aquatic areas are welcomed as a much-needed upgrade and refresh to come up to date with current and future trends for the centre. It has been noted across majority of feedback responses that storage is very important, whether it be locker space for swimmers or storage for clubs.

The inclusion of the warm water program pool is a key asset for the facility and the area as a whole. The programs that will be provided to the ageing population with the concession rates makes it a valuable asset locally and beyond for the older target group.

Accessibility

All abilities access and adequate change rooms for aquatics is very important to the community, ensuring that there is not only ramp access into aquatic areas but an alternative i.e. hoist or swing should be considered for people who have limited mobility. Also, ensuring there are dedicated accessible change facilities throughout wet and dry program areas, and not combining with other change options as is currently at NARC, was raised throughout the consultation period.

Health and Wellness

Feedback suggests that the space allocated to the gym, various number of program spaces and outdoor gym was well received. Data points and gym layout needs to be considered further in the design process; flexibility of spaces to meet different needs and requirements of the gym in the future. It should be noted that air flow and acoustic treatments were raised as concerns from current users and need to be taken into consideration for the health club and program rooms to ensure they are able to be programmed efficiently.

Virtual classes and potential for 24-hour access are a great add on to the programming of the health club.

The allied health component is very important to the community and residents. The variety of offerings and services will be key to the success of this facility component.

Amenities

Concerns were raised over only offering gender neutral changerooms (14%). This was one of the main areas of concern among respondents and mentioned in comments through the survey. Many of the concerns were related to the perceived safety concerns women may feel or experience, if they were to use the same change room as men.

In response to the community concern, officers provided the following response, which was also available in the FAQ's for the project:

The concept plans do in fact have a variety of change/shower/toilet spaces available to all people who wish to use the new facility, both for the aquatic users and health and wellness patrons. These are dedicated men's and women's, gender neutral, accessible, family change and 1 dedicated changing places facility. After people have passed through the reception area, they will be able to select their personally preferred change/toilet/bathroom area from those available. Council anticipates that people who prefer gender neutral toilets will choose those facilities. Council can assure you that formal consultation with culturally and faith diverse groups has been undertaken as part of the development of these designs and the needs and concerns of participants have been responded to.

Further development of the plans and the release of schematic plans to the community will require additional messaging surrounding the change room designs and being inclusive of all patrons through innovative design outcomes.

Café

Strong support raised for healthy eating options to be promoted within the café, with family take home packs that can be purchased after swimming lessons and squad training.

Conflicting responses regarding the location of the café by those who only use NARC and those who use the wider McDonnell Precinct for sports. Those who use NARC only, praised the central location and accessibility from dry, wet and outdoor spaces. Consideration to be given to layout of seating area to accommodate large group fitness participate gathers as informal social spaces. The broader community and wider precinct users would like to see the café with external facing servery to allow for pedestrians passing by to purchase food/drinks. As it stands, the café being located centrally provides the best outcome for the users of the facility yet is still accessible to the broader community within the non-paying entry foyer.

General

There was strong support for multipurpose/meeting/warm up room mentioned by majority of groups, in particular community groups and swim clubs as a space for groups to use that could be multi-purpose would be significantly beneficial to the operation of their groups and clubs and to the community to hire also.

Safe travel was mentioned a number of times throughout the feedback period, including redesign of entry/exit to car park to mitigate current safety issues between vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. In addition, car parking numbers were also raised as a concern, ensuring there is enough car parking during peak times, emergency vehicles have access and that deliveries to plant room and café can be made quickly and efficiently. Alternatively, sustainable transport options were raised which included positive comments surrounding no increase to car parking and increased bike storage solutions for patrons.

Fee increases were mentioned numerous times throughout the consultation feedback. The community expressed concerned that the cost of the build will lead to a rise in rates and increased entry/membership fees once the new centre opens.

AV and IT considerations were raised throughout the period and further details will come for the placement of these during schematic design stage. CCTV was also a major feedback item. Ensuring line of site for all areas both indoor and outdoor was maintained is imperative to safety of staff and patrons within the centre, especially if the facility operates as 24/7 access.

OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Option 1 - Do nothing – not recommended

Do not incorporate the feedback received during the community consultation period on the proposed concept designs for the new NARC within future designs of the new facility.

Option 2 – Further community consultation - not recommended

Further consultation with the community and key stakeholders will take place to further understand their concerns and ambitions for the project.

Option 3 – Consider key findings - recommended

Consider the key findings from the community consultation for the proposed concept design for the new NARC with the understanding that the design process is continuing, utilising the community feedback that has been received, to further define and shape the project. Changes made as a result of the community consultation will be done so ensuring that the project is delivered within budget. Officers will continue to report back to Council on how the design process proceeds.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Details

Warren and Mahoney Architects will continue to advance the design, utilising the findings of the community consultation to inform the schematic design.

All community feedback has been collated and will be assessed and considered for inclusion with the project. Changes that are incorporated into the design will ensure that the project is kept within budget.

Communication

Communication plan will continue to be updated throughout the project. Key findings of the consultation will be included on the Darebin ‘Your Say’ project page and emailed to key stakeholders and subscribers of the project to ensure that we close the loop and communicate the outcomes of the consultation with all participants.

Timeline

Currently, the design is at end of concept stage. The stages and timelines are indicative and will be confirmed and updated on finalisation of the construction procurement strategy for the project.

Date	Milestone
July 2020	Completion of schematic design
Nov 2020	Completion of detail design
Feb 2021	Completion of contract documentation
2021	Procurement for construction contractor
	Construction commences
2022	Construction
2023 - 2024	Construction completion
	Sales and Marketing
	Commissioning and handover

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Nil

Attachments

- NARC - Community Consultation Report - Concept Design - FINAL (**Appendix A**)

DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

Section 80C of the *Local Government Act 1989* requires members of Council staff and persons engaged under contract to provide advice to Council to disclose any direct or indirect interest in a matter to which the advice relates.

The Officer reviewing this report, having made enquiries with relevant members of staff, reports that no disclosable interests have been raised in relation to this report.