

8.3 NORTHCOTE GOLF COURSE CONSULTATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2021-2025 Council Plan (incorporating our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan) is Council's key strategic document for the next four years.

"Prosperous, Liveable and Flourishing" is Strategic Direction 2 of the Council Plan. This Strategic Direction includes an action to "*Undertake community consultation about the future shared use of the Northcote Golf Course land*".

This report builds on previous Council decisions in December 2020 and March 2021 and recommends that Council commence community consultation to inform the development of a plan for the future shared use of the Northcote Golf Course.

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

- (1) Commences community consultation and invite community feedback regarding the future shared use of the Northcote Golf Course
 - (2) Notes that community consultation will occur for 5 weeks starting in late October 2021.
 - (3) Invites those who have provided feedback as part of the consultation to be heard in support of their response at a meeting of councillors at a date to be determined in early 2022.
 - (4) Notes that in parallel, Council officers will progress discussions with Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation regarding any options relating to future co-management options of the site.
 - (5) Receives a report making recommendations on the future shared use of the Northcote Public Golf Course in March 2022.
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BACKGROUND / KEY INFORMATION

Early in its new term, Council resolved to seek to understand how the Northcote Public Golf Course might be opened up for broader community use. Council also resolved to seek the views of a broad range of stakeholders via community engagement which was originally planned to begin early in the new financial year.

Discussions have commenced with the Traditional Owners of the land through the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to explore options for future joint management. It is proposed that these discussions continue in parallel with consultation with the broader community.

Previous Council Resolution

A Notice of Motion was passed by Council on 7 December 2020;

That Council receives a report no later than the March 2021 Council Meeting on options for an inclusive and deliberative process of community consultation regarding opportunities for broader community use of Northcote Golf Course, including multi-use, improve biodiversity and additional improved facilities for community use. The report should outline:

- 1) *Getting financial support from the State Government to undertake a usage, facilities, site and environmental assessment of the Northcote golf Course to inform any future decision-making in respect of the site.*
- (4)
- 2) *The costs and timeframes of the consultation options to ensure that all stakeholders, including golf club(s) and golf users, current course management, community groups, "We Play Golf at Northcote", Merri Creek Management Committee, Traditional Owners, the local community and the State government are appropriately engaged.*
- 3) *Any consultation that needs to be undertaken with the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Elders as the Traditional Owners.*
- (5)
- 4) *Consider actions the Council can take that will allow golfing to continue while enabling broader community use of the Northcote Golf course in the interim.*
- 5) *Opportunities to make the activity of golf more accessible to women, young people, people from diverse backgrounds and of all abilities, and those with less recreational time.*

On 22 March 2021, Council resolved:

1. *Notes the report.*
2. *Upon the adoption of the 2021/22 budget, immediately commences community consultations by adopting a Collaborative model of consultation to assist Council in developing a vision and plan for the future shared use of the Northcote Golf Course.*
3. *Receives a Council report no later than December 2021 on a future vision and plan for the shared use of the Northcote Golf Course after a period of community consultation with the range of key stakeholders as listed in the officer's report, and community members.*

ALIGNMENT TO 2041 DAREBIN COMMUNITY VISION

Strategic Direction 1: Vibrant, Respectful and Connected

ALIGNMENT TO 2021-25 COUNCIL PLAN

Strategic Direction 1: Vibrant, Respectful and Connected

ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1.5 We will prioritise and respect the voices and aspirations of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Darebin

The Council Plan prioritises a number of actions that directly relate to this report. In particular, the future shared use of the golf course is a specific action, while consultation with the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation about a range of initiatives (including future co-management of open space) is also relevant to this report.

DISCUSSION

Officers had indicated that it would be in a position to begin broad community consultation on the future shared use of the Northcote Public Golf Course starting from July 2021. Two factors have delayed broad community consultation:

1. In discussion with councillors, it was agreed that preliminary discussions with the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation should occur before officers commence consultation with other stakeholders.
2. COVID restrictions have prevented the type and depth of consultation that was originally planned and outlined in the report of March 2021.

Officers are now proposing to consult the community, including the list of stakeholders highlighted in the earlier report, starting in late October and concluding in early December 2021.

Officers will consult the community for 5 weeks via Your Say page, social media posts, direct contact with stakeholders listed in the March 2021 report and will include translated materials. Consultation will focus around questions relating to Council's resolution of March 2021 including:

- What does sharing the space at Northcote Public Golf Course look like to our community?
- How does the community see the space being shared between the general public uses and a golf course?
- What options can the community imagine for shared use?

Once feedback has been received, it is proposed that councillors consider these views at a meeting in early 2022 (date still to be determined) prior to making a final decision in March 2022. Those who provide feedback will be invited to speak to their submission.

Discussions with the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation regarding future co-management possibilities of the site will continue in parallel to this broader consultation with the community.

CONSIDERATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (2020) PRINCIPLES

Financial Management

The immediate financial impacts and consequences of the recommendations in this report have already been adequately resourced by Council through its 2021/22 budgets. The consultation costs and the staffing resources required to undertake the consultation have been provided for and are sufficient to undertake the next phase of the project.

Subject to Council's decision in March 2022 about the definition of shared use of the golf course, additional resources may be required. Financial consequences may include:

- Operational management of the course given the current contract with the operator is due to expire in June 2022.
- Capital investment into the golf course to deliver on any shared use position Council takes.

Council's resolution of March 2021 also seeks State Government financial support for any future project. Officers will write to the relevant State Government departments in November 2021, seeking a financial contribution towards a facility assessment as outlined in the resolution.

Community Engagement

Officers are proposing an intense 5-week period of broad community consultation in October and November 2021 on the future shared use of the golf course. The stakeholders that officers will directly contact include (as listed in the March 2021 report):

- Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to run in parallel to the broader consultation
- State Government
- Golf club and golf users
- Golf Australia
- Operator of the NPGC, LMS
- "We Play Golf at Northcote"
- Unlock Northcote Golf Course
- Merri Creek Management Committee
- The local community
- State Government
- Golf Australia
- Moreland Council
- Darebin Nature Trust
- Darebin Aboriginal Advisory Committee
- Other individuals and stakeholders who have contacted Council on this matter in 2021

Given the delayed start to the consultation period, the ongoing restrictions posed by COVID lockdowns and the imminent decision required on the golf course management contract, officers believe that an intense period of consultation in November 2021 is an appropriate period to seek and receive community sentiment on the future of the golf course. Many of the stakeholders with an interest in the topic are aware of the imminent consultation period, are clear on their position in relation to the golf course and are ready to provide feedback on Council's resolution.

Other Principles for consideration

Overarching Governance Principles and Supporting Principles

- (d) the municipal community is to be engaged in strategic planning and strategic decision making;

Public Transparency Principles

- (c) Council information must be understandable and accessible to members of the municipal community;

Strategic Planning Principles

- (b) strategic planning must address the Community Vision;

Service Performance Principles

- (a) services should be provided in an equitable manner and be responsive to the diverse needs of the municipal community;

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**Environmental Sustainability Considerations (including Climate Emergency)**

There are no direct consequences on environmental sustainability considerations of this report given it is largely flagging an intense period of consultation in October and November 2021 on the future shared use of the golf course. However, any subsequent Council decision can directly contribute to mitigating the climate emergency through, for example, rewilding, tree planting, joint waterway management (with Melbourne Water), weed management and cultural Caring for Country with Traditional Owners.

Equity, Inclusion, Wellbeing and Human Rights Considerations:

Officers are developing an equity impact assessment as part of a broad communications and implementation plan. This will ensure that all interested voices of the community are heard as part of this process and that barriers to participation in this process will be eliminated as much as they can be.

Council's resolution of March 2021 responds directly to this goal - *Opportunities to make the activity of golf more accessible to women, young people, people from diverse backgrounds and of all abilities, and those with less recreational time.*

Economic Development and Cultural Considerations

Economic development opportunities, particularly as they relate to local procurement and local jobs, will be explored through any decision Council makes on the future of the golf course in early 2022.

In relation to cultural considerations, recent discussions with the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation provides an opportunity for Council to negotiate to enter into a joint management arrangement with the Traditional Owner (possibly through its land care team Narrup). As these discussions with the Wurundjeri Board are ongoing, it would be premature to make a determination.

Operational Impacts

Council has adequately resourced the consultation which is planned for October and November 2021. Further advice will be provided to Council in the report in early 2022 outlining operational impacts of any recommendations stemming from the community consultation.

Legal and Risk Implications

An immediate risk to implementing Council's decision of March 2021 is in relation to contractual arrangements with the course management operator LMS. The contract to manage the course expires in June 2022 and a new management contract needs to be tendered - either in operational parts or as an entire management package. Officers are confident that the timelines listed in this report permit enough time to ensure a new operational and management arrangement can be established prior to 1 July 2022 (and which complies with any shared use arrangement Council approves).

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

The following consultation process is proposed.

Phase	Indicative Date
Council report to consider consultation period	25 October 2021
Broad community consultation	26 October 2021 – 3 December 2021
Parallel consultation with Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation regarding co-management	Continuing
Officer analysis of feedback	6 December 2021 – 22 December 2021
Councillors hear from community members at a meeting in support of their feedback.	February 2022 (date TBD)
Council decision	March 2022

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Nil

Attachments

Nil

DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

Section 130 of the *Local Government Act 2020* requires members of Council staff and persons engaged under contract to provide advice to Council to disclose any conflicts of 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.