



*the bushland shire*

*creating a living environment*

# **BUSINESS PAPER**

## **WORKSHOP MEETING**

**Wednesday, 31 August, 2011  
at 6:30 pm**

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## **AGENDA AND SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **PRESENT**

### **NATIONAL ANTHEM**

### **OPENING PRAYER**

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY**

Statement by the Chairperson

*"We recognise our Shire's rich cultural and religious diversity and we acknowledge and pay respect to the beliefs of all members of our community, regardless of creed or faith."*

### **ABORIGINAL RECOGNITION**

Statement by the Chairperson:

*"We acknowledge we are on the traditional lands of the Darug and Guringai Peoples. We pay our respects to elders past and present."*

### **AUDIO RECORDING OF COUNCIL MEETING**

Statement by the Chairperson:

*"I advise all present that tonight's meeting is being audio recorded for the purposes of providing a record of public comment at the meeting, supporting the democratic process, broadening knowledge and participation in community affairs, and demonstrating Council's commitment to openness and accountability. The recordings will be made available on Council's website once the Minutes have been finalised. All speakers are requested to ensure their comments are relevant to the issue at hand and to refrain from making personal comments or criticisms."*

### **APOLOGIES / LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

*Clause 52 of Council's Code of Meeting Practice (Section 451 of the Local Government Act, 1993) requires that a councillor or a member of a Council committee who has a pecuniary interest in a matter which is before the Council or committee and who is present at a meeting of the Council or committee at which the matter is being considered must disclose the nature of the interest to the meeting as soon as practicable. The disclosure is also to be submitted in writing (on the form titled "Declaration of Interest").*

*The Councillor or member of a Council committee must not be present at, or in sight of, the meeting of the Council or committee:*

- (a) at any time during which the matter is being considered or discussed by the Council or committee.*

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- (b) *at any time during which the Council or committee is voting on any question in relation to the matter.*

*Clause 51A of Council's Code of Meeting Practice provides that a Councillor, Council officer, or a member of a Council committee who has a non pecuniary interest in any matter with which the Council is concerned and who is present at a meeting of the Council or committee at which the matter is being considered must disclose the nature of the interest to the meeting as soon as practicable. The disclosure is also to be submitted in writing (on the form titled "Declaration of Interest").*

*If the non-pecuniary interest is significant, the Councillor must:*

- a) *remove the source of conflict, by relinquishing or divesting the interest that creates the conflict, or reallocating the conflicting duties to another Council official.*

*OR*

- b) *have no involvement in the matter by absenting themselves from and not taking part in any debate or voting on the issue as if the provisions of Section 451(2) of the Act apply.*

*If the non-pecuniary interest is less than significant, the Councillor must provide an explanation of why they consider that the interest does not require further action in the circumstances.*

## **PETITIONS**

## **MAYORAL MINUTES**

## **NOTICES OF MOTION**

## **RESCISSION MOTIONS**

## **ITEMS PASSED BY EXCEPTION / CALL FOR SPEAKERS ON AGENDA ITEMS**

*Note:*

*Persons wishing to address Council on matters which are on the Agenda are permitted to speak, prior to the item being discussed, and their names will be recorded in the Minutes in respect of that particular item.*

*Persons wishing to address Council on **non agenda matters**, are permitted to speak after all items on the agenda in respect of which there is a speaker from the public have been finalised by Council. Their names will be recorded in the Minutes under the heading "Public Forum for Non Agenda Items".*

## **GENERAL BUSINESS**

- *Items for which there is a Public Forum Speaker*
- *Public Forum for non agenda items*
- *Balance of General Business items*

**GENERAL MANAGER'S DIVISION**

*Nil*

**CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY DIVISION**

*Nil*

**ENVIRONMENT DIVISION**

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**Item 1 EN37/11 PROPOSED CONVERSION OF TWO TURF CRICKET PITCHES TO SYNTHETIC PITCHES**

THAT:

1. Council proceed to obtain a cost saving from the conversion of turf cricket pitches to synthetic pitches.
2. Council choose between converting the turf pitches at Somerville Oval and West Epping Park to achieve a saving of \$43,000 per annum or the conversion of the turf wicket at West Epping Oval only to achieve a saving of \$18,000.
3. After any turf pitches are converted, Council enter into discussions with cricket organisations with the aim of producing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), covering the level of service Council will provide in future years for cricket grounds, ground hire fees, and responsibilities of the parties to the memorandum.
4. Any draft MoU be reported to Council for its consideration.

**PLANNING DIVISION**

*Nil*

**WORKS DIVISION**

*Nil*

**SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA**

**PUBLIC FORUM – NON AGENDA ITEMS**

**MATTERS OF URGENCY**

**CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS**

**Item 2 WK53/11 PROPOSED AGREEMENT TO COMPULSORY ACQUISITION OF COUNCIL LAND BY SYDNEY WATER CORPORATION - BROOKLYN SEWERAGE TREATMENT PLANT**

*This report should be dealt with in confidential session, under Section 10A (2) (c) of the Local Government Act, 1993. This report contains information that would, if disclosed, confer a commercial advantage on a person with whom the council is conducting (or proposes to conduct) business.*

**QUESTIONS OF WHICH NOTICE HAS BEEN GIVEN**

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

## **1 PROPOSED CONVERSION OF TWO TURF CRICKET PITCHES TO SYNTHETIC PITCHES**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

There has been a proposal to reduce recurrent sportsground maintenance by converting 2 of Council's 11 turf cricket pitches to synthetic pitches (at Somerville Oval and West Epping Park). This would achieve an annual net saving of \$43,000 and still provide the sport of cricket in Hornsby Shire with greater access to turf cricket pitches than is enjoyed in neighbouring and comparable local government areas.

It would also allow more cricket to be played, since turf cricket grounds accommodate only 1 game per day, while two games per day can be scheduled on grounds with synthetic pitches.

Cricket representatives point out that there would be disruption to cricket competitions if the conversion went ahead (although the converted pitches would be used in other competitions). They have supported a 30% increase in turf ground hire fees adopted for 2011/2012 instead of a 20% increase. This would yield about \$9,500 in savings, or about \$7,800 if two pitches are converted.

Cricket representatives have proposed that Council reduce its staff establishment responsible for cricket maintenance, and achieve the cost saving while preserving the level of service. The report discusses that this would not be possible.

It was also discussed with cricket representatives that net savings of \$18,000 per annum could be made by converting one pitch only, and this is presented as an option in the recommendation. It would reduce the disruption to cricket competitions.

The report discusses a possible memorandum of understanding between Council and the cricket organisations that would give a level of certainty for future service levels and costs involved in Council's provision of cricket grounds.

### **PURPOSE/OBJECTIVE**

The purpose of the report is to provide Council background information about the proposal to convert 2 turf cricket pitches to synthetic and allow Council to consider whether this is a worthwhile means with which to achieve the budget saving that would be made.

### **DISCUSSION**

At a meeting in July 2011, Council adopted a range of budget reduction measures. Among these was the conversion of 2 of its 11 turf cricket pitches to synthetic surfaces to achieve a saving estimated at about \$40,000 per annum.

A meeting of cricket representatives was told of the proposal by Council staff. It was announced that it was intended to convert the turf pitches at Somerville Oval and West Epping Oval to synthetic surfaces prior to the commencement of the 2011/2012 cricket season, unless the cricket representatives could provide another means of achieving the savings without the conversion taking place.

Alternative means of making the savings that were discussed included handing the maintenance cost and responsibility for the two turf pitches (if retained) to the user clubs, or receiving \$40,000 in additional turf pitch hire fees from users collectively or individually.

The cricket representatives were given time to discuss the response and come back with suggestions. They have now done so, and these are discussed below.

### **Structure of cricket in Hornsby Shire and generally.**

Cricket is played at three main levels in Hornsby Shire, though there are additional representative competitions that are associated with them.

Some of the levels of cricket are Sydney-wide and administered by the Sydney Cricket Association (SCA), which stipulates that each participating club must have the requisite number of teams, each with access to a home ground with a turf pitch. SCA does not provide funding assistance with ground hire fees. It would be within the power of the SCA (but not any of the participating clubs acting alone) to change these rules to reduce the demands its competition places on turf pitch grounds and the resources of the councils that supply most of these grounds.

**Sydney Grade Cricket:** This is a Sydney-wide competition administered by the SCA, which stipulates that each participating club must have five teams, each with access to a home ground with a turf pitch for Saturday matches. Northern Districts Cricket Club (NDCC) is a local club that plays Grade cricket, using Waitara Oval, Asquith Oval and Somerville Oval for home games. Somerville Oval is only required for about half the competition dates because only one NDCC team uses it, while two NDCC teams use each of the other two grounds.

**Sydney Shires Cricket:** This is a Sydney-wide competition administered by the SCA, which stipulates that each participating club must have four teams, each with access to a home ground with a turf pitch for Saturday matches. There are two Shires clubs within Hornsby Shire: Epping Cricket Club (using Epping Oval and North Epping Oval) and Pennant Hills Cricket Club (using two turf pitch grounds in Pennant Hills Park).

**Association Cricket:** These are local competitions played within Hornsby Shire and adjoining council areas. The Hornsby Ku-ring-gai and Hills District Cricket Association (HKHDCA) plays Saturday matches on turf pitches at Storey Park, Parklands Oval and Berowra Oval, and plays lower grade and junior cricket on the majority of Council's grounds with synthetic pitches. Northern District Cricket Association (NDCA, no relation to NDCC) plays senior cricket on turf at West Epping Park and junior cricket on some of Council's synthetic-pitch grounds.

These two associations set their own competition rules with regard to pitch requirements and could opt to play to a higher competition level on synthetic pitches, reducing the demand for turf pitches, and thus, the level of subsidy provided by councils that supply the pitches.

Similar cricket associations exist around metropolitan Sydney. It is understood that many, if not most, do not use turf cricket pitches for regular weekly competition, unlike the two associations operating within Hornsby Shire.

### **Costs and benefits of turf cricket**

There is no doubt that the opportunity to play on turf a pitch is attractive to many that choose the sport. It may be regarded as the 'gold standard' of cricket facility provision.

However, Council is unaware of any strategy document produced by the sport of cricket that sets out the whether it is important to provide access to turf pitches instead of synthetic pitches as a means of developing the sport. On August 19 2011 Cricket Australia released a review of cricket, primarily aimed at improving the national cricket team and its supporting systems. There was mention of the value of grade cricket as a pathway to state and national level, but no reference to levels of cricket below grade level.

In discussions with cricket representatives, it is often mentioned that competitions played on turf pitches provide a pathway to more elite competition levels. It is not clear that the pathway has in fact produced many elite cricketers from Hornsby Shire, nor that it is necessary to preserve 11 turf pitches to provide any such pathway.

Council provides sports facilities mostly for the average community sports participant, who seeks fun, fitness and companionship from sport. The ideal of producing elite athletes is really a secondary one.

The large majority of cricket players in Hornsby Shire are juniors who play all or most of their cricket on synthetic pitches, which are quite adequate for the purpose of learning the game and playing for enjoyment. Because cricket at the elite (international or first class level) is played exclusively on turf pitches, a belief seems to have emerged in the distant past that in order to provide a pathway to these elite representative levels, the largest possible number of turf pitches must be made (and remain) available to all or most competition levels, which, viewed realistically, are far removed from the standards of international and first class level.

The Sydney Grade Competition, represented in Hornsby Shire by NDCC, is the nearest level to first class cricket, with the best players considered for state selection. It would not be possible to progress to first class level directly from the Shires competition or association competitions, a player would need to move to a grade club first. Some of the younger and better players from these secondary competitions may be recruited by NDCC or another grade club, but the majority will not progress, and most are likely to be playing cricket for enjoyment than in the hope of progression to elite levels.

This does raise the question of whether providing 11 turf pitch grounds for cricket in Hornsby Shire is the correct level (bearing in mind the costs) when fewer would clearly satisfy the need to provide the most skilful players in Hornsby Shire with turf pitch experience to allow progression to higher levels. Some of these pitches could be converted to synthetic surfaces and this would provide adequately for those playing mainly for enjoyment, and provide more facilities for junior cricket (which are in scarce supply).

Perhaps the sport of cricket will conduct an analysis of the best way to match the facilities required by the grass roots and development levels of the sport with the scarce and constrained resources of the councils that provide them.

Figures presented below under the heading Budget demonstrate the raised cost of provision of turf cricket pitches compared to synthetic pitches. As well as a higher direct financial cost in providing turf versus synthetic pitches, there is an increased opportunity cost in tying up cricket grounds with turf instead of synthetic cricket. This is because there is only one game of cricket played per day on a turf pitch, commonly commencing at 1 pm. On synthetic pitches, there can be two or more games per day, and play is scheduled morning and afternoon. This is important, because there is a documented shortage of sportsgrounds with synthetic pitches in Hornsby Shire, which is thought to be limiting participation in the sport of cricket.

If some turf pitches were converted to synthetic pitches, more cricket would be played at these grounds, easing the shortage of cricket grounds at a fraction of the cost of providing entirely new grounds. A more rational approach to the level of turf pitch provision may well be in the interests of developing the sport of cricket generally.

### **Provision for cricket by Hornsby Shire Council**

Hornsby Council provides 42 sportsgrounds with cricket pitches for hire. Of these, 11 are turf-surfaced and the remainder are synthetic (a concrete strip topped with a green acrylic fibre carpet, or 'astro-turf'). These synthetic pitches last for many years without requiring replacement. The main maintenance cost involved with synthetic pitches is covering and uncovering them with soil and grass for the changeover in sports seasons, because they are not safe for football to be played upon them uncovered. This is a cost not required for turf cricket pitches; however some football clubs claim that the hardness of the pitch area causes a higher level of injuries to players than grounds with synthetic pitches.

Hornsby Council provides the highest number of turf cricket pitches of neighbouring and other comparable councils, both in terms of absolute numbers, and usually also as a proportion of all cricket surfaces. Ku-ring-gai council has 7 turf cricket pitches (of 28 grounds). Ryde Council, Warringah Council and the Hills Shire provide either 3 or 4 turf pitches.

The turf pitches are provided by Hornsby Council to what is generally agreed to be a very high standard, with attention to good grass cover, pitch hardness, irrigation, repair of worn areas and other factors. The 6.5 staff directly involved take great pride in their work. Long hours are required to bring each pitch to preparation: weed control, mowing 3-4 times per week, fertilisation, topdressing, watering, allowing to dry to the correct consistency, and many hours of rolling with a heavy roller, commencing weeks before each game. Turf pitch preparation is a fine art, with no shortcuts on the way to a quality product.

Each turf pitch is an area of perhaps 500 square metres in the centre of a cricket ground. It is made up of a deep layer of especially imported soil that has properties that allow it to be rolled very hard but still permit good grass root penetration and growth. The turf cover is usually especially chosen also to perform reliably under close mowing, compaction and the wear and tear of sport.

Each pitch area contains a number of 'strips' of regulation width, that are used for a match then rotated throughout a season, with the aim of preserving the quality of each strip and not allowing it to deteriorate badly so that it will need complete replacement with new turf (a costly process requiring months of quarantining from use). If prolonged excessive wear occurs, the entire pitch may need replacement at a likely cost of \$40,000.

If the cricket pitch is underprepared for a game (too little time in rolling, usually as a result of wet weather interruptions) it will not be satisfactory to play upon. The ball will bounce unevenly, perhaps dangerously. The strip will be more prone to crack and break up as a result of strong sunshine and wear from the ball and players' shoes. Large areas of grass will be worn away. If the under preparation continues long term, the decline in quality will be irreversible without expensive and time consuming repairs, and unless it is reversed, a damaged ground will be passed onto winter sports users, and further damage will occur on the exposed pitch during winter sports.

The staff involved with the preparation of these turf pitches believe that any reduction in the current staffing levels without a commensurate reduction in the number of pitches will result

in long term deterioration, and the cost to reinstate the deteriorated pitches will equal or outweigh cost savings sought from the staff reductions.

It is therefore recommended that cost savings in turf pitch maintenance be sought only by reducing the level of provision, that is, the number of turf pitches that are provided.

Associated costs are discussed below.

### **The pitches proposed to be converted, and implications for users**

The two grounds chosen for conversion to synthetic cricket pitches by Council staff are Somerville Oval and West Epping Park. While there is disagreement that any conversions should proceed, the majority view amongst cricket representatives seems to be in agreement with this choice of grounds if it must proceed. The cricket representatives have stated that any conversions of turf pitches will be disruptive to the cricket competitions played in Hornsby Shire at some level.

Somerville Oval is not fully utilised for cricket since Pennant Hills Park received a second turf pitch ground (converted from synthetic) in 2006. West Epping Park is close to Somerville Park allowing the deletion of the staff position responsible for maintenance of both these grounds.

Two remaining turf pitch grounds at Epping Oval and North Epping Oval would continue to provide opportunities to play on turf pitches in the Epping district.

Somerville Oval is used primarily for NDCC fifth grade home matches. Because (as explained above) grade cricket is the most elite level of local cricket, assurances were given to NDCC that a replacement ground would be made available. No such assurance was made to NDCA, the prime user of the pitch at West Epping Park. NDCA has objected, but has conceded that it is not in a position to provide Council with additional payments to compensate for the cost saving anticipated from the conversion of the pitch at West Epping.

NDCA would be the most affected by any pitch conversion, with fewer pitches available for its A grade sides. NDCA has expressed interest in using the converted synthetic pitches at both Somerville Oval and West Epping Park (if and when installed).

Options were presented to the cricket representatives on the rescheduling of ground allocations to the remaining turf pitches if the conversion proceeds.

### **Counter Proposals from Cricket Representatives**

Cricket representatives have requested that the conversion of the 2 turf pitches does not proceed and that all 11 pitches be made available for cricket as in recent years.

Cricket representatives have suggested that the 11 turf pitches could be adequately maintained while still reducing the 6.5 staff directly engaged in turf pitch maintenance to 5.5 staff. The cricket representatives have offered some voluntary assistance from the clubs, particularly in pitch crease markings.

The Parks and Landscape Team has, in the past, trialled cricket pitch maintenance using lower staffing levels and less preparation time per pitch per week. The quality of the pitches began to deteriorate through under-preparation (as discussed above). It is believed that the maintenance of the existing 11 turf pitch grounds with a reduction of one equivalent person would cause damage to accumulate and result in the need for costly repairs to the turf pitches

that would negate the savings made, and cause a decline in the quality of facilities over the course of each cricket season, and a decline in ground surface quality for winter sports.

The proposal to reduce staff while retaining all 11 turf pitches is not supported.

An alternative proposal has been put by the cricket representatives, to convert only one of the turf pitches to a synthetic pitch and maintain the remaining 10 pitches with 5.5 equivalent staff. It is believed that this could be achieved without damage to the quality of the cricket pitch surface.

If only 1 of the 2 turf pitches were converted, the cricket organisations now using the 2 grounds would share the remaining turf pitch throughout the season.

The proposal to convert only 1 turf pitch would provide a compromise and cause less disruption to established cricket competitions. However, this would yield only \$18,000 in recurrent savings.

### **Memorandum of understanding**

It is evident that one of the concerns that the cricket representatives have about the proposal to convert 2 pitches is that further conversions could follow in near future years. Also there is concern about continuing ground hire fee rises in near future years.

These fears could be allayed by entering into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) where Council may wish to guarantee the remaining level of turf pitches after its current decision on whether to convert any future pitches to achieve cost savings. The MoU could also place an upper limit on annual ground hire increases, and place obligations upon the clubs with regard to the development of the sport.

### **BUDGET**

Council spends \$765,000 annually on all ground maintenance for cricket. This figure does not include costs that are attributed to winter sport, nor the revenue from cricket ground hire fees.

There are 42 grounds with cricket pitches (turf and synthetic). The cost to maintain these grounds is \$380,000, and the additional maintenance cost of the 11 turf pitches (not including outfields) is \$384,000. While around 25% of the cricket grounds have turf pitches, the maintenance of these turf pitches represents 50% of the total expenditure on cricket maintenance.

It can therefore be seen that the extra cost of maintenance of turf cricket pitches is disproportionate when compared to cricket ground maintenance as a whole.

The expenditure savings from the conversion of 2 turf cricket pitches would be \$52,000 per annum, considering the reduction in direct costs in labour and materials, and the variation in ground hire income that would occur after conversion of the pitch. If only one of these was converted, the expenditure saving would be \$23,000.

The expenditure saving must be adjusted for loss in revenue, because hire fees for synthetic pitch grounds are substantially less than for turf pitch grounds in 2011/2012.

The net savings would therefore be:

Converting 2 pitches-\$43,000

Converting 1 pitch-\$18,000

This net calculation is based on proceeding with the 30% increase in turf ground hire fees adopted by Council as part of the 2011/2012 budget, and on the hiring schedule as for 2010/2011. On the submission of cricket representatives, this 30% increase was retained when Council considered making it 20% only. This was a gesture by the cricket representatives to assist Council in achieving its savings. As it turns out however, there would be little difference in revenue for the two pitches concerned if the hire fee increase is 20% or 30%.

For the remaining 9 turf pitches, the full 30% hire fee increase is expected to yield about \$7,500 in 2011/2012 than if the increase was 20% only.

If any pitches are converted, some of the matches scheduled at those grounds in previous seasons are expected to be scheduled to remaining grounds where available, especially Sunday matches. This will limit revenue loss but also increase the maintenance workload and associated costs on the remaining grounds with turf pitches.

In the first year, the cost savings will be reduced by the cost of the conversion work, estimated at \$10,000 per ground.

### **POLICY**

There are no policy implications from this report.

### **CONSULTATION**

There have been extensive discussions with cricket representatives about this matter. Financial information was provided to the cricket representatives regarding Council's maintenance costs for managing turf cricket pitches. It is understood that the cricket representatives were considering making a proposal to take over direct management of the cricket pitches using contractors, with the expectation of receiving a subsidy from Council, but allowing Council to achieve a budget saving in the process.

The cricket representatives have not proceeded with such a proposal, and have made other proposals, including agreeing that the 30% rise in hire fees for turf pitches introduced for the 2011/2012 season should remain and not reduced to 20% as Council had considered doing following the approval of the rate variation in June 2011.

### **TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE SUMMARY**

The Triple Bottom Line is a framework for improving Council's decisions ensuring accountability and transparency on social, environmental and economic factors. It does this by reporting upon Council's strategic themes. If Council was to proceed with the recommendations proposed in this Report, contributions would be made to the following strategic themes:

- Society and Culture – enhance social and community well-being.
- Economy – vibrant local economy and sustainable resource use.
- Human Habitat - effective community infrastructure and services

### **RESPONSIBLE OFFICER**

The officer responsible for the preparation of this Report is Mr Peter Kemp, Manager, Parks and Landscape, who may be contacted on 9847 6792.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT:**

1. Council proceed to obtain a cost saving from the conversion of turf cricket pitches to synthetic pitches.
2. Council choose between converting the turf pitches at Somerville Oval and West Epping Park to achieve a saving of \$43,000 per annum or the conversion of the turf wicket at West Epping Oval only to a achieve a saving of \$18,000.
3. After any turf pitches are converted, Council enter into discussions with cricket organisations with the aim of producing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), covering the level of service Council will provide in future years for cricket grounds, ground hire fees, and responsibilities of the parties to the memorandum.
4. Any draft MoU be reported to Council for its consideration.

ROBERT STEPHENS  
Executive Manager  
Environment Division

**Attachments:**

There are no attachments for this report.

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