

## 7.2.4 GLEN WAVERLEY BOWLS CLUB FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

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<b>Responsible Director:</b>	Russell Hopkins, Director Community Services

### RECOMMENDATION

#### That Council

- 1. Notes that Glen Waverley Bowls Club ranks as the highest priority out of Monash’s bowls venues for future capital works improvements/investment using Council’s endorsed Capital Works Prioritisation Framework.**
- 2. In principle, supports future capital works improvements at Glen Waverley Bowls Club that increase participation and community benefit outcomes (such as canopy cover/s over synthetic green/s) subject to project prioritisation and external funding.**
- 3. Encourages bowls clubs to work together with the view to consolidating assets and resources to improve the long-term sustainability of the sport of lawn bowls in Monash.**

### INTRODUCTION

The Glen Waverley Bowls Club (GWBC) has been seeking Council support to improve their lawn bowls facility since 2021, including through budget submissions to Council. The club has also received in-principle support for canopy covers from local State and Federal MPs.

Given this support, the club seeks in-principle agreement from Council that it supports the installation of canopy cover/s at GWBC as its top lawn bowls infrastructure priority as determined by current Council policy frameworks including the Active Monash Capital Works Prioritisation Framework.

It should be noted that each of the bowls clubs in Council managed facilities are seeking support or improvements to address challenges related to membership numbers and participation. GWBC is based at a site that has been assessed as being strategically best positioned to maximise any investment in infrastructure.

### BACKGROUND

#### Bowls in Victoria

Bowls offers a unique proposition to participants due to being a sport with few barriers to access. It is a low impact, non-contact sport that can be enjoyed at any stage in life, both socially and competitively, in a range of environments. Each year in Victoria, people of all ages regularly participate and compete in the sport of bowls:

- Casual and social participants (including barefoot bowls) – there is estimated to be at least 433,000 Victorians who play social and barefoot bowls annually, making it one of the strongest community sport activities in the State

- Victoria’s 506 bowls clubs in metropolitan and regional areas act as a central hub for community connection, providing vital opportunity for social engagement and recreation through healthy activity
- There are 40,464 full members participating in formal structured competition throughout the year
- Regular participants (more than four games annually in a structured competition) - 150,000+
- Over 20% of all bowls participants in Victoria are under the age of 40, with female participation experiencing the highest level of growth in social formats over the past decade
- With 80% of regular participants over the age of 40, bowls offers the opportunity to continue to develop new skills, stay fit, apply their sports IQ, hone talents and compete from Club to State and National Level (Source: Bowls Victoria, [Maximising the Value of Bowls for All Victorias - Covered Greens Initiatives](#), January 2024).

Importantly, bowls also provides older Victorians with more opportunities to continue to lead an active life in a non-confronting environment, no matter their skills. Bowls provides significant physical and mental health benefits for all Victorians. A La Trobe University study showed that a person who participates in bowls is likely to be 12% physically healthier than someone who is not (Source: Building an evidence base to increase participation in Lawn Bowls, Centre for Sport and Social Impact, La Trobe University, 2013).

### Bowls in Monash

There are four community bowls clubs in Monash, as well as one privately-owned bowls venue at the Mulgrave Country Club.

The four community clubs include:

- Glen Waverley Bowls Club (GWBC)
- Mount Waverley Bowls Club (MWBC)
- Oakleigh Bowls Club (OBC)
- South Oakleigh Bowls Club (SOBC)

The bowls clubs that use greens on Crown or Council-owned land do so under an exclusive-use lease agreement with Council. Council is currently developing new leases for bowls facilities in Monash. These leases will be for a term of 10 years, with the option for an additional 5 years.

**Table 1 – Monash Bowls Clubs – Greens and Ownership**

	<b>Turf Greens</b>	<b>Synthetic Greens</b>	<b>Greens Ownership</b>	<b>Pavilion Ownership</b>	<b>Overall Condition</b>
<b>GWBC</b>	3	1	Council	Council	Good
<b>MWBC</b>	2	1	Council	Club*	Good
<b>OBC</b>	2	0	Crown	Crown**	Good
<b>SOBC</b>	1	1	Council	Council	Good

\*The MWBC also owns the land on which the pavilion is built.

\*\*Oakleigh Lands (Bowling Club Lands) Act 1997 – An Act to make provision for the leasing of certain lands that are permanent reserve as a site for Public Recreation.

### Bowls in Monash Discussion Paper

A Monash Bowls Forum was held with bowls clubs on 1 December 2021. All four community bowls clubs and Bowls Victoria attended the Monash Bowls Forum, where clubs were encouraged to put forward suggestions about what needs to happen for the sport to thrive into the future. The key issues impacting the sport, as identified by the clubs at the Forum included:

- Revenue generation and ongoing financial viability and sustainability.
- Declining membership and volunteering numbers, and an ageing member base.
- Public image and perception that the sport is for older adults.

## **DISCUSSION**

### Consultation Findings

During the Monash Bowls Club Forum, clubs identified that declining membership, decreasing volunteerism and ageing members, have made it difficult for them to grow participation. For example, from 2018 to 2022, all four bowls clubs reported significant decreases in membership, with total participation dropping by over 50%. 'Financial viability' was overwhelmingly the most popular response at the Monash Bowls Forum when clubs were asked what the most critical issues currently facing their clubs were.

Consultation at the State level as detailed in Bowls Victoria's *Rolling Toward 2030 Plan*, identified the best approach to maximise the value of Bowls for Victorian communities, while supporting participation growth and the financial health of clubs, is to provide covered greens at existing facilities.

A further study undertaken by Bowls Victoria in February 2023 revealed that Victorian clubs that possessed covered greens were at a substantial advantage in terms of:

- participant growth, diversity and satisfaction levels
- protecting the health of participants (i.e. shade from sun and rain)
- breadth of program and competition offering
- extended operating and playing hours
- facility usage throughout the year, in all seasons
- event attraction and hosting
- ongoing Club financial health and stability

According to Bowls Victoria, the impact of covered greens in attracting new participants to the sport and engaging people in healthy activity across all age groups is significant. For example:

- The installation of two covered synthetic greens at Narre Warren Bowls Club in 2021 has seen participation increase from approximately 400 to over 2,500 (an increase of 575%) through the provision of more opportunities for all ages to play across more social and competitive formats at any time of year.
- The installation of a single covered synthetic green at Karingal resulted in a 100% membership and 200% participation increase, even during the COVID period.
- The installation of a single covered synthetic green at Dandenong resulted in a 100% membership and 200% participation increase, even during the COVID period.

### Club Sustainability

Recent benchmarking has confirmed the installation of canopy covers over greens has been effective in increasing bowls participation and club viability at many clubs in metropolitan Melbourne. It is generally acknowledged in the bowls community that natural turf greens are expensive to prepare and maintain, and that the end-of-life surface replacement costs for synthetic greens are challenging. With this being the case, sustainable sources of income for leased bowls clubs are essential to ensure that the required level of expenditure is being put towards facility upkeep and maintenance.

With appropriate facilities, particularly covered synthetic greens and lighting, the viability of clubs can be greatly improved. However, the feedback from the clubs is that while they are happy to cooperate and, in some instances, consider mergers, each club would like to remain viable in their own right.

Given the considerable cost to Council in either updating and/or supporting capital improvements at these leased facilities, it is considered that the existing bowls facilities should be prioritised in relation to future investment or support. To this end Council's existing Active Monash Capital Works Priorities Framework has been applied to the bowling club sites.

### Active Monash Capital Works Priorities Framework

The [Active Monash Capital Works Priorities Framework](#) is a prioritisation model for identifying capital projects. This Priorities Framework identifies capital works priorities for the next 10+ years for the City of Monash sport and recreation assets by applying a transparent framework to rank projects in order of redevelopment priorities based on a clear and justifiable methodology.

The prioritisation model seeks to represent and classify the variety of sports ground and pavilion standards that exist within the municipality and ensure, wherever possible, these are matched with the different demands for varying standards of competition. The quality of facilities will be fit-for-purpose relative to the level of sport being played.

The following key criteria used to rank capital works priorities:

1. Strategic Justification (10%)
2. Physical Environment (35%)
3. Community Benefit (35%)
4. Economic Benefit (10%)
5. Environmental Assessment (10%)

Monash bowls clubs have been assessed against this prioritisation framework and the GWBC ranks the highest out of all bowls clubs in terms of priority for upgrade.

This is consistent with other strategic frameworks as shown below:

### Monash Open Space Strategy 2021

The Monash Open Space Strategy (MOSS, 2021, p.67) recognises that Monash's '*...most prominent sporting park is Central Reserve, which is Monash's premier sporting park located off Springvale Road and Waverley Road.*'

The MOSS (2021, p. 43) also identifies the following key directions for managing spaces for sustainable sport:

1. Utilise the core service level standards and Active Reserves Facility Hierarchy – Policy Document February 2018, to inform the planning, design, infrastructure provision and maintenance standards for active reserves.
2. Increase the size and adaptability of sports facilities to meet increased demand, including facilitating greater female participation in organised sport.
3. Encourage the development of after-hours lighting and synthetic fields, where appropriate, to increase the capacity and usage of an active reserve.

The key directions in the MOSS, support GWBC's position as a priority site for future infrastructure improvements by comparison to the other sites, especially for sustainable project initiatives such as the installation of canopy covers.

### Active Reserves Facility Hierarchy

Along with its premier sporting status in the MOSS, Central Reserve is classified as an **A Grade reserve** in Council's Active Reserve Facility Hierarchy.

The [Active Reserves Facility Hierarchy](#) creates distinct facility provision categories based on a five level hierarchy system applied to Monash sport facilities. The key classifications are:

1. Class A – Regional/Municipal Facilities
2. Class B – District Facilities
3. Class C – Local Facilities
4. Class D - Other
5. School – School Facilities

The classifications directly inform facility provision standards and maintenance service levels. Regional/municipal facilities typically require a higher level of maintenance and support additional features, such as spectator areas, fencing, additional change rooms, event car parking etc. In comparison, local facilities require amenities and playing surfaces that are safe and fit-for-purpose.

**Class A facilities and reserves** will principally attract people all over Monash (i.e. larger catchment). These venues serve the whole municipality and typically provide the highest-level facilities for that particular sport in Monash. The reserve hierarchy levels and classifications also help inform future infrastructure improvement priorities.

### Strategic Implications for Bowls

Council's prioritisation model currently positions the GWBC as Council's priority bowls venue for future infrastructure improvements and potential investment, noting that this position is subject to annual review, Council-wide project prioritisation, and external funding.

From a strategic perspective, GWBC is considered the best-positioned bowls club to attract external funding for facility improvement because:

- The club ranks highest against other bowls venues in the Active Monash Capital Works Prioritisation Framework
- The club is in Central Reserve, Council's premier sporting reserve which is classified as an A-grade facility in Council's Facility Hierarchy
- Its geographic location is in the heart of Glen Waverley and is 5km away from the next nearest bowls club
- Its location on the edge of the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) Structure Plan Area and within the SRL Planning Area Declaration, and expected to experience significant population growth
- The GWBC is the largest bowls club in Monash with 4 greens and a reported 239 members in 2024, of which 43% are female
- The GWBC land and clubrooms are fully owned by Council, unlike Mount Waverley Clubroom (the clubroom and land upon which it is built owned by the club) and Oakleigh Bowls Club (entirely on Crown land).
- The GWBC proactive advocacy has secured in-principle support from State and Federal members and their committee has formally expressed their willingness to work collaboratively with other clubs to consolidate bowls assets and infrastructure.

It is not considered feasible for Council to support similar scale developments across all four bowls clubs – the strategic identification of a premier level bowls venue in Monash is warranted to help prioritise a site for future development and investment, and more broadly enhance the overall sustainability of bowls in the city.

#### Concept Plans for GWBC

Over the last 12-18 months, the GWBC has been working to develop concept development options for canopy cover/s with synthetic green/s, and an undercover alfresco area over two greens. However, more detailed plans and costings would be required to ensure the feasibility and viability of the project.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The opinion of probable cost to install two green canopy covers over new synthetic greens, and construction of a new undercover alfresco area is \$6.7M inclusive of all investigations, fees, contingency, and escalations. Subject to the amount of external funding received, this project could be scaled back to a cover a single green potentially reducing the construction cost to \$4M.

The next stage of the project is to complete a detailed design of the proposal which is expected to cost around \$60k-\$80k. An application will be made to the State Government's Local Sports Infrastructure Fund seeking a co-contribution to allow this detailed design and costing to be undertaken through joint funding with the Club and Council. Applications for funding close on 17 February 2025 and outcomes are announced from June 2025.

Subject to the receipt of State Government (LSIF) funding, detailed design would be undertaken in the 2025/26 financial year. If the LSIF funding application is unsuccessful, it is proposed a revised design budget will be funded via matching contributions from both Council and the Club. Funds are available from within existing operational budgets to support Council's contribution.

A detailed design would enable the GWBC to seek Federal and State funding towards the installation of canopy covers. It should be noted that that this project is not listed within Council's future Capital Works program and will be dependent upon external funding.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The recommendations in this report are consistent with Bowls Victoria's *Rolling Toward 2030 Plan* and align with relevant Monash strategies and plans including but not necessarily limited to:

- Council Plan
- Municipal Public Health Plan
- Monash Open Space Strategy 2021
- Monash Bowls Discussion Paper
- Active Reserves Facility Hierarchy 2018
- Active Monash Capital Works Prioritisation Framework 2018
- Active Monash Vision.

Combined these policies, plans and strategies highlight the key priorities and areas of focus for Council which focus on improving the health and wellbeing of the community through the provision of -

- safe and inclusive places,
- accessible and engaging activities and services; and
- opportunities for all members of the Monash community to be physically active and participate in community life.

## **CONSULTATION**

The GWBC has worked with officers to identify development priorities and concept plans for the site and has also confirmed a financial commitment of a minimum \$20k towards the cost of detailed design.

## **SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Covered synthetic greens maximises the value of bowls and is particularly valuable to older participants through:

- Enabling all weather play and healthy activity throughout the year, helping to address and reduce significant health issues.
- Providing important shade from sun to counter the incidence of skin cancer (melanoma) and other health conditions.
- Providing greater year-round opportunities for regular social connection, which offers proven capacity to sustain and improve mental health.
- Enabling continued participation in competitive sport.
- Providing protection from the elements for officials, coaches, and volunteers.



- Maintaining year-round social connections.

Broader social and community health benefits include:

- Create capacity to expand both the social and competitive bowls offering to meet the preferences of people of all ages and skills.
- Extend capacity for evening participation (and outside of traditional working hours) meeting the needs of people with different levels of time availability and preference.
- Provide greater capacity to deliver programs and competition for all abilities bowls - blind, deaf, para-ID and para-physical bowlers.
- Provide for extended use by schools in all weather conditions.
- Provide greater capacity to offer the Bowling with Babies program, providing new mothers with important means of connection and recreation.
- Cater to people of different levels of health and fitness through offering a wider range of programs.
- Enhance bowls clubs' proven ability to play a key role in providing social opportunities through engagement in sport and healthy activity.
- Capitalise on the low cost and lack of barriers to entry of the sport and providing more opportunities for all to participate.
- Expand opportunities for regular social connection, which offers proven capacity to sustain and improve mental health.
- Provide an inclusive non-collision sport option for younger people, with opportunities to play for fun (e.g. Roll Up program) or participate in development pathways and competition to elite level.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS**

The proposal complies with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

## **GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

A GIA was not completed because this agenda item is not a 'policy', 'program' or 'service'. AusPlay data indicates females make up 39% of the participation in bowls.


In 2018, female members represented 36% (240 female members) of the total bowls club membership in Monash clubs. In 2022 this had dropped to 27% (87 female members).

GWBC at 43% female membership, has the highest percentage of female participation of Monash bowls clubs. It is expected that the installation of canopy covers at GWBC will significantly increase female participation and overall membership at the club.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Glen Waverley Bowls Club (GWBC) has been seeking Council support to improve their lawn bowls facility since 2021. More recently, the club has secured in-principle support for the installation of canopy cover/s from local State and Federal Members of Parliament.





From a Council policy perspective, the GWBC ranks as the number one bowls site for future potential infrastructure improvements/investment based on Council's endorsed Active Monash Capital Works Priorities Framework.

Based on the club's priority ranking, and with advocacy momentum and political interest mounting, it is recommended Council declare its support for infrastructure improvements at Glen Waverley Bowls Club that enhance participation and community benefit outcomes (such as canopy covers over synthetic greens), noting that any future works would be subject to external funding.

#### **ATTACHMENT LIST**

Nil