

3.5. The Return of Hockey to North Sydney - Response to Notice of Motion

AUTHOR: Robert Emerson, Director Open Space & Environmental Services

ATTACHMENTS: Nil

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide the Reference Group with advice on potential options for supporting the sport of Hockey in the North Sydney Local Government area.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report has been prepared in response to Notice of Motion No. 20/18 by Crs Keen and Mutton – Re: The Return of Hockey to North Sydney discussed at the Council Meeting held on 27 August 2018, where it was resolved (Min. No. 295):

- 1. THAT Council in principle support a hockey field in the North Sydney LGA.*
- 2. THAT Council report on the options available for hockey.*

Members of the Reference Group have requested an update on this matter. Council at its meeting on the 28 September 2020 resolved the following:

- 1. THAT the report be received.*
- 2. THAT Council continue to liaise with Hockey representatives to create opportunities to provide local training facilities.*
- 3. THAT Council further investigate the opportunity of having a dedicated natural turf facility for Hockey.*

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Nil.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. THAT** the report be received.

LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

4. Our Social Vitality

4.1 North Sydney is connected, inclusive, healthy and safe

BACKGROUND

At its meeting on 27 August 2018, Council considered Notice of Motion No. 20/18 by Crs Keen and Mutton – Re: The Return of Hockey to North Sydney and resolved (Min. No. 295):

- 1. THAT Council in principle support a hockey field in the North Sydney LGA.*
- 2. THAT Council report on the options available for hockey.*

CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

Community engagement is not required.

DETAIL

The first known organised hockey games were played in Australia in 1900 and there is evidence of Hockey being played in North Sydney in 1927 with the creation of a Sydney Metropolitan league represented by a number of Sydney based teams including a team from the Cremorne-North Sydney Club.

Today, Hockey has approximately 30,000 registered hockey players in regional and metropolitan areas of NSW. The player base is men, women, boys and girls ranging from five years of age in introductory programs to players aged over sixty-five in master's programs.

Historically, the game was played on natural turf but today it is predominantly played on an artificial turf surface. The transition onto artificial pitches at the elite level came during the 1970s and was made mandatory for major competitions in 1976. Since 1976 there has been a continual move to artificial turf playing surfaces for most senior grades and higher grades of junior hockey.

North Sydney District Hockey Club was a dominant hockey club in Sydney throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It was created from the merging of North Sydney Police Boys Club and Cremorne-North Sydney Hockey Club in 1953, and later including Mosman Hockey Club in 1959-60.

Their home field was Primrose Park where they also had a clubhouse within the current art exhibition space, and they enjoyed a substantial number of players and a large following within the North Sydney community at their height of success.



North Sydney District Hockey Club playing at Primrose Park in the 1970s

In 1991 the Gordon North Sydney Hockey Club was created from the merger of North Sydney District Hockey Club and Gordon Hockey Club, “as North Sydney wasn't getting appraisal or help from the local council towards a future commitment to club infrastructure like a potential artificial turf field and declining player numbers, whereas Gordon had the newly built Ku-ring-gai Hockey Centre with increasing player numbers but still yet to crack the top Men's and Women's grades” Gordon North Sydney Hockey Club website 2020.

The current Mosman Hockey Club was formed in 1992, fielding women's teams in the Northern Suburbs Grass Competition. Since then the Senior teams have moved to artificial turf pitches competitions on the North Shore playing and practicing primarily at Homebush, Concord, Lidcombe, Bankstown, and Pennant Hills hockey facilities.

In 2009 the club began a Mosman Junior program which has become extremely popular, with the Club fielding several Junior teams in the grass and artificial turf pitches winter competitions as well as indoor hockey teams. Mosman Hockey Club use several facilities across Sydney including natural grass fields within North Sydney. Hockey is also played competitively within North Sydney by students from Loreto Kirribilli using the Council grass facilities at Forsyth Park. On average 25 hours per week of hockey is played on North Sydney's grass fields during the winter season.

The primary objective for Hockey to support their sustainable existence within our community and further promote the development and growth of the sport is gaining access to a designated artificial turf Hockey pitch within the local area.

North Sydney Council undertook Recreational Needs Studies in 2005 and 2015 both studies identified the following strategies to be pursued:

3.5 Maintain a diversity of sports and recreation activities in the LGA.

8.1.5 Provide an additional synthetic field in North Sydney – as a priority, suitable for sports including hockey.

8.5.3 Provide facilities suitable to retain a hockey competition in North Sydney.

In response to these strategies and to work towards overcoming the demand and supply crisis for community sport within North Sydney, Council engaged a consultant to undertake a Synthetic Sports Surfaces Business Case Study, 2014 that rated the Council's existing sports fields for conversion to a synthetic sports surface based on a range of criteria. This report compared the existing sports fields and their facilities and prioritised them from most viable to least viable.

Anderson Park was rated the most viable sports field to accommodate a synthetic sports field (artificial turf) surface followed by Primrose Park, Tunks Park, Waverton Park and Forsyth Park.

Based on these findings Council prepared a Development Application for the resurfacing of Anderson Park with a synthetic sports surface that was approved by the North Sydney Independent Planning Panel in December 2015. This DA approval is still current.

In April 2016 Council resolved to suspend any works on Anderson Park until a site-specific Management Plan was produced for Anderson Park and subsequently in November 2017 Council resolved:

***THAT** Council makes a public commitment to all residents, ratepayers, friends and users of both Tunks Park and Anderson Park that artificial turf is not a matter for consideration in either park.*

The next highest ranked existing sports field based on the Synthetic Sports Surfaces Business Case Study findings is Primrose Park. However, as a similar proposal was raised for Primrose Park quite a few years ago and failed due to the local communities' concerns, it is likely the Council will again receive a negative reaction from residents living in the local vicinity of the park. It is also noted the preparation of a Development Application and associated required studies are significant in both the time it takes to prepare the documents and the costs involved.

Short to Medium Term Options to Assist Hockey as a Sport Within North Sydney

If the construction of a synthetic surface hockey field is not possible in the short to medium term, Council could consider creating other opportunities that will support the playing of hockey within North Sydney until a field can be constructed either within North Sydney or in a neighbouring local government area.

This could be done through:

- Working with Hockey to create opportunities where hockey players can train locally and play small sided games on a suitable synthetic hockey surface through repurposing existing facilities e.g. disused Bowling Greens, School playgrounds and underutilised carparks.
- Work with both Mosman Hockey Club and Loretto to coordinate and restrict the playing of Hockey to one grass field within North Sydney rather than multiple fields as is currently the case. Council could then remove other high impact sports use in winter from a dedicated hockey field that would allow Council to maintain a grass surface for hockey at a significantly higher standard than can currently be provided.