

Relevant Information for Council

FILE: S127007.018 **DATE:** 18 September 2026

TO: Lord Mayor and Councillors

FROM: Kim Woodbury, Chief Operating Officer

THROUGH: Emma Rigney, Acting Chief Executive Officer

SUBJECT: Information Relevant To Item 7.3 – Public Exhibition - Draft Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Strategy 2026

Alternative recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve for public exhibition the draft Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Strategy 2026, shown at Attachments A and B to the subject report, ***subject to the following amendments:***
- (i) ***Volume 1 (page 9) - A foundational principle will be added to the Executive Summary around social wellness. This principle acknowledges that in our current context there is a need to enable genuine social connection between all members of our community and the role that recreational and open space facilities play in enabling this***
 - (ii) ***A concise standalone summary will be prepared to accompany the draft Strategy. The summary will clearly communicate the Strategy's key messages, findings and recommendations in a more accessible format, recognising that the full Strategy and supporting technical studies contain substantial detail***
 - (iii) ***Volume 1 (page 86) - 'High capacity surfaces' will be expanded to provide additional detail on the environmental impacts of synthetic turf, in particular heat and microplastic migration and the benefits of natural surfaces. The end-of-life opportunities for synthetic surfaces will be discussed in greater detail, including new technologies available in Australia for the recovery, processing and recycling of synthetic turf. Other high capacity options will be discussed including hybrid turf and combination turf***

- (iv) ***Volume 1 (page 132) and Volume 2 (page 186) 'Events' will be updated to explain that the City supports a limited number of events and cultural activities while ensuring parks are protected from damage and that any access restrictions during restoration are minimised. Other events and festival organisers are encouraged to use civic spaces and streets for temporary events and place-based activations. To support additional events in parks, the City will explore events infrastructure such as hard stand where feasible and appropriate.***
- (B) Council note that the draft Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Strategy 2026 will be placed on public exhibition for a minimum period of ~~6 weeks~~ **4 months which will include broad consultation including with underrepresented groups**
- (C) Council note that the draft Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Strategy 2026, including any recommended changes, will be reported to Council for adoption following the exhibition period
- (D) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to make minor editorial amendments for clarity or correction of drafting errors prior to exhibition of the draft Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Strategy 2026.

Purpose

To provide additional information relevant to the draft Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Strategy 2026.

Background

At the meeting of the Environment and Climate Change Committee on 14 September 2026, further information was sought on the following:

Concise summary of the Strategy

Prior to public exhibition, it is proposed that a concise standalone summary be prepared to accompany the draft Strategy. The summary will clearly communicate the Strategy's key messages, findings and recommendations in a more accessible format, recognising that the full Strategy and supporting technical studies contain substantial detail. In addition any editorial comments made to date will be incorporated prior to public exhibition.

Synthetic turf

The draft Strategy addresses synthetic turf as one option available to deal with high intensity use, arising in the City as a result of population growth and increased sports participation. The draft Strategy (Volume 1, page.86) provides a discussion of synthetic turf as a high capacity surface, and summarises the known environmental and health concerns including "microplastics migration, impacts on soil and water health, and contribution to urban heat island effect as well as need for better end of life recycling measures." The draft Strategy refers to 2 NSW Government guideline documents on page 86 of Volume 1:

- Synthetic Turf Sports Fields in Public Open Space: Guideline for Decision-Makers (May 2025)

- Division 5.1 Assessments – Addendum for Synthetic Sports Fields (effective August 2025)

The draft Strategy summarises the City of Sydney approach that synthetic turf is a:

“complementary recreation solution that may be appropriate in specific circumstances. Any proposal will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, informed by comprehensive social and environmental impact assessments, legislative requirements, contemporary research and latest innovation and best-practice approaches to minimise impacts.

Existing turf fields will be retained, with drainage and surface profile improvements implemented to increase field capacity and usability.

In addition opportunities for providing additional sporting fields through land acquisition and partnerships will be pursued if feasible.

When synthetics are considered projects must prepare a Review of Environmental Factors aligned with NSW guidelines, incorporate heat mitigation and microplastic containment measures, and implement a monitoring and reporting plan covering heat, drainage, and material migration as well as end of life recycling measures.

This approach combines targeted investment in both natural turf and synthetic capacity to meet community needs.”

Synthetic turf implications / other turf options

Before placing the draft Strategy on public exhibition, the high capacity surfaces section on page 86 will be expanded to provide additional detail on the environmental impacts of synthetic turf, in particular heat and microplastic migration. The end-of-life opportunities for synthetic surfaces will be discussed in greater detail, including new technologies available in Australia for the recovery, processing and recycling of synthetic turf.

The wording in this section will be reframed to present synthetic turf alongside other high capacity options and will include additional detail on hybrid turf and combination turf options.

Events in parks

Before placing the draft Strategy on public exhibition, the events sections on page 132 of Volume 1 and page 186 of Volume 2 will be updated to more explicitly explain that the City supports a limited number events and cultural activities while ensuring parks are protected from damage and that any access restrictions during restoration are minimised. Other events and festival organisers are encouraged to use to use civic spaces and streets for temporary events and place-based activations. To support additional events in parks, the City will explore events infrastructure such as hard stand where feasible and appropriate.

Fostering community participation, social cohesion, inclusion and wellbeing

The draft Strategy (Volume 1 pages 52, 78 and 94) recognises the important role that sport and recreation play in supporting both physical activity and social connection. It highlights the value of organised sport, social sport and recreation activities in fostering community participation, social cohesion, inclusion and wellbeing. On page 9 a new foundation principle on social wellness will be included.

The revised draft Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Strategy 2026, with the above amendments and other minor corrections, will be circulated via the CEO Update prior to the public exhibition period.

Engagement plan

Subject to approval to proceed to public exhibition, the City will undertake a targeted and broad program of engagement aiming to test the Strategy's Strategic Directions and explore recreational needs and trends, over a 4 month period. This information will feed back into the final version of the Strategy which will come back to Council for endorsement.

The engagement process will gather feedback from a broad spectrum of stakeholders and community members by targeting:

- Community members using City parks and facilities
- Informal and emerging user groups
- Different demographics with specific perspectives
- Established sporting groups and hirers of our facilities such as schools and recreation businesses

This process will provide a greater understanding of the challenges and demands and will inform the priorities and implementation of the Strategy including equity and resilience outcomes.

The engagement process will include a Sydney Your Say page, summarising key elements of the strategy with maps to illustrate existing and proposed open space and facilities. It will include a survey for individuals and stakeholders.

The survey for sporting and emerging user groups will gather information about trends and targets including participation rates (gender and age) along with their policies and programs to support access, inclusion and wellbeing outcomes, and to respond to changing context such as population growth and climate impacts (e.g. extreme heat).

There will be online and/or face to face briefings for sporting groups, hirers and other groups that use our facilities and open space as well as a focus to reach underrepresented groups that currently don't use our facilities. Focus groups may be undertaken to explore specific and emerging issues in more depth.

The consultation will be promoted through social media, signage in the City's parks and facilities, notification via email to sporting groups and hirers, and e-newsletters.

The outcomes of the engagement process will be collated and presented in an engagement report and will inform the revised final Strategy.

Data sources

Key data sources used to inform the draft Strategy include:

- Australian Sports Commission AusPlay 2026 participation data and trend reports
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 Census data and demographic profiles

- Population and dwelling forecasts prepared using [profile.id](#) and NSW Government population projections to 2046
- Geographic Information System (GIS) spatial analysis and accessibility mapping to assess proximity to open space and recreation facilities
- Greater Sydney Outdoors Survey (NSW Department of Planning and Environment)
- City of Sydney asset inventories and facility databases
- Recreation facility benchmark standards used in the 2016 Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Study
- Sports field booking and allocation data
- Indoor recreation facility utilisation data
- Aquatic centre visitation data
- NSW Office of Sport participation research, including gender participation trends
- Community engagement outcomes from strategic plans, including the Inclusion (Disability) Action Plan 2025-2029
- State and metropolitan strategic planning documents

These data sources provide information about population characteristics, recreation participation, facility utilisation, accessibility, service gaps and likely future demand. Together they were used to assess current provision and identify future recreation needs arising from population growth, demographic change and participation trends.

The proposed 4month public exhibition and engagement process will provide a further opportunity to gather information from informal and emerging user groups, sporting clubs, recreation providers and the broader community on current and future use of City facilities and parks. This feedback will help refine priorities and strengthen the evidence base for future planning and investment decisions.

Data analysis

The recommendations in the draft Strategy were developed through an assessment that combined demographic forecasting, facility utilisation data, spatial analysis, AusPlay participation trends, and industry benchmarking. Rather than relying on a single benchmark or dataset, multiple sources of information were analysed together to identify gaps in the distribution of recreation facilities, capacity pressures, future demand and priority actions.

The analysis acknowledges capacity pressures on playing fields and courts, particularly during peak periods, alongside the increasing diversity of recreation activities competing for access to limited open space and court infrastructure. These findings informed recommendations to improve access, increase capacity, address service gaps and ensure facilities remain flexible and adaptable to changing community needs.

Projections about changing demographics

Pages 24 to 29 and Figure 9 of Volume 2 provide demographic projections to 2046 using profile.id population forecast data. The analysis indicates growth across all age groups, with young adults (25-34 years) remaining the largest age cohort.

In response, the recommendations aim to increase the capacity, inclusivity and adaptability of the open space and recreation network to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse population over the next 20 years. We will target informal and formal groups and focus on female participation.

Role of private facilities

The Strategy (Volume 1, page 43) acknowledges the important role private providers (for example, commercial gyms, martial arts centres and indoor rock climbing etc.) play in supporting recreation participation by complementing public provision and offering a wider range of recreation and fitness opportunities.

Public and private facilities perform complementary but different functions. Public facilities provide equitable, affordable and long-term access for the broader community, while private facilities can respond to specific user needs (such as gyms) and supplement overall recreation capacity for a return on investment.

A key point of difference for Council-operated facilities is their ability to provide targeted and affordable programs for diverse community groups, including children and young people, older people, women and girls, people with disability and culturally diverse communities.

The Strategy supports maintaining a strong network of publicly accessible facilities, complemented by partnerships, shared-use opportunities and acknowledges private investment where there is market. Fluctuations in market mean that private facilities cannot be permanently relied upon.

Broader planning controls

The draft Strategy does not force or amend statutory planning controls but may choose to deploy planning controls to support its decisions. For example, if Council resolves to purchase industrial land as future open space, Council may subsequently rezone the land to Recreation RE1 to reflect and protect that intended use. This is an example of planning controls supporting strategic assets.

The Strategy can also inform a change of use, or the creation of open space or infrastructure at the master planning stage. Examples of include the Green Square Town Centre, Harold Park and the Ashmore Estate.

Court capacity

The draft Strategy (Volume 1, page 114) supports increasing overall court capacity through facility upgrades and provision of adaptable multi-use courts. This includes planned upgrades to tennis courts and amenities at Alexandria Park, as well as the proposed multi-purpose court facilities at the Mandible Street Sports Precinct, which may accommodate tennis and other court-based sports where appropriate.

The Strategy also recognises the growing popularity of pickleball, other racquet sports and recommends adaptable court formats to respond to these changing participation trends.

Victoria Park

The draft Strategy (Volume 1, page 132) recognises the role of Victoria Park as a venue for major community events, including Yabun Festival and Mardi Gras Fair Day, while also maintaining its important function as a community park.

Any future consideration of additional event infrastructure, such as power supply or hardstand areas, would be subject to further assessment, including heritage, environmental, operational and budget considerations, to ensure an appropriate balance between event requirements and the park's recreational, community and landscape values.

Victoria Park has benefited from a series of staged upgrades over previous years, including the renewal of Lake Northam, improved pathways and lighting, a new playground, and the provision of a half-court practice facility, enhancing both recreational opportunities and park amenity.

People with lived experience of disability or hardship

A presentation on the draft Strategy was provided to the Inclusion (Disability) Advisory Panel on 10 February 2026 to seek feedback on its development.

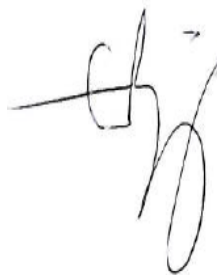
Key feedback highlighted the importance of incorporating relevant actions from the Inclusion (Disability) Action Plan 2025-2029, supporting the delivery of inclusive playgrounds (Volume 1, page 76) across the local government area, embedding inclusive design principles that cater for people with sensory, cognitive and physical disabilities, and engaging with local disability sport and recreation organisations during the engagement phase.

Memo from Kim Woodbury, Chief Operating Officer

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Approved



EMMA RIGNEY

Acting Chief Executive Officer