

Resolution of Council

23 February 2026

Item 12.1

Synthetic Turf Policy Review

The original motion was moved by Councillor Thompson and seconded by Councillor Arkins.

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

- (i) the City's 17 sports fields are important spaces that serve sporting clubs, local communities and recreational users and are under increasing demand as our population grows and availability of suitable sites for new sports fields is limited;
- (ii) the Open Space, Sports and Recreation Needs Study (2016) forecasts the need to increase capacity by [16,000 playable hours](#) by 2030;
- (iii) the City currently has 4 synthetic turf fields located throughout the Local Government Area (LGA) that provide an extra 11,000 playing hours per year, achieving about 70% of our playable hours target;
- (iv) the City is considering a new synthetic turf field at the proposed Mandible Street Sports Precinct, Alexandria, and will consult the community about this proposal before a decision is made;
- (v) community consultation carried out by the City in 2021 revealed 89% of respondents opposed a proposal to install a synthetic sports field to replace an existing natural turf field at Turruwul Park, Rosebery. As a result:
 - (a) [Council resolved](#) not to proceed with Synthetic Fields at Turruwul Park and Waterloo Oval; and
 - (b) the [City indicated](#) that they would follow recommendations of forthcoming advice by the NSW Chief Scientist and NSW Government Guidance in the development of any future synthetic fields;

- (vi) synthetic turf sporting fields can play an important role in meeting shortfall in playable hours and meet community needs, but should only be considered on a case-by-case basis, in line with the [NSW Governments Synthetic Turf in Public Open Space Guidelines for Decision-Makers](#) and with comprehensive social and environmental impact assessments in line with legislative requirements as outlined in the NSW Governments Guidelines for [Division 5.1 Assessments - Addendum for Synthetic Sports Fields](#);

(B) Council further note:

- (i) unshaded synthetic turf sports fields can attract high temperatures in the summer, potentially creating unsafe conditions for users and contribute to the urban heat island effect;
- (ii) the '[Mapping Summer Microclimates](#)' report published on 5 March 2025 by the University of Western Sydney found parts of suburbs near the proposed Mandible Street Sports Precinct, such as Alexandria, Rosebery and Beaconsfield experienced some of the highest daytime temperatures in the LGA;
- (iii) published in 2022, the '[Synthetic Turf in Public Spaces](#)' assessment prepared for the Office of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer found when daytime temperatures rise above 27°C, synthetic turf fields can inflict serious skin burns on users;
- (iv) [research](#) conducted by Associate Professor in Urban Management and Planning at Western Sydney University, Dr Sebastian Pfautsch, indicates ground temperatures on synthetic playing surfaces in the suburbs of Banksia and Penrith were double those on nearby natural fields, but notes that more systematic assessments on the impact on microclimates and urban heat island effect is needed;
- (v) published in 2024, The [National Urban Policy](#), prepared by the Department of Infrastructure, suggests that 'sustainable and resilient urban places should' consider urban heating in planning and incorporate appropriate mitigation strategies including through blue-green infrastructure;
- (vi) there is an environmental risk associated with synthetic sports fields exposed to waterways, particularly during maximum flooding events. The NSW Government's new guidelines and recommendations for councils in [Division 5.1 Assessments - Addendum for Synthetic Sports Fields](#) indicates that without structures to reduce infill loss (such as barrier walls, brush mats, drainage around the field and pits to contain and collect microplastics, and rubber crumbs) tens to hundreds of kilograms of microplastic fibres may be lost from each field, each year;
- (vii) most sports fields (natural turf and synthetic turf) within the LGA are located on flood prone sites. However, where the City builds synthetic sports fields, if they are located in a flood zone, they are built above the flood level;
- (viii) some modern, well-designed and highly maintained grass turf sports fields are proving capable of delivering more playable hours compared to older turf sports fields, but without the potential social and environmental risks of synthetic turf fields;

- (ix) the [Natural Turf Alliance](#)'s case study says [Middle Head Oval in Mosman](#) is used between 49 to 55 Hours per week in winter and has seen a reduction of cancelled games, mitigation of flooding impacts with appropriate infrastructure, and decreased costs associated with ongoing and long-term maintenance compared to the previous turf field; and
 - (x) Mosman Council advises Middle Head Oval is available 7am to 9pm 7 days per week (98 hours per week) and it is currently used between 22.5 and 27.5 Hours per week, mostly on evenings and weekends, which represents a utilisation rate of between 23 to 28%;
- (C) Council further note the NSW Government's new guidelines and recommendations for councils in [Division 5.1 Assessments - Addendum for Synthetic Sports Fields](#), published in May 2025, following an independent review by the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer, which included the following guidance:
- (i) a heritage impact statement should be prepared for the construction of any synthetic turf fields within conservation areas, including areas of Aboriginal significance;
 - (ii) the cumulative impacts from synthetic turf fields should be assessed at a local climate scale, including heat, extent of impenetrable surfaces, light, soil and water health;
 - (iii) sports fields located in proximity to or draining into a sensitive ecosystem must be independently assessed;
 - (iv) synthetic turf sports fields should not be constructed in areas of extreme flood risk;
 - (v) a biodiversity impact assessment must be conducted to identify potential impacts of synthetic turf sports fields, including impacts of habitat loss, heat effects on fauna and light spill; and
 - (vi) when preparing a Review of Environmental Factors (REF), an end of life (EOL) management plan must be prepared and included and should be consistent with the intent and provisions of the NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy and the NSW Plastic Reduction and Circular Economy Act 2021;
- (D) Council endorse that the City take the following approach to decisions about any potential future synthetic sports fields:
- (i) the City recognises that synthetic turf sport fields can play an important role in meeting shortfall in playable hours and meeting community needs, but that environmental risks exist and must be carefully managed;
 - (ii) the City remains open to new science and will always follow the most recent NSW Government guidance and legislation when considering synthetic sports fields;
 - (iii) synthetic sports fields will only be considered on a case-by-case basis, and taking into account current NSW Government Guidance and legislative requirements for detailed impact assessments and community consultation as part of the required Review of Environmental Factors;

- (iv) the City will report the draft project scope and the completed impact assessments required for the Review of Environmental Factors for any proposed synthetic sports field seeking Council's approval to consult the community on the proposal; and
 - (v) the final Project Scope and Engagement Report will be reported to Council for their approval to proceed to detailed design and to finalise the Review of Environmental factors incorporating community feedback; and
- (E) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to report the draft project scope and the completed impact assessments required for the Review Of Environmental Factors in line with [*Division 5.1 Assessments - Addendum for Synthetic Sports Fields*](#) for the Mandible Street Sports Precinct seeking Council's approval to consult the community on the proposal, taking into account:
- (i) the recommendation that a heritage impact statement should be prepared for any synthetic turf fields within conservation areas, including areas of Aboriginal significance;
 - (ii) active and passive recreational usage demands;
 - (iii) impacts of the proposed synthetic surfaces on waterway pollution, biodiversity and the local environment, particularly in regard to microplastics;
 - (iv) impacts of the proposed synthetic surfaces on the microclimate, including potential urban heat island effects; and
 - (v) a comparison of the estimated capital, maintenance and ongoing operational costs of the proposed field as a natural versus synthetic fields, including end of-life costs.

Amended motion carried unanimously.

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