

Item 12.3

Notices of Motion

Synthetic Turf Policy Review

By Councillor Thompson

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

- (i) the City's sports fields are important spaces that serve sporting clubs, local communities and recreational users, despite being in limited supply;
- (ii) the City currently has 4 synthetic turf fields located throughout the Local Government Area (LGA) and plans to construct a new synthetic turf field at the proposed Mandible Street Sports Precinct, Alexandria;
- (iii) 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; and
- (iv) synthetic turf sporting fields should only be considered on a case-by-case basis, following comprehensive social and environmental impact assessments in line with legislative requirements and with contemporary research and best-practice;

(B) Council further note:

- (i) synthetic turf sports fields attract high temperatures in the summer, 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 suburbs near the proposed Mandible Street Sports Precinct, such as Alexandria, Rosebery and Beaconsfield experienced the highest daytime temperatures in the LGA, with some sites recording maximum temperatures over 40°C;
- (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 often double those on nearby natural fields;
- (v) published in 2024, The National Urban Policy, prepared by the Department of Infrastructure, directed that 'sustainable and resilient urban places should' consider urban heating in planning and incorporate appropriate mitigation strategies through blue-green infrastructure;

- (vi) there is broad consensus on the environmental risk associated with synthetic sports fields exposed to waterways, particularly during flooding events. Experts indicate 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;
 - (viii) modern, well-designed and highly maintained natural turf sports fields are proving capable of delivering the benefits of synthetic turf fields, without the social and environmental impacts; and
 - (ix) modern natural fields, such as Middle Head Oval in Mosman have demonstrated an evident increased usage and capacity, reduction of injuries, mitigation of flooding impacts with appropriate infrastructure, and decreased costs associated with ongoing and long-term maintenance;
- (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; and
- (D) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:
- (i) conduct a review into the City's policies which guide use of synthetic turf in new or redeveloped sporting fields, including the Mandible Street Sports Precinct, taking into account:
 - (a) the recent NSW Government guidelines for synthetic sports fields, in particular (C)(ii) above;
 - (b) active and passive recreational usage demands;

- (c) the number of estimated playable days given projected flooding and heatwave events;
 - (d) efficacy of flood mitigation methods and infrastructure deployed by other Councils to reduce wet weather field closures for natural turf fields;
 - (e) impacts of synthetic surfaces on waterway pollution, biodiversity and the local environment, particularly in regard to microplastics;
 - (f) impacts of synthetic surfaces on the microclimate, including potential urban heat island effects; and
 - (g) the ongoing financial cost of natural versus synthetic fields, including end-of-life costs;
- (ii) prepare changes to the City's policies which guide use of synthetic turf in accordance with the findings of the review and report back to Council; and
 - (iii) provide the outcome of this investigation to Council prior to the March 2026 Council meeting to ensure Councillors have the opportunity to deliberate on its findings and include relevant considerations in the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs review in 2026.

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