



Merri-bek
City Council

Draft

Sportsground

Surface Policy

1. Introduction

At Merri-Bek City Council ('Council'), we are committed to fostering a vibrant, safe, healthy, resilient, innovative, and regenerative community. Our Sportsground Surfaces Policy is a testament to this commitment, embodying our vision and outlining our strategic objectives for sportsground surface management and decision-making within our municipality.

Developed in consultation with our stakeholders and guided by evidence-based research, this Policy is a clear reflection of our commitment to the sustainable use and enjoyment of our public open spaces.

This Policy outlines Council's approach to the management of our sports grounds, and gives consideration to the triple bottom line principles of environmental, social and financial sustainability. This Policy applies to sports grounds, as defined in the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy 2012-2022, as areas reserved for sporting pursuits such as baseball, soccer, cricket or football. This policy also covers other sports surfaces including lawn bowls, tennis, hockey and other synthetic surfaces.

The primary purpose of our sports grounds is to facilitate organised sport for our community. With limited amounts of open space, we want to maximise the use of sports grounds by our community for diverse uses outside of organised sport hours. Our aim is to manage sports grounds in a way that maximises use and provides the highest quality grounds to support community demand within budget allocations.

2. Context

Our community's growing demand for access to quality public open spaces, driven by population growth, urban densification, and increased diversity of sport participants, necessitates crucial decisions about the types of playing surfaces and management practices that can accommodate this need to be made by Merri-bek City Council.

Given the projected deficit of sports fields over the next two decades in inner Melbourne, the divided community sentiment regarding synthetic turf, and the complexities arising from Merri-bek's unique climatic, geotechnical, and environmental conditions, it is critical that Merri-bek City Council has a clear process for making decisions about sportsground surfaces.

3. Policy

VISION	Merri-bek's sportsground surfaces enable vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable spaces that foster a happy and healthy community through access to sport and recreation for all.
AIM	OUR AIM THROUGH THIS POLICY IS TO Integrate the diverse needs of our growing community with considered surface decisions that nurture the social, economic, and environmental fabric of our city.
OBJECTIVES	WE ARE GUIDED BY OUR PRINCIPLES, INCLUDING SOCIAL  Our surfaces and management practices are suitable to meet growing sporting and community demand. ENVIRONMENTAL  We fully understand and are open about the environmental impact of our decisions. ECONOMIC  Our decisions consider financial equity both across the municipality and between different user groups.  Our decisions transparently consider and value diverse formal and informal community users  We avoid, minimise, and mitigate all environmental impacts of sportsground decisions to the extent possible using the most current technology.  Our decisions are economically sustainable, considering longevity, risk management, and adaptation to changing community needs.
	WE CREATE CLEAR STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT THIS POLICY, INCLUDING Field diversification: Offer a mix of field types to cater to diverse user needs and local conditions. Accessibility and inclusivity: Promotion of inclusivity and accessibility across all sports field facilities. Stakeholder and Community engagement: Involve the community in decision-making for tailored upgrades and management practices guided by Council's Community Engagement Policy. Sustainable field management: Invest in physical and social infrastructure resilient to environmental changes and risks. Continual learning: Incorporate emerging research for ongoing policy improvements. Trial new surfaces.
PRINCIPLES	OUR POLICY IS GROUNDED IN CORE DECISION-MAKING PRINCIPLES, INCLUDING EVIDENCE-BASED We understand that effective management of sports ground surfaces relies on clear, evidence-based principles. PRECAUTIONARY We err on the side of caution with unknown impacts, prioritising risk avoidance and harm prevention in all decisions. STRATEGIC & SPECIFIC We balance site-specific needs with a systems view of the sports field network for overall sustainability and efficiency.

4. Decision-making framework

Merri-bek City Council has a supporting decision-making framework for internal use to ensure this Policy is enacted with robust, transparent, and evidence-based decision-making. It aligns Council's decision-making on sportsground surfaces and management practices with the unique social, economic, and environmental considerations impacting our community, coupled with a steadfast commitment to safeguarding access to sport and recreation and the enjoyment of our public open spaces for all members of the community.

Our framework for making decisions about our sportsground surfaces follows the following process and makes use of a multi-factor decision making tool informed by our objectives and decision-making principles outlined above.

