

Coburg North Sports Hub

Merri-bek City Council

Draft Master Plan Community Feedback Report
June 2025



Acknowledgement of Country



We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek, and pay respect to their Elders past and present.



Introduction

Project Overview

Merri-bek City Council is developing a Master Plan for an area labelled the “Coburg North Sports Hub” and has appointed independent consultants Solucio and The Office for Collective Design (The OCD) to lead this process.

This area has not previously been defined as a collective precinct. It includes five key sporting facilities as well as the surrounding trails, open spaces, Merri Creek and Edgars Creek.

Project Aim

The aim of the project is to strategically guide future planning and development on the site, ensuring it can sustainably meet the needs of the community.

Of significant importance for this project is the requirement for both

- A long-term vision, as well as;
- Aligned and realistic short-term development plans.

Community Feedback

In April 2025, the draft Master Plan (and project engagement report) was published for a five-week community feedback process.

During this time, the project team noted the plan was viewed online 9,641 times, with 876 feedback submissions via Conversations Merri-bek, and 17 email submissions for consideration.

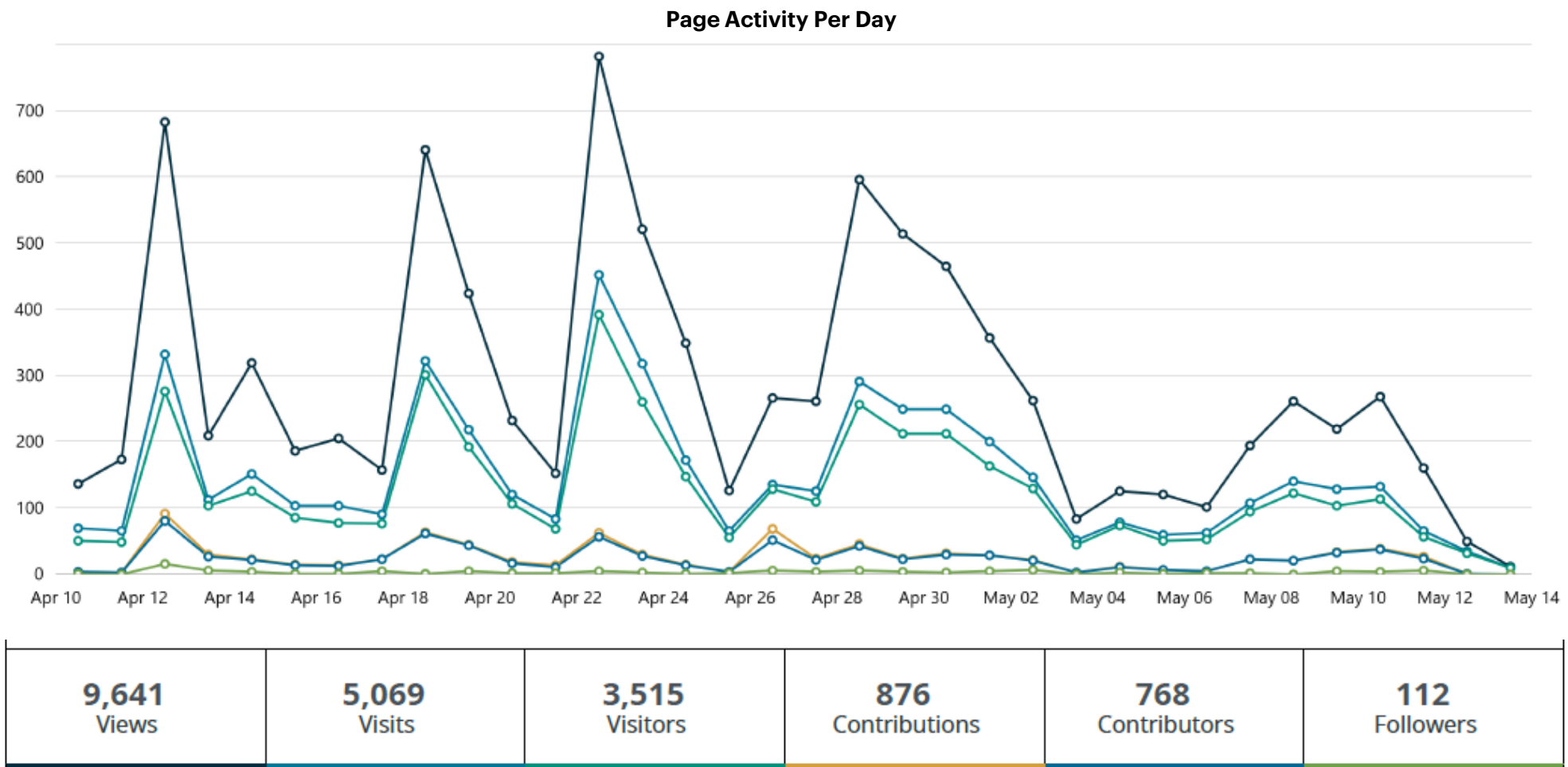
This document provides the findings from the community submissions and recommendations for updating the Master Plan.



Draft Master Plan Long-term 2050 Vision

Conversations Merri-bek Feedback Statistics

Throughout the feedback process, Conversations Merri-bek observed significant digital traffic with 9,641 page views, and with 45% of visitors spending more than one minute on the page. The total page engagement time equated to seven days, 23 hours and 43 minutes.



Conversations Merri-bek Feedback Summary

Positive Feedback

There were 111 positive feedback submissions, which provided an overall rating of the Draft Master Plan as either a four or five out of five.

The following themes were prominent from the corresponding submissions:

- The commitment to upgrading the pool to increase access and year-round opening hours.
- The opportunities to heat the pools and retain the diving pool and grass/lawn setting.
- The different zones being enhanced with tailored and appropriately approaches.
- Multi-use facilities and the benefits of maximising use and enjoyment of buildings, parks and ovals by individuals, communities and groups.
- Improvements to the current stadium's entry and the ongoing planning for a new basketball facility.
- Feasibility study, site selection and concept design and planning for a new relocated stadium.
- Enhancing creekside vegetation, expanding the trail network, and celebrating the site's Woi Wurrung cultural significance.
- The focus on improving community and sporting facilities.
- Improving the safety, usability and vegetation in the area around Murray Road and Elizabeth Street.
- Enhanced community access opportunities to the athletics track.

"Great to see the natural environment and habitat areas preserved and enhanced and sustainable and incorporating energy efficient design."

"I would very much hope the amazing amenity that is Coburg Olympic pool is upgraded and maintained so the community who loves it so much can utilise it even more. The 50m pool needs to be heated and open all year round and at appropriate hours for people to lap swim in the early morning and evening. Thank you."

"Completing a feasibility study and concept design for a new, relocated basketball stadium to allow for expansion of courts is identified in the plan however current timeframes indicates this work to take place within the next ten years. We need this to be a priority for Council now – and we need Council to make an addition to its current draft budget for this critical work to take place."

"As a local resident I am very supportive of the Coburg North Sports Hub Draft Master Plan and commend Council for the long-term vision presented. The plan rightly reflects the value of this precinct as both a sporting hub and an ecological asset for the local community."

"I'm excited to see the draft masterplan and think the team has done a good job at capturing the needs and desires of the community."

Conversations Merri-bek Feedback Summary

Neutral and Negative Feedback

There were 765 neutral or negative feedback submissions, which provided an overall rating of the Draft Master Plan as either a one, two or three out of five.

The following concerns, largely centered around the long-term vision's impacts on athletics, were raised from the corresponding submissions:

- The proposal of a grass athletics track and its suitability for the athletics community, diverse user groups and school carnivals, as well as the risk of injuries.
- Not being able to conduct athletics activity in all weather conditions and during the evenings.
- Confusion over how the proposed Zone 2 would work practically with different activities, user groups and community use.
- The elongated timeframe for the proposed upgrades for the basketball facilities.
- Concern that Council may not be able to maintain the upgraded facilities to the proposed standards.
- The logic of upgrading facilities in the short-term if the facilities will then be redeveloped in the medium-to-longer-term.
- Lack of designated dog on-leash and dog-off-leash areas within the Sports Hub.

"Although there are many aspects of the masterplan which are good, including a heated Olympic pool for year-round access, my principal concern is about the replacement of the Harold Stevens athletics track with an integrated grass oval. This plan falls short of the aspirations and dreams for athletics that many have in the club, and will diminish the chances and impact of athletics in our community."

"Logistically at the moment cricket and athletics can happen at the same time - this will no longer be possible in your one size fits all field."

"Overlapping with cricket, football, and other recreation — may sound inclusive in principle, but in practice it severely limits the functionality and safety required for key athletics disciplines. Events such as javelin, discus, high jump, and shot put require exclusive access, specialised markings, and safe buffer zones that cannot be accommodated within multi-use open fields."

"We need funding urgently for a proper development plan, site selection, and design for a new stadium—one that's big enough (at least 10–12 courts) to meet the needs of our growing basketball community, now and into the future."

Email Submissions Feedback Summary

17 email submissions were received by the project team between April 12th and May 13th. Similar to the Conversations Merri-bek webpage, the general issue that motivated the majority of the submissions concerned the long-term vision's impacts on athletics.

The following provides a summary of the feedback and insight into the sentiment:

- Strong objection to the proposed removal of the synthetic athletics track and the broad physical activity opportunities that will no longer be available to the community.
- The potential loss of historical significance of athletics for the community.
- Higher risks of injuries and lost opportunities to compete when there is inclement weather.
- The significant additional maintenance required to maintain a grass track.
- Displacement of local athletes to other clubs with synthetic tracks.
- Removal and loss of existing facilities such as an Olympic standard high jump facility, pole vault facility, newly renovated club rooms, high-performance gym, long and triple jump pits, and shade sails for spectators.
- Not including an indoor athletics track.

There was one email submission in support of the overall draft Master Plan:

- A commitment to the pool, natural environment and community sport and recreation have all been prioritised, which demonstrates local community values were understood.

"The athletics club, the oldest in Victoria, has a rich history of producing both national and international athletes over more than 100 years. The track opened in 1971 has been part of generations of families sporting lives providing a safe place for people of all ages and abilities to exercise, stay healthy and connect with others in the community."

"As a level surface is required, a grass track requires expensive maintenance to keep it safe and usable. It needs to be marked with lines prior to every event, and it cannot host regional junior events as it is not up to Athletics Victoria standards. It is useless for winter training and competition in Melbourne's fickle summer weather would become limited."

"It would be unlikely that [Local School] would seek to use a grass track for its athletic carnival - as it is currently the only synthetic track in Merri-bek, we would likely need to find an alternative venue out of the council area where students would need to be bussed to and from."

"We would encourage a reconsideration so that a World Athletics Class 1 or 2 synthetic track (which would have longer straights but not be as wide) could be retained within the precinct alongside an oval for cricket and Australian Rules."

Conclusions and Proposed Next Steps

The community feedback on the Draft Master Plan was robust and extensive, and there was strong alignment with many clear areas for support and a couple of areas of significant angst.

There is strong support for the environmental corridor enhancements and considerations, the proposed upgrades to the pools and support for finding a solution to the current shortage of suitable basketball courts.

Conversely, the community's overwhelming message of anguish is that the synthetic track-based athletics facility simply can't be removed.

Council now has an opportunity to consider all feedback and identify a compelling solution, which retains the key strengths of the Draft Plan, while addressing the key areas of concern.

The project team's recommendation to Council is to:

- Endorse the short-term development plans and long-term Vision plans for Zone 1 and for Zone 3, which all received positive support from the community.
- Endorse the short-term development plan for Zone 2, which includes exploring the "...feasibility of options to upgrade and extend the life of the athletics track."
- Remove the following actions from the Zone 2 long-term Vision plans:
 - Realign the whole space on one level with improved drainage, irrigation and natural grass.
 - Develop new multi-use sporting fields, training and supporting amenities for Athletics, Cricket and Australian Rules, and review the management model for this space to maximise community use.
 - Develop a perimeter synthetic running trail/pathway that connects with the existing Sports Hub trail network.

For clarity, the long-term vision plans that would remain in Zone 2 are:

- Enhance the creek corridor and vegetation buffer.
- Remove the basketball stadium, once new fit-for-purpose stadium is fully operational.
- Realign and increase the provision of car parking, incorporating additional trees and landscaping.
- Replace, relocate and expand the play space.



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