

6.3 NOM NO.7-2023 - CHANGE OFF-LEASH STATUS OF JACK EDWARDS RESERVE TURF PITCH TO 'NO DOGS'

(JG)

Submitting Councillor: Cr Klisaris

MOTION*That Council resolves to:*

1. *Signal its in principle support for a change to the off-leash classification at Jack Edwards Reserve to:
(a) no dogs on the turf pitch
(b) dogs on-lead in the spectator areas surrounding the turf and synthetic pitches.*
2. *Note the areas behind the pitches and as depicted in green in Attachment 1 are proposed to remain available for dog off-leash activity.*
3. *Seek community feedback on the proposed change and report the findings of this process to a future Council Meeting.*

This NOM proposes that Council considers changing the classification of Jack Edwards Reserve from a dog off-leash reserve to:

- a) no dogs on the turf pitch*
- b) dogs on-lead in the spectator areas surrounding the turf and synthetic pitches.*

BACKGROUND

At the 29 November 2022 meeting Council resolved to:

1. *Note the community feedback and key findings of the off-leash area review and draft off-leash policy consultation.*
2. *Note the comprehensive community feedback received in regard to off-leash area hot-spots and endorses the amended off-leash area recommendations for Gardiners Reserve, Damper Creek Conservation Reserve, Mayfield Park and FE Hunt Reserve as depicted in Attachment 1 – OLA Hot Spots & Recommendations.*
3. *Note that, with exception of the off-leash area hot-spots, generally all remaining proposed changes to existing and new off-leash areas are supported.*
4. *Agree to increase the number of off-leash areas in Monash from 31 to 45 sites as detailed and mapped in Attachment 1 – OLA Hot Spots & Recommendations and:*

- a) *notes that the provision of new OLA sites generally meets the recommended 800m minimum provision standard; and*
 - b) *approves a future capital allocation of up to \$700k to fabricate and install dog-related infrastructure (incl. safety fencing) at recommended and new off-leash sites.*
5. *Note that the need for the proactive enforcement of the dog controls in places such as on-lead and off-leash areas was highlighted throughout the consultation and:*
- a) *notes that the Community Laws team do not have capacity to uplift the existing level of patrols; and*
 - b) *refers an additional 3.0 EFT Community Laws Officers for consideration as part of Council's 2022/23 budget process.*
6. *Endorse the Off-Leash Policy as presented in Attachment 2 –Off-Leash Policy, noting that no changes have been made to the draft Policy.*
7. *Authorise offices to bring Council's decision regarding any approved changes to off-leash areas by adopting an Order made under Section 26 of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 and publish this order in the Government Gazette and in a newspaper circulating in the Monash municipal district (effective from 1 July 2023)*
8. *Not to reduce the existing off-leash area at Jack Edwards Reserve, with the status quo to remain, given the limited alternatives for off-leash areas in this part of the municipality.*

DISCUSSION

Council resolved not to reduce the existing off-leash area at Jack Edwards Reserve on the basis of there being limited alternatives for off-leash areas in this part of the municipality. This resolution has been formalised through Council's adoption of its Dog Control Order at its meeting of 28 March 2023.

Council's Dog Off-Leash Policy 2022 recommends that in general, Premier A grade turf sportsgrounds, and playing surfaces and Specialised Sports Surfaces should be dog-free, due in part to the additional operational resources associated with maintaining these surfaces for high standard, premier-level sport.

This venue hosts the National Premier League (NPL) competition and accommodates professional and semi-professional athletes. Matches are live-streamed on the NPL-TV platform available across Australia. The home NPL team (Oakleigh Cannons) also hosted and competed in the 2022 Australia Cup Semi Final (versus A-League team, Macarthur FC) which was lived streamed on national TV (Channel 10).

Council has also recently committed \$8.2m to the redevelopment of the main pavilion and grandstand at Jack Edwards Reserve, further supporting the significance of this site as a premier sporting venue and the need to protect the playing surface.

Access to the main playing surface was closed to the community and Club earlier this year to enable turf maintenance works to occur prior to the upcoming NPL season. During this closure, repairs to impacted turf areas attributed to dogs and the recently replaced goals were also undertaken. Given regular reports on the standard of the playing surface officers have documented the resources and frequency of work required to address impacts which can be attributed to dogs over recent months (see attached). The Club has regularly highlighted its concerns with officers and Councillors.

While this NOM proposes that the pitch itself will no longer be off-leash, part of this reserve would remain off-leash for dogs and dog walkers. This would reduce the likelihood of future damage occurring to the playing surface resultant from dog diggings and dog urine. This would also limit the additional operational resourcing required to undertake repairs and maintenance above the regular turf management activities on the turf playing surface.

This NOM proposes that Council considers changing the classification of the reserve from a dog off-leash reserve to:

- a) *no dogs on the turf pitch*
- b) *on-lead in the spectator areas surrounding the turf and synthetic pitches as depicted in Attachment 1.*

It is acknowledged that there was considerable community feedback during the previous consultation on the draft Dog Off-leash Policy during 2022, with support evident for both the retention of the dog off-leash status of the reserve and for the reserve to become dog free. As such, while this NOM seeks the in-principle support of Council for the reserve to become dog free based upon the documented evidence of damage to the pitch caused by dogs, it also recognises that community feedback should be sought on the proposed change and that this feedback be provided to Council at a future date.

Attachment 1 –Proposed Off-Leash area at Jack Edwards Reserve **Attachment 2** – Images of Recent Damage to Jack Edwards Reserve Turf Pitch - 19 January 2022

Attachment 3 – Dog Damage – Jack Edwards Reserve

Attachment 1 – Proposed Off-Leash area at Jack Edwards Reserve



Attachment 2 – Images of Recent Damage to Jack Edwards Reserve Turf Pitch - 19 January 2022



Dog Damage – Jack Edwards Reserve

Background

Council resolved to adopt the new Dog Control Order on 28 March 2023 excluding Jack Edwards Reserve NPL turf pitch from list of recommended new dog free areas to take effect from 1 July 2023.

Evidence of Damage

Councillors at the time, cited a lack of definitive proof that dogs were causing damage to the turf playing surface of Jack Edwards Reserve, Council's premier football venue.

Commencing in the week beginning 25 February (following the reopening of the pitch to the public after maintenance works), officers from Council's Horticultural Services Department captured the extent of repair work undertaken at the reserve due to damage caused by dogs. A summary of the first nine weeks is captured below including:

- a) The number of turf sods replaced due to dogs digging – 53 in total; and,
- b) The number of patches / turf sods replaced due to urine or faeces burn – 225 in total.

A total of 278 repairs were carried out on the natural turf pitch between 25 February and 28 April. This equates to almost 31 per week. During the period of 30 January to 17 February whilst the pitch was closed to public access to allow turf maintenance works to occur, no new damage to the playing surface that could be attributed to dogs was observed.

Turf sod replacements are either sourced from the perimeter of the pitch or purchased at a cost of \$20 per sod. It is not feasible to continue to source replacement sod from the perimeter of the pitch, in which case, the cost to purchase replacement turf would equate to approximately \$600 per week excluding installation once the suitable turf sourced from the perimeter of the pitch is exhausted. If the current damage trends continue the perimeter supply will likely be exhausted in late May/early June.

On average, officers spent almost 4 hours per week at the site undertaking repairs to the pitch from dog damage. This roughly equates to \$10 per sod replacement or approximately \$200-300 per week including other overheads including administration, plant, ordering, accounts payable, rostering etc

Discussion

Jack Edwards Reserve is Council's premier football ground and the only venue that hosts National Premier League - 1 matches. The ground regularly hosts Football Australia Cup matches and is regarded as having one of the best NPL surfaces in Victoria.

Results from the 9-week study show that Council is currently spending in excess of \$200-300 per week which will escalate to approximately \$800-900 per week from late May/early June to repair the natural turf pitch on top of its normal maintenance regime due to the damage being done to the pitch by dogs.

As damage occurs throughout the week, it is difficult to ensure that the pitch is always free of damage. As a result, the playing surface is constantly compromised, affecting both the playability of the surface and increasing the risk of injury.

Jack Edwards premier turf pitch is the only A grade / premium surface in Monash that permits dogs off leash.

Dogs were removed from Council's other NPL venue, Gardiners Reserve for the same reason, however are allowed on-leash at Central Reserve, Council's premier Australian Rules and Cricket venue.



Photo 1 & 2 – Incidences of dog damage being repaired with new turf sods.



Photo 3 & 4 - Demonstrating burn damage and the area being impacted by swapped-out turf

NOM NO. 7-2023: CHANGE OFF-LEASH STATUS OF JACK EDWARDS RESERVE TURF PITCH TO 'NO DOGS'- OFFICER'S RESPONSE

(JG)

Submitting Councillor: Cr Klisaris

Responsible Director: Russell Hopkins, Director Community Services

MOTION*That Council resolves to:*

1. *Signal its in-principle support for a change to the off-leash classification at Jack Edwards Reserve to:
(a) no dogs on the turf pitch
(b) dogs on-lead in the spectator areas surrounding the turf and synthetic pitches.*
2. *Note the areas behind the pitches and as depicted in green in Attachment 1 are proposed to remain available for dog off-leash activity.*
3. *Seek community feedback on the proposed change and report the findings of this process to a future Council Meeting.*

At its meeting of 29 November 2022 Council considered the findings of consultation related to the draft Dog Off-Leash Policy 2022 and resolved to retain the existing off-leash area at Jack Edwards Reserve given the limited alternatives for off-leash areas in this part of the municipality.

Council's Dog Off-Leash Policy 2022 recommends that in general, A-grade playing surfaces should be dog-free, due in part to the difficulties associated with maintaining these surfaces for the high standard of premier-level sport. Jack Edwards Reserve is the only A-grade playing field with a dog off-leash status.

Council has also committed to the development of a \$14.7 million grandstand and pavilion at Jack Edwards Reserve to ensure its status and suitability as a National Premier League (NPL) venue and home to the Oakleigh Cannons which is seen as one of the largest and most successful football clubs in Victoria.

While the main pitch at Jack Edwards Reserve meets the needs of many residents including dog owners, as a well utilised area of local open space, the standard of maintenance required relates specifically to its role as an NPL pitch. There is evidence that the pitch receives damage due to its current use as an off-leash dog area. There have been times when the turf pitch at Jack Edwards Reserve has been deemed unsuitable for hosting NPL matches, due in part to the impact of dog off-leash activity. At the request

of Councillors, data has been collected over recent months in relation to the nature and level of repairs at the Reserve that can be attributed to dog usage.

There are other parts of the reserve that can accommodate dogs off-leash, noting that these are limited in size compared to the areas currently available.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Funding for the implementation of Council's Dog Off-Leash Policy has been submitted for consideration as part of the development of the 2023/24 budget. No additional resources beyond that submission are required. It is likely that adoption of this Motion would result in reduced maintenance costs at Jack Edwards Reserve main pitch.

IMPACT ON INTERNAL RESOURCES

No additional resources beyond those outlined above are required to implement this Motion if endorsed.

COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

This Motion is consistent with the Council Plan's strategic objective of Enhanced Places and is informed by Council's Dog Off-Leash Policy 2022.

RELEVANCE TO WORK ALREADY UNDERTAKEN BY OFFICERS OR COMMITTEES

As outlined within this Motion, significant analysis and consultation has been undertaken to inform the adoption of Council's Dog Off-Leash Policy 2022.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

N/A