Recreation Strategy 2012 - 2017

SUMMARY
Recreation Strategy background

The City of Whittlesea has a strong commitment to enhancing the quality of life for all residents and recognises the valuable contribution that sport and recreation make to community health and wellbeing.

A municipal Recreation Strategy has been developed to provide Council, in partnership with the community, a clear direction as to how to create and fulfil a vision for leisure.

The project methodology and resultant directions reflect a changing philosophical approach to the way Council will engage and partner with the community. Council has set a firm foundation for supporting communities to identify and build on its strengths and past successes.

The Strategy has a strong focus on partnering with the community and identifies a number of critical planning gaps that will require resolution in close consultation with relevant community organisations and stakeholders. The consultation highlighted gaps in existing planning knowledge in areas such as sports facilities, open space, play spaces, indoor stadia, aquatic facilities and community meeting spaces.

The City of Whittlesea is growing at a rapid rate. By June 2016 the City’s population is forecast to reach approximately 202,462 people. The Strategy identifies that leisure facility developments, resource allocation and operational decisions need to be made from a strong knowledge base to meet the leisure requirements of our growing community.

This summary document, together with the complete Recreation Strategy 2012-2017, identifies a number of recommendations to meet the community’s leisure needs.
In terms of the City’s planning framework, the Recreation Strategy is an important strategic reference document that will guide internal roles, responsibilities, priorities and officer work plans. The Recreation Strategy will support Council strategies and statutory planning documents, such as precinct structure plans, the Corporate Plan and the Community Plan.

The Recreation Strategy will also support and influence other Council policies, plans and documents, such as, the Family Plan, Play Space Strategy, Open Space Strategy and individual Reserve Master Plans.

Indicative planning relationships are illustrated in the diagram below.

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In preparing the Recreation Strategy 2012 - 2017, Council consulted broadly with a cross-section of the community.

The considerable geographic distances and vast differences in community character and urban development experienced across the City added a challenging dimension to engagement and response.

The scope of the study allowed for high level strategic assessment of the current practices and future direction of leisure service delivery.
The community’s strengths

Council requested an innovative approach to the development of the Recreation Strategy, utilising an asset based community development (ABCD) model (also known as ‘strength based community development’).

Strength based community development is about helping communities identify their own assets and focus on these rather than their deficits.

The approach works on the basis that community members have the skills, knowledge and energy to generate new ideas for creating a dynamic community and thriving economy.

The strength based community development approach provides a positive alternative to problem solving theory and is a simple and effective way of engaging people in what is working in their community. The engagement process focuses on asking questions about the best of their past and current experiences to help generate ideas and involvement for the future.

Thirty in-depth consultations with a diverse range of recreation groups and sporting clubs were held to engage with and understand what is working now. In addition, an evening consultation was held specifically for sporting clubs and was attended by 24 different sporting clubs.

In excess of 300 people were directly involved in these face-to-face consultations and workshops.

Diversity of age, club experience, geography and especially culture was achieved by way of involving Council Officers from a range of departments in introducing the project to community groups with whom they are already engaged. This enabled Council to learn from what is already working in the community and to further build existing relationships between Council and community/leisure groups.

To further ensure diversity of culture, translators and gender specific consultants were provided where required.
Demand assessment

To further inform the Recreation Strategy 2012 - 2017, a demand assessment was conducted and includes the consideration of resident population changes, recreation facility provision and industry standards, and an analysis of gaps in the provision of recreation facilities.

The demand assessment, combined with the consultation and survey results, informed the identification of key issues and recommendations.

Influencing trends

Industry trends reflect growing levels of participation in recreation activities, particularly in non-organised (informal) activities, including walking, aerobics/fitness, swimming and cycling. These trends are likely to increase demand for appropriate infrastructure to support these and other informal activities.

Factors regarded as catalysts for change in recreation participation include the change in size and structure of communities, increased recognition of health benefits of regular participation in physical activities and demand for greater diversity in recreation participation opportunities.

The importance of recreation

The range of recreation and leisure opportunities available in the municipality contributes to its liveability and enhances the region’s economic sustainability through tourism, events and population growth.

Recreation plays an important role in promoting a sense of community, social inclusion and community wellbeing.

Recreation facilities are recognised as important physical assets that contribute to providing a social focus and influencing people’s perception of their community.

Quality venues facilitate broad community connection and contribute to the overall health and economic sustainability of the communities in which they exist.
The community’s voice

A snapshot of key findings from the community consultation workshops include:

- Acknowledgement that ‘recreation’ is far more than just formal sports participation.
- The community (with varying levels of support from Council) creates and facilitates a diverse range of leisure and recreational activities, including club-based and informal activities.
- Greater Council recognition and support is sought to assist local community groups, clubs, venues and activities to develop and contribute to community wellbeing.
- Many community groups and clubs are keen to work in closer partnership with Council to help facilitate a range of recreation and leisure participation opportunities, including leveraging off existing activities and services.
- The recreation community should be involved in shaping the nature and understanding of how Council and clubs can work together to establish a shared vision for sport and recreation and a shared responsibility for delivering the desired outcomes.
- It is important that community members who have ideas and a commitment to enhance current recreation services or activities be met with responsive Council processes that support their willingness to be responsible for delivering outcomes.
- There is a current perception that local government process (red tape and risk aversion) can get in the way of maintaining local club involvement throughout the process of developing existing facilities.
- Clubs/groups require differing levels of Council support depending on the relative level of organisational maturity, history and skills of those individuals involved. Council services need to be flexible enough to respond to individualised needs.
In addition to the comprehensive program of community workshops, a written survey was distributed to all sports clubs and groups listed on the City of Whittlesea database.

An analysis of the sports club survey findings highlights the following potential implications:

- Participation in a range of sports activities (e.g. cricket, football, soccer, self-defence and martial arts) is increasing across the City. The majority of respondent clubs expect membership to continue to grow, which is likely to drive demand for access to additional facilities and venues.

- A lack of netball and basketball facilities may be restricting participation growth.

- The ageing population and ageing infrastructure in established areas, particularly Thomastown and Lalor, may be negatively influencing participation. Refurbished and/or new facilities may be needed in these areas to encourage participation in a range of activities.

- Priorities for Council assistance should continue to focus on asset developments; in particular improving and maintaining existing facilities, provision of new/additional facilities, sports lighting and sustainable access to water.

- Other priorities for Council assistance relate to club promotion, marketing, volunteer management, club training and player recruitment/retention.

- Approximately 75% of respondent clubs are satisfied (‘most of the time’) with the current level of support or assistance provided by Council, therefore suggesting a continuation of current practices is likely to satisfy the majority of clubs, however key areas for development include:
  - Seeking club/user input into future planning and priorities
  - Providing individualised club support/assistance
  - Sports field/court maintenance
  - Developing new facilities and/or enhancing existing reserves.
The Recreation Strategy 2012 - 2017 identifies 30 main recommendations presented under the key themes of:

- Policy
- Planning
- Built facilities
- Programs and services.

For each theme, recommendations are identified for the City as a whole, and where appropriate, further defined for rural areas, established/existing areas and new/emerging areas of the municipality.

The 30 recommendations seek to address the issues highlighted as part of the community consultation and supporting research process.

The recommendations, together with a comprehensive evaluation of key issues can be found in the complete Recreation Strategy 2011 - 2016 document.

To obtain a copy of the complete Recreation Strategy 2012 - 2017 please visit Council’s website (www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au) or contact Council’s Leisure & Community Inclusion department on 9404 8833.

Further to the recommendations, Council has developed a set of actions to address the key issues, as identified in the Recreation Strategy 2012 - 2017. These actions (adjacent) are staged over four years and provide for a balanced and realistic approach to improving recreation in our municipality.
## Action Plan

### YEAR ONE 2012/13

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<td>1</td>
<td>Ensure likely users of facilities are actively involved in the planning and delivery of facilities. This will help contribute to the sense of community belonging and pride.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Work with local communities to continually monitor future demand for formal sports facilities.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Present learnings from involvement in the application of strength based community development, including how to facilitate the involvement of the community in Council planning and how to sustain the approach.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Investigate the feasibility and level of demand for additional aquatic facilities within the new/emerging residential areas. Include the feasibility of facility improvements at Whittlesea Swim Centre and the outcomes of the Mill Park Leisure and Services Centre Master Plan.</td>
</tr>
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| 5  | Develop an integrated Sports Facilities Strategy that reviews and consolidates sports specific findings from existing strategic documents (e.g. Cricket and Football Strategy) and assesses the needs of key sports targeting those with existing high levels of participation and/or potential relevance to the character of the City. The Strategy should be undertaken in two distinct stages, specifically:  
1. Develop a municipal sports vision and planning framework (so that there is a consistent set of criteria and methodology for all new sports planning to follow).  
2. Develop and review individual sports strategies using the framework developed in stage 1, including:  
   • Minor sports such as rugby union and league, and hockey  
   • Tennis. |
| 6  | Review and update the Open Space Strategy in order to ensure adequate provision of a range of active and passive open space reserves across the municipality. Within that, review existing recreation reserves in order to identify possible opportunities to encourage increased informal community use (e.g. picnic areas, playgrounds, walking paths/trails, bike tracks, ½ court basketball court). |
| 7  | Develop a Playspace Strategy.                                                                                                         |
### Action Plan

#### YEAR TWO 2013/14

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<td>8</td>
<td>Provide the recreation community with access to a ‘Recreation Facilitator’ from the Leisure and Community Inclusion department who will encourage and support community driven projects. The recreation community is supported to share their stories of what makes their clubs work. An emphasis needs to be placed on learning from clubs in relation to innovative use of facilities, resource sharing and planning ideas.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Develop a Council policy that provides the rationale, principles and guidelines for commercial and private use of public recreation facilities.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Develop a pilot project that explores opportunities for transitioning responsibility for the utilisation of a selection of recreation facilities to local community groups and/or clubs.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Build on Council’s existing Sports Pavilion Strategy to facilitate a club and facility vision program that brings together clubs using current facilities to develop a plan for the shared use and future development ideas for facilities (and services). The process should also be used to open up opportunities for creative ways to share facilities and responsibility for improvements. (i.e. Council should not be seen as solely responsible for sport facility provision, rather opportunities to work in partnership with clubs, users and stakeholders should be explored to share responsibility and opportunities for development).</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Review existing Council recreation grants and funding programs to improve alignment to a strength based approach whereby Council and local club or facility managers work in partnership to search for resources to achieve a shared vision for facilities.</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Regularly provide the recreation community with open and up to date information about existing Council processes and resource allocation for recreation services (including sharing successes and positive stories).</td>
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| 14 | Develop individual sports facility strategies for:  
  - Basketball, netball, badminton (indoor stadia)  
  - Cycling (including mountain bike, road cycling, shared paths and trails)  
  - Minor sports such as bocce, table tennis, martial arts, athletics, moto-cross  
  - Soccer. |
| 15 | Develop a Community Meeting Spaces Strategy (including Community Activity Centres, Community Halls and Senior Citizens’ Centres). |
### YEAR THREE 2014/15

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<td>16</td>
<td>Provide recreation information in a variety of languages and information sources, consistent with the demographic profile of specific geographic areas.</td>
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| 17 | Develop individual sports facility strategies for:  
• Baseball and softball  
• Cricket and football  
• Skate and BMX  
• Netball (outdoor). |
| 18 | Plan within a place-based framework which allows for tailored responses that reflect the needs of different communities and stages of maturity/development. |
| 19 | Plan for the needs of equestrian, pony clubs and other activities (e.g. motor sports, shooting) that require significant open space buffers within the municipality and determine an appropriate long-term plan to address the needs of these activities. Assess the feasibility of regional (cross-municipal) facility provision. |
| 20 | Develop a guide to strength based community development to provide clubs with information about how the City of Whittlesea supports the development of clubs. This could include information about facilities, fundraising and membership support roles. It could also include information about other clubs offering mentoring support to young or emerging clubs. |
| 21 | Invite existing clubs to establish a club mentoring program that provides new and growing clubs with access to advice in relation to the many areas of expertise held by clubs. Council becomes a facilitator rather than deliverer of peer based club-to-club mentoring by recognising the skills, resources and interests that rest within both the organisation and the recreation community. Develop a club development framework as part of this process. |
| 22 | Develop and maintain a web-based storybook of community and recreation participation by diverse members of the community so stories can be displayed and community achievements celebrated. This will service the purpose of promoting existing opportunities for participation and marketing new opportunities for how local people can become involved not just in positive participation, but also in the development of recreation and leisure opportunities in the City of Whittlesea. |

### YEAR FOUR 2015/16

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<td>23</td>
<td>Provide the recreation community with access to a second “Recreation Facilitator” who will encourage and support community driven projects. The recreation community is supported to share their stories of what makes their clubs work. An emphasis needs to be placed on learning from clubs in relation to innovative use of facilities, resource sharing and planning ideas.</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Establish a City of Whittlesea Recreation Building Initiative (RBI), informed by the lessons of the Whittlesea Community Building Initiative (CBI). This would commence in rural communities and potentially have the capacity to expand to all parts of the municipality if supported by place based Recreation Facilitators.</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Review the efficacy of the “Recreation Facilitator” positions in delivering outcomes that create vibrant, self-sustaining communities.</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Review the Recreation Strategy</td>
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