

IN THE MATTER OF
THE NORTH EAST LINK PROJECT

SUBMISSIONS ON BULLEEN PARK
ON BEHALF OF MANNINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

1. Manningham City Council's ('Manningham') primary position remains that the design of the Project at Bulleen Road needs to be reconsidered with an objective of avoiding impacts on Bulleen Park and other nearby land uses. It is noted that:
 - (a) NELP has not led any evidence to support a conclusion that such an outcome is not achievable; and
 - (b) It was the evidence of Mr Weston and Dr Stubbs that the Project should be required to internalise its costs, as opposed to imposing them on other people.
2. If impacts on Bulleen Park are unavoidable, it is respectfully submitted that, unless some alternative can be agreed between the affected councils, the IAC should recommend the adoption of Option 4 as identified in Technical Report I – Social Appendices, Appendix 2: Bulleen Park Area Sports and Recreation Options Assessment.
3. Boroondara City Council's ('Boroondara') preferred option as advanced in evidence before the IAC is that the Freeway Golf Course be retained as an 18-hole golf course with a length of approximately 5,100 and with a par of no less than 69.
4. This option requires the acquisition of part of Manningham's Bulleen Park, being Lot 1 on TP176386 ('the Land'). The Land to be acquired comprises an aeromodellers field and archery range currently used by, the Doncaster Aeromodellers Club ('DAC') and the Yarra Bowmen Inc. archery club respectively.
5. Manningham does not support Boroondara's preferred option. It considers that, as proposed in Option 4, the Freeway Golf Course should be converted into a diversified golf facility, consisting of a 9-hole par 36 golf

course¹ and such short-form golf products (e.g. a driving range) as may be appropriate.

6. In saying this, Manningham emphasises that it has formed this view having regard to strategic planning and equity considerations, rather than on the basis of who does or should own the Land.

Strategic Planning

7. From a strategic planning perspective, the central issue is: what is the best use that can be made of scarce public open space? From an equity perspective, the question is: are we giving people who want to participate in their preferred activity a fair opportunity to do so?
8. Manningham is not satisfied that the short or long term interests of Manningham residents – or those of surrounding municipalities – are best served by sacrificing the Land for the exclusive use of a golf course in circumstances where, even if Option 4 is adopted, there will continue to be five publicly accessible 18-hole golf courses within a 10km radius.²
9. Maintenance of the Land in its current form and layout serves both the short- and long-term interests of Manningham and surrounding municipalities:
 - (a) In the short term, the benefits of maintaining the land in its current form are that:
 - (i) It enables the DAC and the Yarra Bowmen and their members to continue to operate in their current form and on the same terms. This is significant in a context where, despite the best efforts of NELP over a reasonable period, no suitable alternative sites have been found. In those

¹ Noting that a 9-hole, par 36 course can be played twice to qualify as a 18-hole, par 72 course, which is a competition course.

² The WellPlayed Report (at p. 21) states that there are four 18-hole public golf courses (including the Freeway Golf Course) within 10km of the Freeway Golf Course and 8 member-based golf courses, of which 6 are 18-hole golf courses. However, two of the courses apparently included in the 'member-based' category – Box Hill Golf Club and Heidelberg Golf Club – are described in the table immediately below these figures as 'Members & guests PLUS public access', which would suggest that they are publicly accessible.

circumstances, loss of the Land may mean that these clubs are forced to close or merge with other clubs some distance away, which will have consequences for their users. Manningham notes the DAC's submission that the nearest club with which it could potentially merge is 23km away. While the Kew City Bowmen archery club is only a few kilometres from Bulleen Park, the Kew facilities are of a lesser standard – the Kew facilities is both smaller and less favourably orientated for archery – and are only available on weekends, rather than everyday of the week.

- (ii) The position of the DAC and the Yarra Bowmen stands in stark contrast to the position of users of the Freeway Golf Course. As noted, leaving aside the possibility of joining a member's only club, there are at least five other publicly accessible 18-hole golf courses within 10km of the Freeway Golf Course that would continue to be available if Option 4 was adopted.
- (iii) As Dr Stubbs noted, in this context, there is no obvious reason why golfers should be privileged over other recreationists simply because those other persons are engaged in forms of recreation which are less common.³
- (iv) Further, the Land in its current form is available for informal recreation when not in use by the DAC and Yarra Bowmen, which is a benefit for the broader Manningham community including other tenants of Bulleen Park. This is particularly in the context of ever-growing demand for public open space. If the Land were converted to a golf club, it could not (safely) be used for any other purpose but golf.
- (v) Finally, the current format of the Land also provides public access to the Yarra River and safeguards the opportunity to

³ Tabled document 29c, page 23.

develop continuous walking and cycling paths adjacent to the Yarra. These opportunities would be lost, or least severely compromised, by the development of the Land for a golf course almost immediately adjacent to the Yarra. Even if sufficient space was provided for a walking path adjacent to the golf course, a substantial fence would need to be provided between the course and the path in order to avoid walkers and cyclists being injured by errant balls.

10. In the longer term, the benefit of retaining the Land in its current form is that it provides flexibility to accommodate new uses alongside existing uses as demand grows. For example, if participation rates for a particular sport were to grow, then, subject to the level of infrastructure required for that sport, the Land could potentially accommodate that use outside of the hours when it is used for the DAC and the Yarra Bowmen, while still allowing some time for informal recreation.

Mr Simon's Evidence

11. Manningham submits that little weight ought to be given to the evidence of Mr Simon in relation to the retention of the Golf Course as an 18-hole course, given that it amounts to little more than a recitation of facts and figures taken from the report by WellPlayed Golf Business Consultancy entitled *Freeway Public Golf Course: Market Insights + Future Viability* ('the WellPlayed Report').
12. Further, as Mr Simon acknowledged and despite his obligations as an expert witness to comment on relevant matters, his evidence did not involve any significant consideration of:
 - (a) The impacts of extending the Golf Course on Manningham, even though he was aware this would impact on the DAC and the Yarra Bowmen;
 - (b) Those portions of the WellPlayed Report which relate to trends within the golf industry, which stress the need to diversify the player base with new offerings; or

- (c) The 2017 DELWP discussion paper 'Planning for Golf in Victoria', which describes itself as the 'first step in developing a State-wide golf facilities plan.'
13. The WellPlayed Report itself appears to have been prepared as an advocacy document for the purposes of demonstrating the Golf Course's viability to NELP.⁴ What is certain is that the authors of that document were not called to give evidence and in preparing it were not under the same obligations as an expert witness would have been.
14. In fact, a fair reading of the WellPlayed Report is that it provides a good deal of information about trends in golfing in Australia and elsewhere and remarkably little analysis about the viability of the Freeway Golf Course. Relevantly,
- (a) First, the WellPlayed Report contains no figures regarding the usage of the Golf Course. While there are graphs which are indicative, no absolute figures are provided. In particular, the WellPlayed Report does not identify how many unique players play at the Golf Course each year. This would be relevant as the size of the player base affected by any change to the Golf Course would obviously be relevant in assessing the significance of any change to the Golf Course.
- (b) Second, even though the WellPlayed Report is intended to assist Boroondara in demonstrating the viability of the Freeway Golf course and even though it notes that 'a diversified revenue stream is increasingly important for golf facilities to remain sustainable',

⁴ The WellPlayed Report provides the following context for its preparation:

NELA has led an open space planning process for the 'Bulleen Park' which includes Freeway Golf and the Boroondara Tennis Centre. During this process [Boroondara] Council officers have presented a design that, in conjunction with the road development, provides the ability to maintain the golf course as a viable 18-hole facility and retain the tennis facility, albeit in a new location.

NELA is considering [Boroondara] Council's response but during this process has questioned the future viability of golf and the need for Freeway Golf to remain as an 18-hole golf course. NELA has referenced the 'Planning for Golf in Victoria - Discussion Paper (2017)' in developing its position.

Council has now engaged WellPlayed Golf Business Consultancy to assist.

the WellPlayed Report expressly does not undertake an analysis of the financial viability of the Golf Course. This is a significant omission. If the Club is not currently viable as an 18-hole golf course, then that is by itself a strong argument for not continuing it as an 18-hole course, particularly at the expense of other clubs.

15. Insofar as it is claimed that 55,000 rounds are played at the Golf Course, this figure appears to have come directly from Boroondara Council itself and simply been repeated by Mr Simon.⁵ There is no evidence of independent verification.
16. In any event, the figure of 55,000 appears likely that the figure involves some 'double counting' which would inflate the level of apparent usage:
 - (a) An 18-hole golf round takes 4 – 4 ½ hours. Adopting a conservative figure of 4 hours, 55,000 unique rounds would require 220,000 hours to play.
 - (b) A calendar year consists of 8,760 hours and the Golf Course itself is only open for 5,110 hours during the year.⁶
 - (c) On this basis, it would seem physically impossible to play 55,000 unique 18-hole rounds at the Golf Course in a single year – even acknowledging that more than one round may be played at once.
17. Assuming the figure of 55,000 rounds is correct, the most plausible explanation is that every person who pays to play a round is counted as playing a single round, even if they in fact play with other people – i.e. if four people play a round together, this is treated as four separate rounds, rather than one round. This inevitably has the effect of making the Golf Course seem more heavily utilised than it is and emphasises the utility of providing unique user numbers in forming an understanding of usage.

⁵ Expert Witness Statement, Richard Simon, [5.2.1-2].

⁶ Assuming it is open 14 hours a day every day of the year. The figure of 14 hours a day is consistent with the hours posted on Google (6am to 8pm). It is unclear whether the Golf Course is in fact open every day of the year (e.g. Good Friday, Christmas Day, etc.)

18. In any event, no work has been done to establish why people play at the Golf Course in preference to any other golf course. In a context where it is asserted that maintenance of the Golf Course as an 18-hole course with a competitive par is so important as to warrant the eviction of two other sporting clubs, it would be relevant to understand why the users of the Golf Course use it in preference to any other and particularly the significance, if any, that they attach to it being an 18-hole golf course with a competitive par.
19. In this regard, it is relevant to note that the WellPlayed Report indicates that the main motivators for playing golf are fun and having a social experience, whilst competition and maintaining a handicap were described as 'very low motivators' for golf participation. This suggests maintaining an 18-hole course with a competitive par may not be especially important in attracting and maintaining users.

Potential benefits of Option 4

20. Manningham considers that, in the long term, there is the potential for the adoption of Option 4 to deliver benefits to the Golf Course.
21. Section 2 of the WellPlayed Report sets out a number of trends in the golfing industry. In broader terms, those trends point to:
 - (a) A decline in overall golf participation;
 - (b) A decline in golf club memberships generally;
 - (c) An increase in people participating in 'social' golf; and
 - (d) An increase in the number of ways golf is played and experience with a move away from the traditional format and towards shorter form golf products.
22. Having regard to these trends, the WellPlayed Report identifies a number of future opportunities and challenges. The top three are as follows
 1. *Golf facilities must be **market-focused** and **adapt to stay relevant to succeed** in today's changing sport, recreation and leisure market.*

2. *Golf facilities must be **customer-focused** and need to become **friendlier to women, families, younger generations, diverse groups and social golf clubs.***
 3. *Golf facilities should **focus less on competition golf** and introduce **social, short-format** and other **golf-entertainment** participation options.*
23. On its face, Option 4 appears to be highly responsive to these future challenges and opportunities as it provides an opportunity for the Golf Course to diversify by moving away from the traditional long form game and broaden its player (and revenue base) by adding a range of new golf products that may be more attractive to non-traditional players.
24. In this context, Manningham considers that the adoption of Option 4 has the potential to not only benefit Manningham – by avoiding the conversion of the Land to a golf course – but also to benefit users of the Golf Course in the long run.
25. At the very least, given the relatively large number of golf course in the area, it cannot be said that the adoption of Option 4 would leave anyone materially worse off in terms of their opportunity to engage in their preferred form of golf.
26. For these reasons, Manningham would respectfully ask that the IAC recommend Option 4 as the preferred option if impacts on Bulleen Park cannot be avoided.

Rupert Watters

Instructed by Harwood Andrews