

Golf Course Policy



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RESPONSIBLE EXECUTIVE	General Manager of Sustainable Planning and Development
POLICY OWNER	Manager, City Strategy

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1. Responsible Executive

General Manager Sustainability, Planning & Development

2. Policy owner

Manager, City Strategy

3. Policy Statement

Council reaffirms our existing planning scheme policies to protect our sand-belt golf courses, as provided by Schedule 1 to the Special Use Zone and by Clauses 21.02 and 21.11.3 of the Kingston Planning Scheme Council recognises that, although the land is privately owned, the current use provides considerable community amenity. Golf courses provide recreation opportunities, landscape values and can provide environmental benefits.

The Council wants existing golf clubs to remain economically viable. Where clubs are genuinely unable to be economically viable and should the land owner wish to cease golf operations on the site, the Council is keen that the land is used for public or private open space purposes that allow the land to retain its green and open vistas.

4. Policy Details

4.1 Context

There are 11 golf courses within the City of Kingston. Plan Melbourne, the Metropolitan Planning Strategy, recognises the Sand Belt Golf Courses as a feature of Melbourne. Similarly, in the words of Helen Gibson, the Chief Panel Member of the New Format Planning Schemes Panel, *"The Municipal Strategic Statement recognises the special significance of the Golf Courses of Kingston and acknowledges them as a key asset. Because there are so many courses within Kingston, they could be seen as part of the contributing character and "specialness" of the municipality and as such be recognised within the Special Use zone.*

"The Panel supports the inclusion of the golf courses in a Special Use zone, however this could be further strengthened through additional recognition in the MSS." (Final Report - New Format Planning Schemes April 1999). The MSS has provided strong planning support for golf courses in Clauses 21.02 and 21.11.3, below.

Having such large tracts of private land that have been developed as golf courses provides unique opportunities for the communities which surround them and both opportunities and some potential challenge for the clubs that own and manage the golf courses. However, Schedule 1 to the Special Use zone allows a number of associated uses including function centre, indoor recreation facility, leisure and recreation, major sports and recreation facility, residential hotel and Place of Assembly, that should assist clubs to diversify in order to respond to challenges.

The City of Kingston also has:

- A diversity of natural resources including rivers and creeks, the foreshore, remnant heathlands, wetlands, and parks.
- A diversity of land uses including vibrant activity centres, residential suburbs, productive industrial areas and more.
- A diversity of communities including residents from over 150 countries of origin who speak over 120 languages.

The large number of golf courses in Kingston contributes to the feeling of green open space in the municipality. Although intensive turf management can have impacts on water quality and may require high water and energy use, overall the courses can provide environmental benefits if they provide habitat for native flora and fauna and/or accommodate precinct scale storm water treatment facilities. Golf Courses in Kingston have continued to explore innovative opportunities to capture and store water which remains critical to their operations.

The golf clubs that manage the courses provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. The clubs also deliver hospitality services and, collectively, are an important employer in Kingston. The clubs themselves provide an opportunity for people to come together and build connections with their neighbours near and far. Overall, the existence of golf courses in Kingston and the associated golf clubs, provide considerable community amenity.

4.2 Different business models

Different golf clubs have different business models. Some rely on being a club where people are keen to obtain membership, even if they don't play a lot of golf. Others rely more on providing opportunities primarily for their members to play at that course, and others, such as public golf clubs, rely on income from casual pay for play golfers. Because different clubs have different business models it is not possible to say that all clubs are facing the same challenges, or that all clubs can respond in the same way. Council has resolved to undertake further consultation with Golf Clubs to better understand any challenges they may face.

4.3 What are the challenges?

It is understood that over the past decade there has been some decline in the number of people playing golf and, for many clubs, the number of people who want to pay for an annual membership. Anecdotally some clubs suggest that the reduction in income, coupled with the escalating costs of building and grounds maintenance and repairs means that, unless they increase their income, or decrease their costs, they may become uneconomically viable in the long term.

4.4 What are the opportunities?

Further discussions with clubs will allow them to explore whether they are able to increase their income by:

- Increasing the number of paying users of the facility: getting more people through the door either to play or practice golf, or for other income generating uses like functions.

- Increasing the number of paying members: making the club something that people want to be a part of even if they do not want to play golf.
- Broadening the offering: developing opportunities that reflect the fact that people have much more limited discretionary time available.
- Other opportunities to ensure long-term viability as a golf club: in most cases individual businesses are best placed to identify opportunities and what they need.

4.5 How can golf clubs share knowledge about new opportunities?

For many business owners, the day-to-day demands of their business leave little time for networking or sharing ideas. While the City of Kingston cannot make a business viable, we can provide an opportunity for golf clubs to share ideas and hear from experts. A forum on the business of golf in the 21st century would bring together clubs and experts to discuss ideas and opportunities to explore viable business models for golf clubs. The Council would deliver this forum as a tangible demonstration of support for golf clubs in the same way we support other business sectors through business development opportunities.

The forum would explore ways to encourage participation in the sport to strengthen the ongoing viability of the clubs, however it is important to note that there is no way Council can guarantee that the clubs will take up new ideas, or put in place a business model that ensures viability.

Council is approaching the forum on the basis that given the membership nature of golf club it is not the desire of any golf club to actively pursue merging or disbanding.

4.6 Are the golf courses in Kingston adequately protected in the Planning Scheme?

In the Kingston Planning Scheme golf courses are protected through specific provisions under Schedule 1 to the Special Use Zone. This is the highest level of protection that can be provided and the purpose of the zone is explicit in stating that it seeks to provide for the use and development of land as a golf course and associated uses. Schedule 1 to the Special Use Zone has been in the Kingston Planning Scheme since the inception of the new format Kingston Planning Scheme in 1999.

The Council has responsibility under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* as the Planning Authority responsible for considering changes to the Kingston Planning Scheme. Although it is possible for an external party to request of the Council to consider a Planning Scheme Amendment to change the Kingston Planning Scheme, Council is required to act in the best interest of the community and there should be no expectation that any such requests will be supported.

The Minister for Planning is also able under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* to consider requests made by external parties for changes to the Kingston Planning Scheme, however, the Minister is also unlikely to support applications that are not in the best interests of the community and are not supported by Council.

4.7 Relevant Kingston Council Resolution and Kingston New Format Planning Schemes Panel References

- **City of Kingston Ordinary Meeting of Council - Minutes 23 March 2015**

8.1 Response to Notice of Motion 50/2014 - Golf Course Policy

Moved: Cr Staikos Seconded: Cr Brownlees

1. That considering there are 11 golf courses within the City of Kingston, Council recognises that, although the land is privately owned, the current use provides considerable community amenity. Golf courses also provide recreation opportunities and can provide environmental benefits. The Council wants existing golf clubs to remain economically viable. Where clubs are not able to be economically viable and, should the land owner wish to cease golf operations on the site, the Council is keen that the land is used for purposes that allow the land to retain its green and open vistas.
2. That officers prepare a Golf Course Policy for consideration by Council along the lines of part 1 of this motion, and the resolutions passed at the May 2014 and December 2014 meetings of Council (Item 13.6) and of the legal advice consequently received, with reference to:-
 - a) providing certainty about the future protection of golf course land in the City of Kingston,
 - b) any relevant provisions in Plan Melbourne,
 - c) reaffirming protections in the Kingston Planning Scheme including schedule 1 to the Special Use Zone.
3. That this draft policy be provided to Councillors in the May 2015 meeting cycle
4. That once Council adopts a policy;
 - a) Council write to the Minister for Sport and the Minister for Planning:
 - i. seeking to understand whether the State Government has an established policy position on Private Golf Courses (viability of clubs and strategic land use issue), and
 - ii. expressing an interest in further discussing opportunities for State Government investment in golf infrastructure in Kingston.
 - b) Council develop and deliver a forum about "the business of golf in the 21st century" which brings together clubs and experts to discuss ideas and opportunities to create viable business models for golf clubs.

CARRIED

- **Kingston Planning Scheme references to golf courses in Kingston:**

Helen Gibson, the Chief Panel Member of the New Format Planning Schemes Panel, concluded in her

Final Report - New Format Planning Schemes April 1999:-

"The MSS recognises the special significance of the Golf Courses of Kingston and acknowledges them as a key asset. Because there are so many courses within Kingston, they could be seen as part of the contributing character and "specialness" of the municipality and as such be recognised within the Special Use zone. The Panel supports the inclusion of the golf courses in a Special Use zone, however this could be further strengthened through additional recognition in the MSS."

In the current Kingston Planning Scheme, the MSS at clause 21.02 states:-

"Kingston enjoys a significant reputation for its world class golf courses, with continuing community demand likely to consolidate golf as a prominent recreational activity within Kingston."

Clause 21.11 specifically requires the application of the Special Use zone to golf courses. Objective 2 of clause 21.11.3 is:-

"To promote a diverse range of social and recreational opportunities which provide for the changing leisure needs of the municipality's current and future populations."

Strategies to achieve this objective include:-

"Support the significant regional tourism/recreational role of golf courses in Kingston."

This strategy will be implemented by:-

"Applying the Special Use Zone (schedule 1) to all golf courses to facilitate their appropriate use and development where either:-

- *An appropriate combination of the other available zones, overlays and local policies could not give effect to the desired objectives or requirements; or*
- *The site adjoins more than one zone and the strategic intent of the site, if it was to be redeveloped, is not known and it is therefore not possible to determine which zone is appropriate."*

5. Transition/Translation arrangements

Commencement Date – 25 May 2015