

No more Synthetic Turf in Bayside

A motion asking for a report on the installation of all-weather fields at Jellicoe Park (Pagewood), L'Estrange Park (Mascot) and Kingsgrove Avenue Reserve (Bexley) was presented at Bayside Council's July meeting. The motion asked for the detailed report to be presented by November.

With less than two months till the council elections - scheduled for 14 September - an examination of options by November leaves very limited time for community consultation.

We have therefore conducted a quick pulse survey of residents in surrounding streets and they have raised the following concerns:

Environmental Impacts

The motion states there are significant advances in developing environmentally-friendly all-weather playing surfaces but residents have requested more information about environmental impacts.

Residents remain concerned about diverse impacts on the health, diversity or productivity of the environment. Even with advances in synthetic material, these do not meet environmental standards and experts agree that there are significant **knowledge gaps**, particularly when it comes to exactly what goes into commonly used rubber infill, and chemical composition of synthetic turf.

The 2022 NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer Independent Review into the design, use and impacts of synthetic turf study in public open space' states: 'Research has suggested that biological pathogens, toxic chemicals, and micro-plastic ingestion are all risks to human health that are associated with synthetic materials.' Synthetic surfaces are incredibly resource depleting during manufacture, extremely expensive to install, easily damaged, simple to vandalise and are rendered unusable for some days following heavy rain.

The 2022 NSW Govt report also noted that between **10 to 100kg of infill per year per field** alone is transported away from artificial turf fields in Australia.

[Other areas of public concern also examined in this report included injury data, heat impacts, flora, fauna, exposure to chemicals, substances released to the environment and more].

Microplastics

All-weather fields are also a proven and preventable source of the spread of microplastics in the environment. The European Union has banned the type of rubber infill used in synthetic fields due to concerns about microplastics ending up in waterways, giving the industry eight years to switch to alternatives such as cork and wood products. The 2022 Chief Scientist's report recommended more research into synthetic turf impacts and that measures be taken to mitigate environmental risks. The Total Environment Centre and its Australian Microplastic Assessment Project recently called for a five-year moratorium on new planning and approvals for synthetic grass fields, and to subject existing fields to "pollution mitigation measures as soon as possible."

Another often overlooked issue relates to the **increase in urban heat** due to the replacement of grass with synthetic turf. What is even more alarming is that surface temperatures on synthetic turf in Sydney can also reach near boiling point. A temperature of around 60° C *can cause third degree burns in a matter of seconds*. The heating of turf endangers athletes' health.

In a Western Australian Local Government report, [Natural Grass vs Synthetic Turf Study](#) states:

"...synthetic turf surfaces absorb rather than reflect sunlight, causing the emission of heat. These high temperatures not only impact the surrounding environment, but they can also affect the health and safety of athletes and children who use the synthetic turf grounds. They can become an uncomfortable playing surface very quickly, especially for summer sport..."

Natural grass plays an important role in controlling climate. Natural grass is one of the best exterior solar radiation control ground covers, because it absorbs radiation and converts it to food for growth through photosynthesis. Natural grass surfaces reduce temperature extremes by absorbing the sun's heat during the day and releasing it slowly in the evening.

The replacement of natural grass with synthetic turf has the opposite effect and can contribute to rising temperatures in urban settings, known as the urban heat island effect. Urban heat islands are created when natural grass and trees are replaced by impervious surfaces which absorb heat.

Urban heat islands increase demand for energy (particularly air conditioning), intensify air pollution, and increase heat-related health problems.

It is extremely concerning that Bayside Council is ignoring these warnings and is adding more sports fields to its already alarmingly high portfolio of synthetic turf fields:

- Gardiner Park
- Ador Reserve
- James McCarthy Park
- Ilinden Sports Centre
- Brighton Memorial
- Bicentennial Park East
- Hensley Oval
- Arncliffe Park

The synthetic field at Gardiner Park, and the others installed throughout the LGA, have created newly formed heat island effects on the properties of residents nearby and the greater LGA. Adding more synthetic fields will increase urban heat and thus increase the risk/s to the health of the community within Bayside LGA.

Concerns about future use of these parks

Residents have expressed concern that these proposals will now favour only one sport, soccer, and alienate all other activities. The fields are currently used for a number of sports and activities and are an important area for relaxation for residents. It is important that these important community assets are available to all residents, not just football clubs. This is tantamount to a commercialisation/privatisation of these fields.

Residents have also raised concerns about increased parking and noise from football club events if this is going to become the dominant use of the fields. Traffic, illegal parking and blocked streets are already a problem around Jellicoe Park.

Increased risk of injury

Sports injuries on artificial turf surfaces come about because of increased rotational traction. Athletes describe the moment of injury as a feeling of "getting stuck". This can and does result in serious damage to the ligaments of the knee. Anterior cruciate ligament and meniscus tears are common rotational injuries caused by playing on plastic grass surfaces. Kids using these artificial surfaces, who are not involved in sport, are also highly susceptible to these knee injuries.

Maintenance and Repair

Synthetic fields are costly to maintain and eventually need to be replaced. synthetic fields can cost over **\$200,000** per annum to maintain.

A recent expert report also noted that it is not clear whether expectations about the longevity and carrying capacity of synthetic fields can be met under Australian climatic conditions, potentially influencing decisions about installation and cost-benefit considerations

The descriptor "**all-weather surface**" also needs further examination. Just like natural grass, the synthetic fields are often closed following a heavy downpour. Well-draining grounds with natural grass can often be played on the following day. Because they don't absorb moisture they also contribute to stormwater runoff.

Conclusion

Peaceful Bayside is extremely concerned that Bayside Council is not heeding experts' warnings and is considering the addition of more sports fields to its already alarmingly high portfolio of synthetic turf fields, which include Gardiner Park, Ador Reserve, James McCarthy Park, Ilinden Sports Centre, Brighton Memorial, Bicentennial Park East, Hensley Oval and Arncliffe Park.

Say NO to more synthetic fields in Bayside:

I object to the natural grass on our sporting fields being replaced with synthetic turf as it will negatively impact our environment, health and community amenity. I believe that the science supports the continued use of grass and it's time to stop further roll-outs across Bayside of synthetic turf as it contributes to the increased incidence of pollution, rising heat and injuries. It also locks other users out of using our parks.

Sign our Petition