



## The Office of the Chief Executive

5 April 2023

The Secretary  
Willoughby Environmental Protection Association  
PO Box 4263  
Castlecrag NSW 2068

Dear Dr Foley

### **RE: Northbridge Baths Landscape Improvement Works**

Thank you for your recent letter dated 30 March 2023, detailing your concerns regarding Council's proposed landscape improvement works at the Northbridge Baths and in particular, the installation of 80m<sup>2</sup> of synthetic turf. I am responding on behalf of the CEO, Debra Just, advising that we have assessed the matters raised and can provide the following response.

#### **Design Intent**

The selection of a synthetic turf surface for this location was determined following a thorough site assessment by Council Officers and was in direct response to community feedback received both through formal stakeholder discussions with the Friends of Northbridge Baths, Northbridge Progress Association and Northbridge Swimming Club as well as community feedback received informally over a number of years.

The feedback provided identified a desire to have a consistent 'turf' surface that was well maintained and provided a suitable space for both pedestrian movement as well as comfort for patrons relaxing by the water for activities such as picnicking. Efforts have been made over a number of years to achieve this with natural turf however, despite best efforts of Council Officers it has proven unachievable in such a well shaded, high wear location.

The use of sand beneath the shade sail was considered inappropriate as it would alter the function of this space by creating a secondary beach area disconnected from the water's edge and would introduce a physical barrier that limits accessibility for some patrons. With this space forming a key linkage between the public amenities and the eastern areas of the baths and with the shade sail providing one of the few areas consistently shaded, it was deemed unsuitable to consider an uneven surface such as sand.

With patron comfort and ability to use the space for picnicking identified as a high priority alongside the accessibility principles through the feedback provided by the Northbridge Baths stakeholders, synthetic turf was therefore selected as the most appropriate surface with this proposal supported by all stakeholders engaged through the design process.

## **Environmental Considerations**

Council Officers are aware of the concerns regarding the potential for microplastics from synthetic turf products. To date, a majority of research has focused on microplastics emanating from synthetic turf infill products used in sporting field environments with the NSW EPA and NSW Department of Planning both noting a need for further research and investigation on the potential impacts of microplastic migration from the 'blades' of synthetic turf.

In response to the concerns you have raised regarding surface temperature and the sustainability of the product Council Officers would note the following:

- In contrast to a sports field which sees high intensity movement (i.e. sprinting, cutting, jumping) by sporting participants, the synthetic turf in this location will primarily support walking and sitting which reduces the risk of damage to the 'blades' of synthetic grass which may result in the creation of loose microplastics.
- Non-organic infill products such as black rubber play a significant role in the high surface temperatures recorded on synthetic sports fields; with a natural sand infill and significant shading throughout the majority of the day from both the natural and built environment (shade sail) it is anticipated that the surface temperature of this space will be comfortable for patrons.
- In late-2023, Australia's first synthetic turf recycling facility is due to open with this facility having the capacity of processing all synthetic turf waste and recovering upwards of 98% of raw materials used within synthetic turf. It is Council's intent that at the end of serviceable life that this synthetic turf would be processed by this or a similar facility.

Council Officers are currently awaiting further information including design guidelines from the NSW Department of Planning via the Chief Scientists Report. Upon being made available, Council Officers will review and consider all guidelines and recommendations into the future planning and management of synthetic turf surfaces across all of Willoughby's public spaces.

## **Project Delivery**

Council Officers again met with the Northbridge Baths stakeholders on 3 April 2023. As part of this meeting, the installation of this area of synthetic turf was discussed and considered noting both the design intent, that this is not a sporting oval and the environmental considerations. All stakeholders supported the continued delivery of the project as per the original design inclusive of the synthetic turf.

As a result of this feedback, Council intends to proceed with the delivery of the Northbridge Baths Landscape Improvement Works as previously scheduled with works due to commence in mid-April 2023.

Willoughby City Council would like to thank Willoughby Environmental Protection Association for their interest and feedback on this project.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'LP', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Linda Perrine  
Community, Culture & Leisure Services Director  
Willoughby City Council