

4 December 2007

YARRA PARK – MANAGEMENT OF THE PARK AND PARKING

Division Design and Urban Environment

Presenter Francis Khoo, Manager Parks Services

Purpose

1. To report to the Environment Committee on the issues associated with the management of Yarra Park as a public open space facility as well as a car park to support events at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and the Melbourne and Olympic Park venues.

Recommendation from Management

2. That the Environment Committee note:
 - 2.1. the results of the investigation into the condition of the soils in Yarra Park; and
 - 2.2. the initiatives being undertaken to improve the condition of the lawns in Yarra Park while maintaining a reasonable level of parking.

Key Issues

3. Under the provisions of the Yarra Park Parking Agreement (Agreement) between Melbourne City Council and the Minister for Planning, the Council manages Yarra Park as a public open space facility as well as a car park to support events being held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) and certain events in Melbourne and Olympic Park stadiums (MOPT). (Please note that for the purposes of the Agreement and this report, Yarra Park refers only to the park bounded by Punt Road, Wellington Parade, Jolimont Terrace and Brunton Avenue. Other open space areas sometimes referred to as Yarra Park, including Gosch's Paddock and Hammer Throw, are excluded).

Parking & Soil Condition

4. The trees and grassed areas of the park are subject to additional wear and stresses due to car parking. While pedestrian traffic can place similar pressures on turf as wheeled traffic, the intensity of the wheeled traffic during parking events as well as the additional wear and shearing effects due to turning movements results in heightened levels of damage to the turf. Successful recovery of the damaged turf depends on the time allowed for the area to be rested from the crushing effects to the grass stems and leaf blades.
5. Much of the root system of the trees lies within the surface layers of the ground around the trees. Within this area, the tree roots require access to moisture, oxygen, nutrients and permeable soils through which the roots can grow. Therefore, this area of ground needs to be protected from being overly compacted, particularly through the impact of wheeled traffic during wet weather. The ground can withstand relatively high loads when it is dry but becomes very susceptible to compaction when it is wet.

6. Investigations of the soil profile have been carried out. There is evidence of previous attempts to modify the soil profile so that they would be better able to withstand wheeled traffic while supporting trees and turf. Scoria gravel has been mixed in with the top layers of soil and drains have been installed to take water away from areas prone to being waterlogged.
7. It has been found that the condition of the soil profile at present is unfavourable for withstanding compressive forces. This may be due to a range of reasons, including the degeneration of the added scoria over the years, but the soil material is now very susceptible to compaction. There are options to improve the soil profile, ranging from wholesale replacement of the top 200 mm of soil (which would be very costly) through to the incorporation of small trenches filled with sand that would improve permeability and drainage. There is no budget allocation for works of this nature.
8. A program of mulching around the bases of the trees in Yarra Park was commenced last summer and will be completed prior to Christmas. This will provide a protected area around the tree bases where tree roots can thrive and will also provide a visual indication to car drivers to avoid parking close to the trees.
9. In the past, the Yarra Park lawns could be irrigated in order to support the health of the turf. Under the Stage 3A water restrictions, the City is only able to provide water to the trees but not the lawns. This makes it even more difficult to maintain the grass cover in the lawns. Under these circumstances, the condition of the lawns will be of a lower standard than is possible in other City parks.

Management of Parking

10. The car parking in Yarra Park is managed under a contract with S & K Parking. The Contractor provides the management and labour to supervise parking events. All parking revenue is received by the Council. The parking fee is currently \$6 per entry and the Council has recommended to the Minister for Planning an to increase in the fee to \$8 per entry.
11. There are two major parking “seasons” at Yarra Park. The first is the football season that runs from March to September each year and the second is the cricket/ tennis season that runs from December to January. However, there are many other parking events that occur to support the MCG and MOPT venues.
12. For the purposes of managing car parking, Yarra Park is divided into lawns, largely according to the pathway boundaries. Refer to Attachment 1. There are some lawns adjacent to Vale Street (lawn 6 & part of lawn 7) where parking is not carried out. Lawn 15 (adjacent to the playground in the northern section of the park) is also largely not used for parking. Due to the safety issues related to pedestrian traffic using the William Barak Bridge at the western end of the park, the adjacent lawn (lawn 16) has also not been used for parking. However, the Agreement allows the area to be used for parking of vehicles that arrive early and leave late after the events.
13. The Agreement does not specify the maximum number of car parking spaces that would be provided, however, in practice, the figure is about 5,000.
14. In the past, lawn areas have been removed from parking for various periods of time mainly due to wet weather conditions that would make the lawns more susceptible to significant damage from cars and may also increase safety risks.
15. A review is being carried out of the performance of the Yarra Park lawns during this calendar year when water was not available for irrigation. It is intended that a set of criteria will be established in consultation with the Melbourne Cricket Club, under which parking should be further restricted if the lawns become stressed due to the parking and the lack of water.

Lawn Reinstatement

16. Significant works have been carried out after the Grand Final to reinstate the lawns in Yarra Park. Warm season grasses have been planted in lawns 12, 13, 14 and 16, using line planting and sprigging techniques and some instant turf has also been placed. Watering is also being carried out through water tankers (from the Royal Park wetlands) to aid the establishment of the grass.
17. All the other lawns have been aerated, fertilised and seeded with cool season grass seed. There are significant costs associated with planting the lawns with warm season grass and providing water to aid establishment. The risk that the grass cannot become established is high unless they can have access to reasonable amounts of water and be rested from parking at least for the duration of the summer.
18. All the lawns will be rested from parking until the Boxing Day Cricket, except for lawns 1 and 2 which are used for cricket matches at the MCG as well as some MOPT events. It is hoped that the longer period of rest will enable the grass to be better established to withstand next year's parking events.
19. In addition, it has been proposed to the MCC that lawns 12, 13 and 14 not be used for parking until the football commences in March. This will provide a full summer for the warm season grass in those lawns to become fully established. If the result is successful, other lawns could be similarly treated next year providing adequate watering can be allowed for.
20. Consultants have advised that it is not possible to maintain good grass coverage over Yarra Park while it continues to be used as a car park especially when water is not available for irrigating grass. Even with a high level of intervention, there will be significant bare areas particularly at the entries to the lawns from the pathways and the access routes within the lawns. The current soil profile is not desirable for the car parking usage. A trial will be conducted early next year to treat an area of lawn with sand trenching.

Relation to Council Policy

21. Council's policy in relation to parking in Yarra Park was outlined in its resolution of August 2005 when it approved the current five year parking agreement which expires in 2010. This resolution indicates that Council will work towards ceasing car parking in Yarra Park at the expiry of the current Parking Agreement.
22. Connected and Accessible City: The initiatives are in line with the objective of improving the City's integrated and connected park system.

Consultation

23. On-going discussions take place regularly with the Melbourne Cricket Club regarding the parking and the condition of the lawns and trees in Yarra Park.

Finance

24. The initiatives described in this report are fully funded from the 2007/08 Parks Works Program.
25. This report is for noting only and no direct financial implication arise from the recommendation contained in this report.

Legal

26. This report is for noting only and no direct legal issues arise.

Sustainability

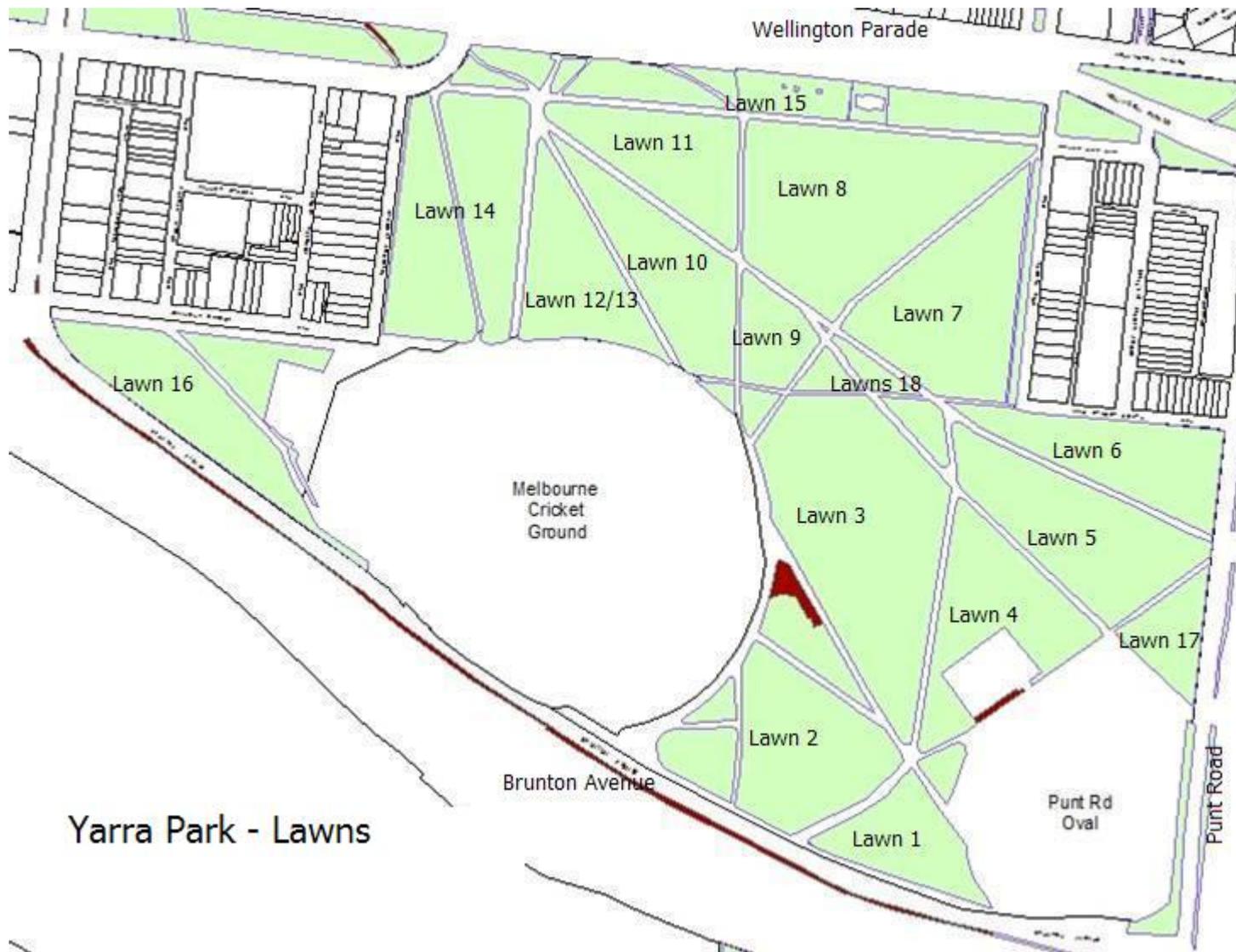
27. There are significant issues related to sustainability which have been covered as part of the various sections of this report. The overall amenity of Yarra Park has been adversely impacted upon by the current water restrictions.

Background

28. Yarra Park is subject to a Crown Grant issued to the City of Melbourne and the Minister as joint trustees. It is reserved as a public park under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978. The City has been appointed as Committee of Management for Yarra Park.
 29. The Yarra Park Parking Agreement between the State Government and City of Melbourne sets out the conditions under which parking is permitted in Yarra Park to support events at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and certain events in Melbourne and Olympic Park stadiums. The latest agreement is dated 28 October 2005 and expires on 29 September 2010.
 30. At its meeting on 5 June 2007, the Environment Committee requested a report on the restoration of Yarra Park and the management of the repair of its grassed areas.
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Attachment:

1. Yarra Park - Lawns



Yarra Park - Lawns

FINANCE ATTACHMENT

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Joe Groher
Manager Financial Services

LEGAL ATTACHMENT

YARRA PARK – MANAGEMENT OF THE PARK AND PARKING

Yarra Park is reserved as a public park under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* (“the CLRA Act”).

The Council and the Minister are the joint trustees of Yarra Park with the Council being appointed the Committee of Management of Yarra Park pursuant to the CLRA Act.

Section 3C(1) of the *Local Government Act 1989* (“the Act”) provides that the primary objective of a Council:

“is to endeavour to achieve the best outcomes for the local community having regard to the long term and cumulative effects of decisions.”

Section 3C(2) of the Act goes on to state that in seeking to achieve its primary objective, a Council must have regard to facilitating objectives, including —

“(a) to promote the social, economic and environmental viability and sustainability of the municipal district;”

The recommendations of this report are made in accordance with the Council's objectives as set out in the Act.

Kim Wood
Manager Legal Services