

## 6.1 Royal Park Master Plan - Future Outdoor Sports Field Provision in the Municipality

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### Executive Summary

1. The City of Melbourne is expecting continued population growth over the next 20 to 30 years. Planning for this growth includes considering infrastructure that will be required to support participation in community sport and recreation.
2. There are challenges to meet projected demand that will accompany the growth in population. As a capital city, constraints include competing priorities for use of land, land supply especially for larger land parcels, and cost. Alternatives to securing land to provide additional outdoor sports fields include increasing the capacity of existing facilities so that they can accommodate higher levels of use.
3. As part of its resolution to release the draft Royal Park Master Plan (Master Plan) for community consultation on 10 September 2024, the Future Melbourne Committee requested that a report be presented to the Committee in open session before the end of the community engagement period summarising the projected demand and evidence for outdoor sports fields in the municipality including Royal Park. The report at Attachment 1 provides the requested summary.
4. The community engagement period concludes on 14 February 2025.

### Recommendation from management

5. That the Future Melbourne Committee:
  - 5.1. Notes the report at Attachment 1 of the report from management as providing context for the recommendations relating to outdoor sports fields in the draft Royal Park Master Plan.
  - 5.2. Requests that management publish the report on the Draft Royal Park Master Plan Participate Melbourne webpage as a background document.

**Purpose**

6. To inform the Future Melbourne Committee (FMC) of the demand for outdoor sports fields in the City of Melbourne. This is additional context to the recommendations relating to outdoor sports fields in the draft Royal Park Master Plan.

**Background**

7. More than half of the City of Melbourne residents (58.9 per cent in 2024) do not engage in regular physical activity.
8. Sport and recreation facilities play a critical role in the health and wellbeing of communities, supporting physical and mental health, and creating opportunities for community connection.
9. Local government is the largest provider of accessible places for sport and active recreation participation. These places include outdoor sports fields, multi-purpose courts, skate facilities, parks and gardens and indoor sports and aquatics facilities.
10. A review was undertaken in 2022 to understand the provision and condition of existing sport and recreation facilities in the municipality. It considered future population demand and strategic approaches to address the identified provision gap.
11. To plan for forecast population growth, a Recreation Facilities Provision Framework was developed and endorsed by the FMC in 2024. The framework provides strategic guidance to ensure that sport and recreation infrastructure investment provides optimal community outcomes.
12. One of the key sites of outdoor sports fields in the municipality is Royal Park. A new master plan for Royal Park is a Council Plan 2021–25 action under Major Initiative 16 Increase public open space. The master plan will guide future management of Royal Park over the next 20 years.
13. The draft Master Plan was considered by the FMC on 10 September 2024. At this meeting, the FMC requested that a report be presented to the FMC in open session before the end of the community engagement period summarising the projected demand and evidence for outdoor sports fields in the municipality including Royal Park.
14. Community engagement on the draft Master Plan commenced on 25 November 2024 and will close on 14 February 2025.

**Key considerations**

15. The report at Attachment 1 presents data relating to the current supply and projected demand for outdoor sports fields in the municipality. It explores the capacity and occupancy status of outdoor sports fields across the municipality and draws specific conclusions for Royal Park which informed the draft Master Plan.
16. Existing outdoor sports fields across the municipality are at or close to maximum capacity. In 2022–23 the average weekly participants using outdoor sports fields for structured, organised sport was nearly 10,600 people in winter and 6600 people in summer.
17. Strategies to increase capacity at existing facilities include installation of sports lighting to extend the hours available for play during winter, and reconstruction of sports fields to improve turf surfaces for increased durability and drainage. These strategies will increase the number of hours available for use but will not be sufficient to cater to predicted future demand.
18. The development of the draft Master Plan presented the opportunity to examine current use of the outdoor sports fields in Royal Park and explore how capacity can be increased. The draft Master Plan vision and principles set the foundation for future management and support a measured approach to accommodate additional use.

**Legal**

19. There are no direct legal implications arising from recommendation from management.

**Finance**

20. There are no financial implications arising from the recommendation from management.

**Conflict of interest**

21. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a material or general conflict of interest in relation to the matter of the report.

**Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities**

22. The recommendation contained in this report is compatible with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006* as it does not raise any human rights issues.

**Health and Safety**

23. In developing this proposal, no Occupational Health and Safety issues or opportunities have been identified

**Consultation**

24. The report at Attachment 1 will be made available as a background document on the Participate Melbourne draft Master Plan page.

**Relevance to Council Plan and Council Policies**

25. This report supports the objectives of Major Initiative 16 – Increase public open space, Major Initiative 36 – Inclusive sports facilities for women in the Council Plan 2021–25, the Fair Access Policy 2024, the Open Space Strategy and the Recreation Facilities Provision Framework 2024. It also aligns with the aspirations of the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan which highlights the importance of actions to increase the number of residents meeting recommended physical activity guidelines.

**Social and environmental impacts**

26. Social impacts

26.1. Providing places for participation are critical to supporting the health and wellbeing of the community. In 2021, KPMG prepared a report quantifying the social value of community sport and recreation in the City of Melbourne. Community sport and recreation in the City of Melbourne equates to an annual benefit of \$129.39 million.

27. Gender Impact Assessment

27.1. A Gender Impact Assessment was undertaken to inform the draft Master Plan development program and engagement activities.

28. Environmental impacts

28.1. Environmental sustainability issues and opportunities have been considered in the development of this report. The data and analysis in this report is one input into the draft Master Plan, which is also informed by an ecology and biodiversity report and a Conservation Management Plan.

**Attachment List**

1. Supply and projected demand for outdoor sports fields [6.1.1 - 27 pages]

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# SUPPLY AND PROJECTED DEMAND FOR OUTDOOR SPORTS FIELDS IN THE CITY OF MELBOURNE

PREPARED BY CITY OF MELBOURNE, 2025



## **Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners**

The City of Melbourne respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we govern, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong Boon Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge and honour the unbroken spiritual, cultural and political connection the Wurundjeri, Bunurong, Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Wadawurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin have to this unique place for more than 2000 generations.

We are committed to our reconciliation journey, because at its heart, reconciliation is about strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, for the benefit of all Victorians.

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4 February 2025

3 [melbourne.vic.gov.au](http://melbourne.vic.gov.au)

## Executive summary

The City of Melbourne is expecting a period of unprecedented population growth over the next 20 to 30 years. Planning for this growth includes considering infrastructure that will be required to support participation in community sport and recreation. These places include aquatic centres, stadiums and clubrooms, outdoor sports fields, multi-purpose courts, skate facilities, parks and gardens.

There are challenges to meet projected demand that will accompany the growth in population. As a capital city, constraints include competing priorities for use of land, land supply especially for larger land parcels, and cost. It is critical that planning takes place now to set aside land even if facilities are not provided for another 20 years.

This report presents the supply and projected demand for outdoor sports fields in the City of Melbourne. Key points in the report include:

- The City of Melbourne has a current population of 177,000. A further 114,700 are anticipated by 2043 taking the estimated population to 292,100.
- There are currently 32 grass ovals and eight other playing fields that mostly provide full size rectangular pitches in the municipality.
- In 2022–23 the average weekly participants using outdoor sports fields for structured, organised sport was nearly 10,600 people in winter and 6600 people in summer.
- All sports are showing growth in participation particularly by women and girls.
- Current outdoor sports fields are already nearing capacity for use, particularly in the northern part of the municipality.
- Capacity can be increased at some outdoor sports fields by provision of sports lighting to extend the number of weekly hours they can be played on especially during winter.
- Other strategies to increase capacity of existing sports fields include reconstruction of sports fields to improve the surface and increase the number of weekly hours available for play.
- Even with improvements to increase capacity it is unlikely that the current provision of sports fields can meet the demands likely to arise with the population growth of a further 114,700 residents.
- Since 1986 there has been a significant reduction in the number of sports fields in the City of Melbourne, particularly in Royal Park.
- Council endorsed a Recreation Facilities Provision Framework in 2024 to assist with allocating priorities to upgrading existing and provision of new facilities.

This report includes the application of provision ratios, using benchmarks to predict the number of sports fields that may be required based on population numbers. The provision ratios show gaps in supply of sports fields in the future. While it will not be possible to maintain the current ratio of sports fields to population with projected growth, effort must be made to secure spaces for community sport for the future.

More than half of City of Melbourne residents (58.9 per cent in 2024) do not engage in regular physical activity (City of Melbourne Health and Wellbeing Insights 2024). With a growing population, all opportunities to provide places to participate in community sport and recreation must be explored to help increase the number of residents meeting recommended physical activity guidelines.

### Application of the findings of the review to the draft Royal Park Master Plan

The development of the Royal Park Master Plan has been an opportunity to examine the park landscape and the way it is used. It is recognised that there will be increasing use of the park with population growth. The master plan vision and principles set the foundation for future management. A measured approach to accommodate additional use is consistent with the draft master plan's principles.

The draft master plan has considered the need for more outdoor sports fields, in balance with all the other objectives of the park. It has acknowledged there has been significant loss of sports fields in the City of Melbourne over the past thirty years, including from Royal Park. A recommendation in the draft master plan is to upgrade outdoor sports fields on Lawn 7 south of the State Netball Hockey Centre (which are currently overflow sports areas). The proposal at Lawn 7 would include an oval and two or three rectangular fields (depending on design) plus amenities required to support participation in community sport. It also proposed for one additional tennis court at North Park Tennis Club.

The remaining objectives focus on strategies to increase the capacity of existing sports fields in the park including provision of sports lighting on most existing fields (to increase hours available for use). The draft master plan also supports progressive upgrades of the sporting pavilions and clubrooms. Sports field reconstructions are not referenced as these are prioritised through park maintenance and renewal planning.

Figure 1. Cricket in Royal Park



# 1 Introduction

As a major capital city in Australia, the City of Melbourne provides facilities for people to live, work, visit and play. The City of Melbourne is responsible for planning and delivering a range of sport and recreation infrastructure and services to support existing and future communities. This includes community sport and recreation facilities.

During its review of the draft Royal Park Master Plan on 10 September 2024, Future Melbourne Committee requested that “a report be presented to this Committee in open session before the end of the community engagement period summarising the projected demand and evidence for outdoor sports fields in the municipality including Royal Park”.

This report presents a summary of the supply and projected demand for outdoor sports fields within the City of Melbourne. It outlines the evidence for future demand for sports fields across the municipality and will inform the Royal Park Master Plan currently in development.

## 1.1 Background

Local government is the largest provider of accessible places for sport and active recreation participation. These places include facilities (such as aquatic centres, stadiums and clubrooms), outdoor sports fields, multi-purpose courts, skate facilities, parks and gardens. Well-designed, multi-purpose facilities support a diversity of activities.

A comprehensive review was undertaken in 2022 to understand the provision and condition of existing sport and recreation facilities within the municipality, including future population demand, and strategic approaches to address the gap. It was informed by several studies, population forecasts, capacity and condition of existing facilities, participation and industry trends and demographic data. One of the areas of concern highlighted was that more than half of the City of Melbourne residents (58.9 per cent in 2024) do not engage in regular physical activity.

Sport and recreation facilities play a critical role in the health and wellbeing of communities, supporting physical and mental health, and creating opportunities for community connection. The City of Melbourne continues to experience significant growth in residential population, visitors and workers. To plan for growth, a Recreation Facilities Provision Framework was developed to provide strategic guidance to ensure targeted sport and recreation infrastructure investment provides optimal community outcomes.

### 1.1.1 Recreation Facilities Provision Framework

The Recreation Facilities Provision Framework (the Framework) was endorsed by the Future Melbourne Committee on 20 August 2024.

The Framework sets out a vision, objective and guiding principles “to provide a network of adaptable recreation spaces that supports the health and wellbeing of the communities that live, work, visit and play in the City of Melbourne”. It provides guidance as to how Council will plan, design and deliver new, renewed and upgraded sport and recreation facilities until 2041.

Current recreation facilities and services will not meet future needs. A strategic approach is required to respond to:

- significant population growth being forecast for the City of Melbourne over the next 20 to 30 years,
- finite land supply in the municipality, and
- constrained resourcing.

Addressing this challenge will require partnerships across multiple sectors and levels of government. The City of Melbourne will use three approaches:

1. Increasing capacity of existing facilities
2. Upgrading existing facilities
3. Providing new facilities

## 1.2 Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to present the current supply and projected demand for outdoor sports fields in the municipality. It explores the current status across the municipality and draw specific conclusions for Royal Park to contribute to the draft Royal Park Master Plan.

Demand will be demonstrated through the following themes:

- Population growth – which is expected to grow by a further 114,700 residents in the next 20 to 30 years, and the implications for sports facility planning.
- Increasing diversity of participation – the need for sports fields to accommodate more diversity of sports participation, as described through the increasing variety of sports and ways people want to participate.
- Fair Access policy – and the action plan aiming to increase participation for women and girls in recreation and physical activity.
- Data on current provision, use and capacity of outdoor sports fields.
- Sports participation trends – demonstrating growth at a Victorian and local municipal level.
- Provision ratios – application of this planning tool commonly used to assess adequacy of the number of sporting facilities within an area or predict the number of sporting facilities which may be required in the future based on projected population growth.

Figure 2. View to the east across Princes Park



## 2 Population growth and trends in participation

### 2.1 Current municipal demographic profile

The City of Melbourne is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Victoria. In 2023 the estimated resident population was 177,396 and this is projected to grow to 292,100 by 2043.

The forecast in Table 1 notes the largest projected growth will occur in the Melbourne CBD (63 per cent), Southbank (68 per cent), Docklands (70 per cent), North Melbourne (103 per cent) – this includes Arden and Macaulay, Kensington (63 per cent) and Port Melbourne (150+ per cent) – this includes Fishermans Bend. Open space and recreation facilities including sports fields need to be planned to meet the needs of this growing population.

Table 1 City of Melbourne population forecast 2023–43 (Source: SGS Economics and Planning 2024.)

CLUE* small area	2023	2033	2043	Change 2023–2043	Growth 2023–2043
Carlton	20,000	28,000	28,300	8,300	42%
Docklands	18,200	25,500	30,900	12,700	70%
East Melbourne	5,400	7,400	7,500	2,100	38%
Kensington	12,300	16,300	20,100	7,800	63%
Melbourne (CBD)	51,800	71,500	84,400	32,600	63%
Melbourne (Remainder)	3,200	4,300	4,300	1,100	36%
North Melbourne	17,700	24,900	35,800	18,100	103%
Parkville	8,600	11,400	12,200	3,600	41%
Port Melbourne	12	160	1,900	1,888	>150%
South Yarra	4,100	5,700	5,800	1,700	40%
Southbank	26,500	38,400	44,500	18,000	68%
West Melbourne (Industrial)	-	-	-	-	0%
West Melbourne (Residential)	9,500	13,200	16,500	7,000	73%
<b>Total (City of Melbourne)</b>	<b>177,400</b>	<b>246,600</b>	<b>292,100</b>	<b>114,700</b>	<b>65%</b>

Note: table shows rounded figures

\* CLUE refers to the Census of Land Use and Employment

### 2.2 Key summary points

As the population grows, so too does the demand for places for participation in community sport and recreation. The growth in demand for outdoor sports fields and other community trends are reflected in the following points:

- Population growth will bring an increased demand for facilities.
- Diversity of population will also increase the diversity of activities sought.
- There is high growth in the number of 5- to 34-year-olds living in the City of Melbourne, which is the age cohort that has the highest participation in club-based sport. This age cohort is expected to increase to 80 per cent of total population by 2041.
- There will be an increase in the number and forms of sport available. Sports and active recreation are adapting to the different ways people want to participate. There has been an increase in participation in activities that are not club based, but more casually accessed.
- Increased understanding of the importance of physical activity and mental health, and knowledge of number of people not meeting the current recommended weekly activity levels.
- Fewer dwellings with private green space and gardens, placing additional dependence on public open space for participation.

- Participation has increased by women and girls in sport and active recreation.
- Strategic approaches to support fair access to facilities for participation by women and girls will increase the number of participants seeking places to play.
- Current use of outdoor sports fields by women and girls in the City of Melbourne is only 34.6 per cent in winter and 23.3 per cent in summer. This needs to be addressed to improve the equity of use for current facilities and supports the demand for more spaces for participation.

### 3 Current provision of outdoor sports fields in the municipality

#### 3.1 Outdoor sports fields – what are they and how are they used?

Outdoor sports fields are typically multi-use open space areas that provide opportunities for organised sport participation by people of all ages, at all skill levels. For competition, sports fields require specific infrastructure. Different sports have different requirements for size and layout. Some outdoor sports fields are more multiuse than others. Younger age groups often play modified games and can use fields more flexibly.

In general, outdoor sports fields include grass ovals, grass rectangular fields, synthetic ovals or fields, sports courts (outdoor netball, basketball or multiuse), tennis courts, bowling greens, synthetic athletics tracks, synthetic hockey fields, baseball and softball fields.

Outdoor sports fields are used throughout the year. Examples of community sports played on outdoor sports fields include AFL football, cricket, soccer, rugby (union and league), lacrosse, netball, tennis, hockey, bowls, baseball, and softball. Some competition sports play in specific seasons (e.g. winter and summer), using the same field (e.g. AFL played in winter, and cricket in summer).

Typically, grass-based sports fields have a maximum use of 25 – 30 hours per week for structured activities, depending on the sport played. This is primarily due to wear and tear experienced by playing sport on a grass surface. The time outside of regular scheduled play, the fields can be used for casual and unstructured recreation, including exercise, running, dog walking, and informal games.

Examples of emerging sports that require access to outdoor sports fields include touch football variations across a number of codes, Live Action Role Play, ultimate frisbee, bubble soccer and quidditch. With growth in casual and social sport, the types of uses and activities will continue to evolve as will the demand for space to play.

Some sports fields can be more multipurpose than others. Ovals used for cricket with synthetic wickets are more multipurpose than ovals used for cricket with turf wickets, as turf tables are cordoned off when not used for competition, restricting the other activities that can take place on the oval. Synthetic sports fields are more multipurpose and can accommodate many more hours of use than a typical grass sports field.

Sports lighting can increase the hours of use of the sports fields. This is most important during the winter months in Melbourne, when AFL, soccer and rugby are usually played.

Sports such as tennis, bowls, hockey and athletics typically operate year-round, and their facilities are less available for multipurpose use. As the intensity of use is generally high, especially for tennis and hockey, the single purpose design is appropriate. These facilities are usually fenced. Sports such as tennis now use booking systems which allow the community to access the courts outside of competition and coaching times, ensuring the facilities are used to their maximum capacity.

#### 3.2 Current provision of outdoor sports fields in the City of Melbourne

The outdoor sports fields in the City of Melbourne include 32 grass ovals and eight other playing field spaces that mostly provide full size rectangular pitches. Some of the ovals can be configured for rectangular fields in winter season. For example, Ryder Oval in Royal Park North currently caters for cricket in summer and soccer in winter. When Edmund Herring Oval is returned to Council following the Metro Tunnel project, one more grass oval will be available.

Cricket is currently played on the 32 ovals during summer, with 19 turf tables and 13 synthetic wickets provided. During winter the sports using the ovals and rectangular fields include AFL, soccer, rugby and lacrosse.

There is one synthetic sports field used for a variety of sports in JJ Holland Park. Configuration of fields can vary from season to season depending on use, demand and need but includes line markings for AFL, soccer and cricket.

Other outdoor sports fields in the City of Melbourne include eight tennis facilities, three lawn bowl facilities, two baseball diamonds, two outdoor multipurpose sports courts, four bookable outdoor sports courts and three futsal courts. A nine-hole public golf course is also provided in Royal Park.

The City of Melbourne does not have any freely accessible outdoor netball courts, which is a significant gap in provision.

Over summer there are 33 separate clubs playing sport on the outdoor sports fields. Over winter there are 37 clubs playing sport on the outdoor sports fields. A further three clubs play bowls and six clubs play tennis throughout the year.

The existing outdoor sports fields and current uses are listed in Table 2. Maps of all the outdoor sports fields are included in Appendix 1.

Table 2 Outdoor sports fields and current seasonal uses

Field name	Code played each season	
<b>Royal Park</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Summer</b>
Brens Oval	AFL	Cricket - turf
Flemington Road Oval	Soccer	Cricket - turf
McAlister oval	AFL	Cricket - turf
Poplar Oval	Soccer and Cricket	Cricket - synthetic
Ransford Oval	AFL	Cricket - turf
Ryder Oval	Soccer	Cricket - turf
Smith Oval	Rugby	Cricket - turf
Walker Oval	Rugby	Walker East cricket - turf Walker West cricket - turf
Western Oval	AFL and lacrosse	Cricket - turf
Ross Straw North	Baseball, soccer	Cricket - synthetic 5-a-side soccer
Ross Straw South	Baseball, soccer	Cricket - synthetic 5-a-side soccer
Manningham Street upper	Soccer	Soccer
South of Hockey Centre	Soccer, touch rugby	Soccer, touch rugby
Royal Park Tennis Courts	14 en-tout-cas tennis courts	14 en-tout-cas tennis courts
North Park Tennis Courts	3 synthetic grass courts	3 synthetic grass courts
Royal Park Public Golf Course	9 holes and practice green	9 holes and practice green
<b>Princes Park</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Summer</b>
Oval 1	AFL	Cricket - turf
Oval 2 (Crawford Oval)	AFL	Cricket - turf
Multipurpose playing fields	7 x rectangular pitches generally used for soccer	2 x cricket - turf 2 x cricket – synthetic 5 x touch football 1 x soccer
Princes Hill Tennis Courts	4 x synthetic tennis courts	4 x synthetic tennis courts
Princes Park Bowls Club	2 x bowling greens - turf	2 x bowling greens - turf
<b>Fawkner Park</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Summer</b>
Cordner oval	1 x AFL Or 3 x touch football	1 x cricket - turf
Southern sports fields	2 x soccer Or 3 x touch football	1 x cricket - turf 1 x cricket - synthetic Or 4 x touch football
Multipurpose spaces (throughout Fawkner Park)	1 x rugby 3 x soccer 3 x soccer (junior only) 5 x softball	3 x cricket - turf 5 x cricket - synthetic (junior only) 6 x softball 1 x touch football
Multipurpose sports court	1 x non bookable	1 x non bookable
Fawkner Park Tennis Courts	6 x synthetic tennis courts	6 x synthetic tennis courts
<b>JJ Holland Park</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Summer</b>
Oval 1	1 x AFL	1 x cricket – turf
Oval 2	1 x AFL and Soccer	1 x cricket - synthetic

Field name	Code played each season	
Synthetic sports field	Multipurpose sports field use including soccer	Multipurpose sports field use including cricket - synthetic
<b>Newmarket Reserve</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Summer</b>
Sports field	1 x Soccer	Touch sports variations
Flemington / Kensington Bowls Club	1x synthetic bowling green	1 x synthetic bowling green
<b>Ron Barassi Senior Park</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Summer</b>
Sports fields	2 x soccer	2 x rectangular fields
<b>Domain Parklands</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Summer</b>
Edmund Herring Oval	To be returned following Metro Rail Project completion	To be returned following Metro Rail Project completion
<b>Flagstaff Gardens</b>	<b>Year-round</b>	
Flagstaff Gardens Bowls Club	1 x bowling green – turf 1 x bowling green – synthetic	
Flagstaff Gardens multipurpose sports courts	2 x bookable courts (tennis, netball, bike polo or futsal)	
<b>Other outdoor multipurpose sports courts</b>	<b>Year-round</b>	
Hub@Docklands	Bookable courts (2 x basketball or netball or 1 x futsal)	
North Melbourne Recreation Reserve	1 x futsal court + 2 x basketball rings, 2 x netball ring	
Neill Stret Reserve	1 x futsal court + 1 x basketball court (multipurpose)	
Buncle Street Reserve	1 x futsal court + 2 x basketball rings, 1 x netball ring	
<b>Other tennis courts</b>	<b>Year-round</b>	
Parkville Tennis Club	3 x en-tout-cas tennis courts	
Powlett Reserve Tennis Courts	5 x synthetic tennis courts	
Kensington Banks Tennis courts	3 x synthetic tennis courts	
Carlton Gardens Tennis courts	4 x synthetic tennis courts	

### 3.2.1 Outdoor sports field use and existing club membership at Royal Park

The following information was gathered during the research into recreation use of Royal Park in 2023–2024.

Sports played at Royal Park include football, cricket, soccer, lacrosse, golf, tennis, baseball, netball and hockey for junior and adult participants. Other organised activities using the sports fields include Live Action Role Play, school sports, employee soccer-football competitions, and social sports.

Organised community sports, including competition, training, and social sport, occur on 14 core sports field areas, plus tennis courts and the golf course.

Some uses are seasonal (summer and winter) and some year-round.

Some 4500 people are members of sports clubs playing on fields and courts in Royal Park. Data on use suggests fields are being used at capacity for most of the park. (These figures do not include school sports or casual sport bookings).

Club use is estimated at 202 hours per week on outdoor playing fields in winter and 253 hours in summer. Poplar Oval has the highest weekly use in summer of any oval in the City of Melbourne, at 34 hours. In winter its use is limited to 11 hours per week as the field does not have lights. Ryder Oval also does not have sports lights, so winter use is constrained. Similarly Ross Straw field, Manningham reserve and Walker ovals also have lower winter use due to lack of lighting.

Tennis has the largest membership in the park with 1020 members across 2 clubs, followed by Australian rules football (910), soccer (653), cricket (573) and live action role play (500).

Soccer has the highest membership aged 14 years or below with 350 members (41 per cent), followed by Australian rules football with 250 members (29 per cent), tennis with 135 members (16 per cent) and cricket with 124 members (14 per cent).

### 3.2.2 Expressed demand for outdoor sports fields in Royal Park

During the consultation on the development of the Fair Access Policy, clubs using Royal Park have expressed demand for additional training and game time. They also expressed the need for more sports fields and facilities to accommodate the increase in female participants. This need was also raised during the consultation in the preparation of the draft Royal Park Master Plan.

Currently about 30 per cent of existing club members are females (very similar to other locations). The highest proportion of females are in tennis and touch rugby (with 45 per cent), followed by golf and Australian Rules football. Note, netball, hockey and other sports that use the State Netball and Hockey Centre are not included in this data.

### 3.2.3 North Park Tennis courts

The North Park Tennis Club has three synthetic grass tennis courts. The court surface is suitable for club and community level tennis. The club currently has 300 members, the majority living in City of Melbourne. Their junior program will grow to two full teams in the next 12 months. They are at full capacity for junior and male adult competitions.

The three courts are open and available through book-a-court for the times not in use by the club. Expressed demand for an additional court is demonstrated by the 100 per cent bookings during the week from 7am until 9 - 10pm on weekends, and 3pm – 8pm or 10 pm Monday to Friday.

The North Park Tennis Club participates in four community competitions. All require a minimum of one court per team to play, but higher grades may require two to three courts. With only three courts this limits the number of teams the club can enter. Night competitions may need to play into the evening to complete all matches.

The Tennis Australia Infrastructure plan describes a four-court facility as a “local level” facility. This recognises that four courts provide more sustainable options to play social and pennant competitions, in addition to programs and casual use. With the knowledge that the club will be more sustainable with four courts, and the current strong membership, it is recommended that an additional court be provided at North Park Tennis Club.

### 3.2.4 Conclusions from current provision and use of sports fields in Royal Park

Most outdoor sports fields in Royal Park are currently used over their capacity in summer and winter. This finding supports the draft master plan recommendations for additional sports fields to support participation by a growing population.

The outdoor sports fields in the north of the municipality are at 89.2 per cent of their combined capacity. This level of use is not sustainable. Continued use of these sports fields at these levels can cause significant deterioration of the playing surface during the season (especially in wet weather). This can lead to safety issues and costly repair works, as well as user dissatisfaction and potential game forfeiture.

To address these concerns the draft Royal Park Master Plan recommends that Poplar Oval, Ryder Oval and Walker Oval are upgraded with sports lighting to increase the availability of these fields for use, particularly during winter. Consideration of future lighting of Ross Straw Field would be subject to investigation into wildlife friendly lighting solution, given proximity to Royal Park West remnant and Trin Warren Tamboore wetlands.

With the high demand for sports fields, opportunities to reinstate sports fields have been explored. With consideration for all the other objectives and values in the park, the area south of the State Netball Hockey Centre (known as Lawn 7) is being put forward as the most appropriate location to reinstate sports fields. The area has been used for sport historically and the precinct already supports high levels of activity. The facility will be designed in conjunction with the State Netball and Hockey Centre to explore the opportunity to share some amenities such as a small pavilion.

It is also proposed to improve the surface at Manningham upper field to support more regular organised sport.

## 3.3 Key summary points

- Existing outdoor sports fields are well used.

- The outdoor sports fields in the City of Melbourne include 32 grass ovals and eight other playing field spaces that mostly provide full size rectangular pitches.
- The 32 sports fields are already well used by the current population. With a further 114,700 people to move into the City by 2043 it is clear the current provision will not meet future needs.
- In 2022 - 23 the average weekly participants using the outdoor sports fields were nearly 10,600 people in winter and 6600 people in summer.
- Many of the sports fields are being used at or near capacity.
- Most of the sports fields that are not used at capacity do not have sports lighting. Provision of sports lighting at these fields will allow increased use.
- Even with improvements to increase capacity it is unlikely that the current provision of sports fields can meet the demands likely to arise with the population growth of a further 114,700 residents.
- Sports played at Royal Park include football, cricket, soccer, lacrosse, golf, tennis, baseball, netball and hockey for junior and adult participants. Other organised activities using the sports fields include Live Action Role Play, school sports, employee soccer-football competitions, and social sports.
- Some 4500 people are members of sports clubs playing on fields and courts in Royal Park.

## 4 Planning for outdoor sports fields – strategic context

### 4.1 Application of sports facility provision ratios

The application of sports facility provision ratios is one planning tool commonly used to assess the adequacy of the number of sporting facilities within a defined area (such as a municipality), or to predict the number of sporting facilities that might be required in the future based on projected population growth.

Provision ratios are industry accepted benchmarks proposed by the State Sporting Associations (SSAs) to guide provision of sporting facilities. In 2020 these ratios were applied to six sporting codes within the City of Melbourne, through the “Sports Facility Provision Analysis” by Simon Leisure. A revised shortfall (to the benchmarks) was then applied to reflect the geographic size, existing provision and constraints of the municipality. These constraints include land availability, budget constraints, changing demands, demographics and participation trends. The existing provision ratio describes the current provision.

Application of the ratios provides the insights into future demand described in **Error! Reference source not found.**

Table 3 Sports facility provision ratios and adjusted shortfall within City of Melbourne (Source: “Sports Facility Provision Analysis” by Simon Leisure 2020)

Sport	Existing CoM provision ratio (2020)	Benchmark provision ratio	Number of sports fields / courts CoM			Revised shortfall
			Existing 2020	2041 (based on benchmark ratio)	Shortfall	
AFL oval	1 oval: 21,000	1 oval: 6,000	9	64	-55	16 ovals
Bowling greens	1 green: 34,500	1 green: 20,000	5.5	21	-15.5	2 greens
Cricket ovals	1 oval: 6,000	1 oval: 5,000	31	78	-47	12 ovals
Outdoor netball courts	1 court: 47,500	1 court: 7,000	4	55	-51	16 courts
Soccer pitches	1 pitch: 8,250	1 pitch: 5,000	23	78	-55	14 pitches
Tennis courts	1 court: 2,900	1 court: 4,000	65	98	-33	10 courts

### 4.2 Historic loss of outdoor sports fields

Since 1986 there has been a significant reduction in the number of outdoor sports fields in the City of Melbourne. Some were converted for other park uses (such as stormwater detention), while others removed for different reasons. These facilities have never been replaced. This places a greater strain on existing facilities and makes finding space and investing in new facilities increasingly important to support active and healthy communities.

The specific facilities removed and the rationale for their removal are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4 Outdoor sports fields and supporting facilities lost since 1986

Facility name	Facility size	Year removed and reason
<b>Royal Park</b>		
Royal Park – Flemington Road Oval	Approximately 1ha	2015 – For the Royal Children's Hospital redevelopment.
Royal Park – Oak Street	Approximately 1.2 ha plus a pavilion	2005 – For the Trin Warren Tam-boore Wetlands construction.
Royal Park – Brens Drive Outdoor Netball Courts and Indoor stadium	20 outdoor netball courts and indoor stadium. Approximately 2ha.	2001 – State Netball and Hockey Centre developed incorporating 2 outdoor hockey fields, 8 indoor and 4 outdoor netball/basketball courts. These outdoor courts were converted to indoor stadium courts in 2019.
Royal Park – Grassland Circle, pavilion and toilet block	Approximately 27 ha – 3 ovals and 4 soccer fields (winter) and 12 cricket wickets (summer) plus pavilion.	1994 – to create the Grassland Circle initiated in the 1984 master plan.

Facility name	Facility size	Year removed and reason
Royal Park – Macarthur Road Hockey Pitches	Approximately 3.5ha	1994 – was used for organised hockey. Following development of new facility this area is currently used for overflow and informal sport.
<b>Total area for sport lost at Royal Park – 34.7 hectares plus pavilions/ indoor stadium</b>		
<b>Other reserves</b>		
Melbourne Park – Goschs Paddock, Old Scotch and Old Xavier ovals, Rugby 1 and 2, and other grounds used summer and winter	Approximately 32 ha	Fields were included under the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust and community sport no longer has access. Most of the area was converted to the Tennis Centre and rectangular stadium or is used by elite football codes.
<b>Changes to community sport access to other facilities</b>		
Carlton Football Club – Princes Park number 1 oval (adjacent to Ikon park).	Approximately 2ha	There is very limited community access to oval #1.
North Melbourne Recreation Reserve – North Melbourne Football Club oval	Approximately 2ha	There is no community access on the AFL oval.

### 4.3 Key summary points

- Application of sports provision ratios shows a significant gap in all outdoor sports fields in the municipality.
- All sports are showing growth in participation.
- Since 1986 there has been a significant reduction in the number of sports fields in the City of Melbourne, particularly in Royal Park.
- A strategic approach to increase capacity of existing facilities will provide some additional hours of use, but not sufficient to cater to predicted future demand.
- Strategies to increase capacity need to include provision of sports lighting to increase hours available for play or training, particularly during winter.
- To date, the urban renewal planning process has failed to provide sufficient outdoor sports fields.
- The review of the Open Space Strategy has identified greater projected population growth than anticipated in 2012.

## 5 Conclusion

The City of Melbourne's commitment to enhancing its outdoor sports fields is evident through the analysis and strategic planning outlined in this report. The projected demand for outdoor sports fields, driven by significant population growth and evolving community needs, underscores the necessity for a multifaceted approach to facility provision.

By increasing the capacity of existing facilities, upgrading current infrastructure, and developing new spaces, the City aims to ensure that all residents have access to high-quality, adaptable recreation spaces. This strategic investment not only supports physical and mental health but also fosters community connection and inclusivity.

This report identifies demand for sports fields and makes recommendations for Royal Park. It gives visibility to the need for more sports fields throughout the municipality to continue to support the recreational needs of its diverse and growing population. This report provides a sound basis to inform Council decisions on the importance of allocating resources to upgrade or develop new recreation infrastructure for the city.

The evidence presented in this report supports the recommendations for increasing capacity and provision of new outdoor sports fields in the draft Royal Park Master Plan. This master plan will guide the future management for Royal Park over the next 20 years.

Figure 3. View across Ross Straw Field in Royal Park West



# Appendix 1

## Outdoor sports fields in the City of Melbourne

### Royal Park

Figure 4 Summer



### ROYAL PARK NORTH

Melways Reference 29 F10

- Barbeque
- Public Toilets
- Cricket Nets
- Car Park
- Tree Coverage

#### Summer Sports Ground For Hire

- Cricket - Turf  
Field Number
- Cricket - Synthetic  
Field Number

For more information or to apply for a casual sports permit - email [recreation@melbourne.vic.gov.au](mailto:recreation@melbourne.vic.gov.au)



Figure 5 Winter



### ROYAL PARK NORTH

Melways Reference 29 F10

- Barbeque
- Public Toilets
- Car Park
- Tree Coverage
- Lights

#### Winter Sports Ground For Hire

- Australian Rules Football  
Field Number
- Soccer  
Field Number
- Lacross  
Field Number

For more information or to apply for a casual sports permit - email [recreation@melbourne.vic.gov.au](mailto:recreation@melbourne.vic.gov.au)



Figure 6 Summer

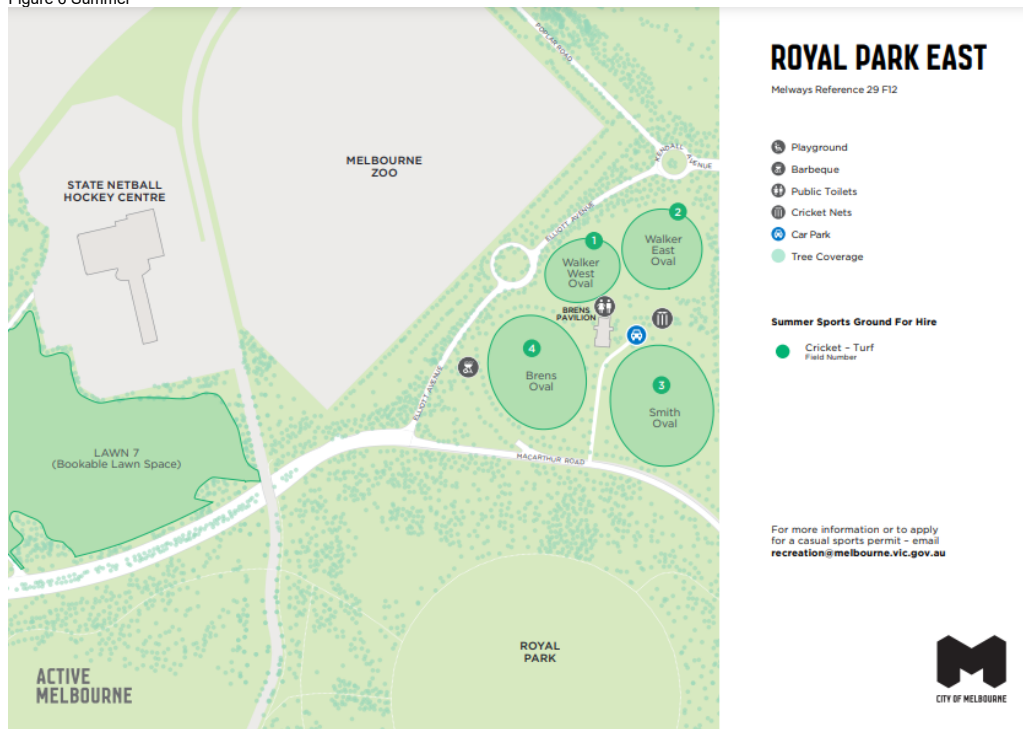


Figure 7 Winter

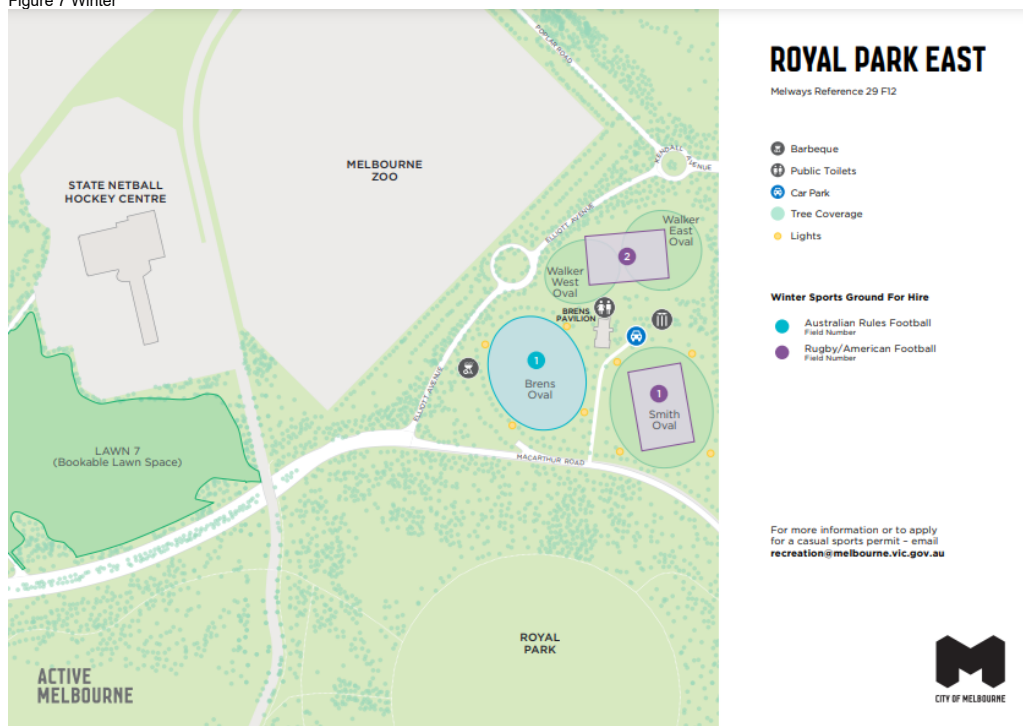


Figure 8 Summer

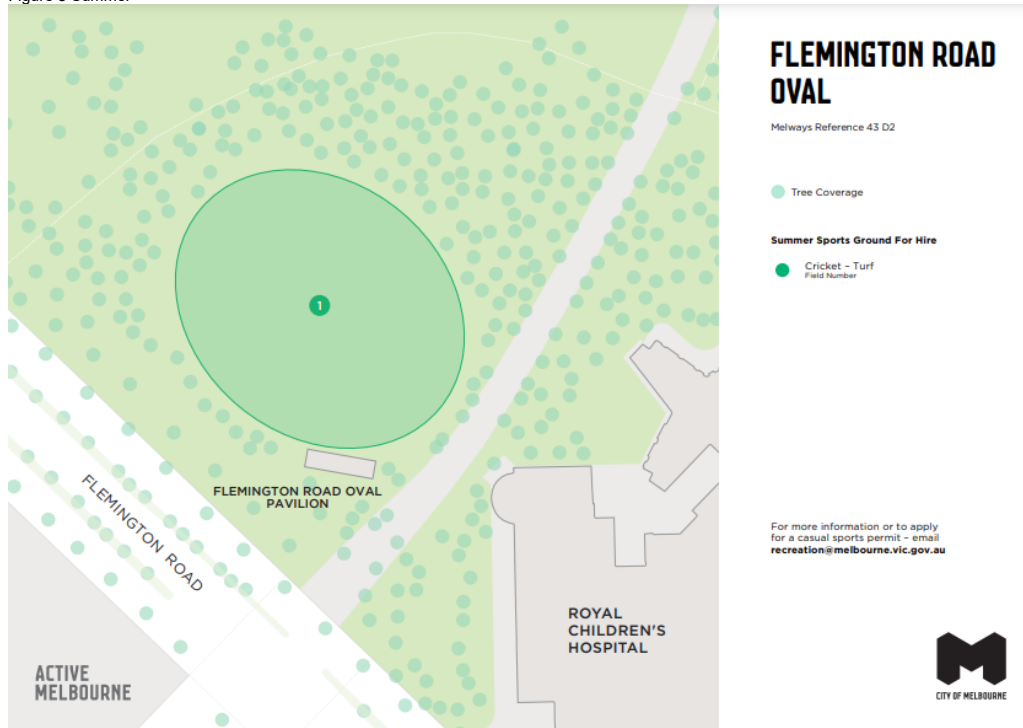


Figure 9 Winter

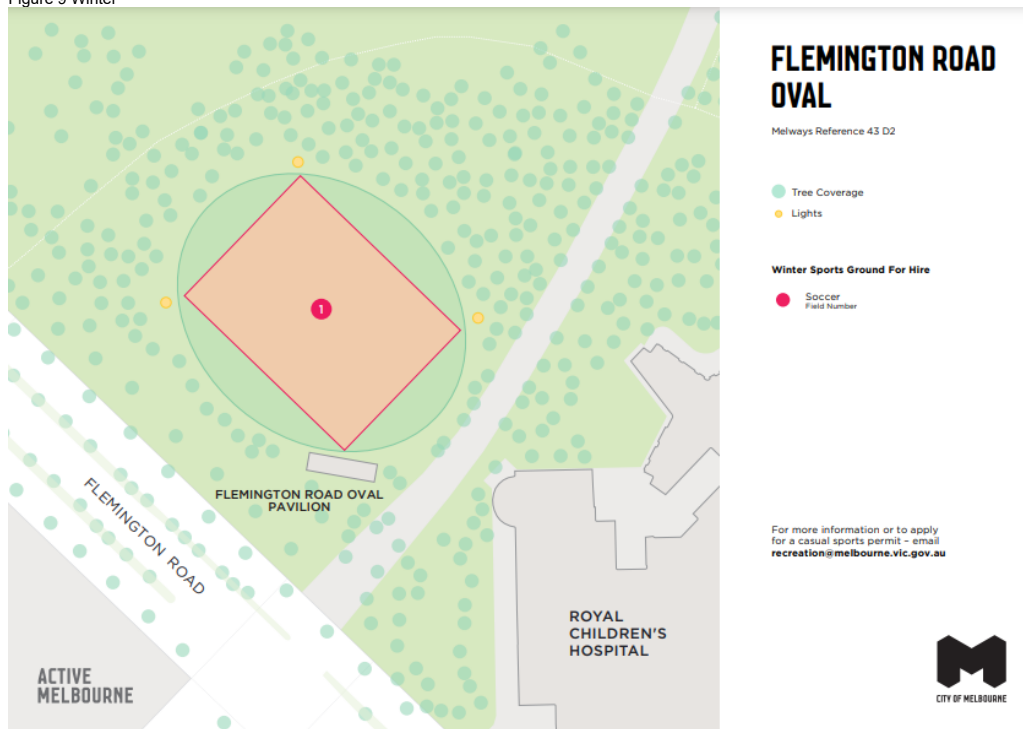


Figure 10 Summer

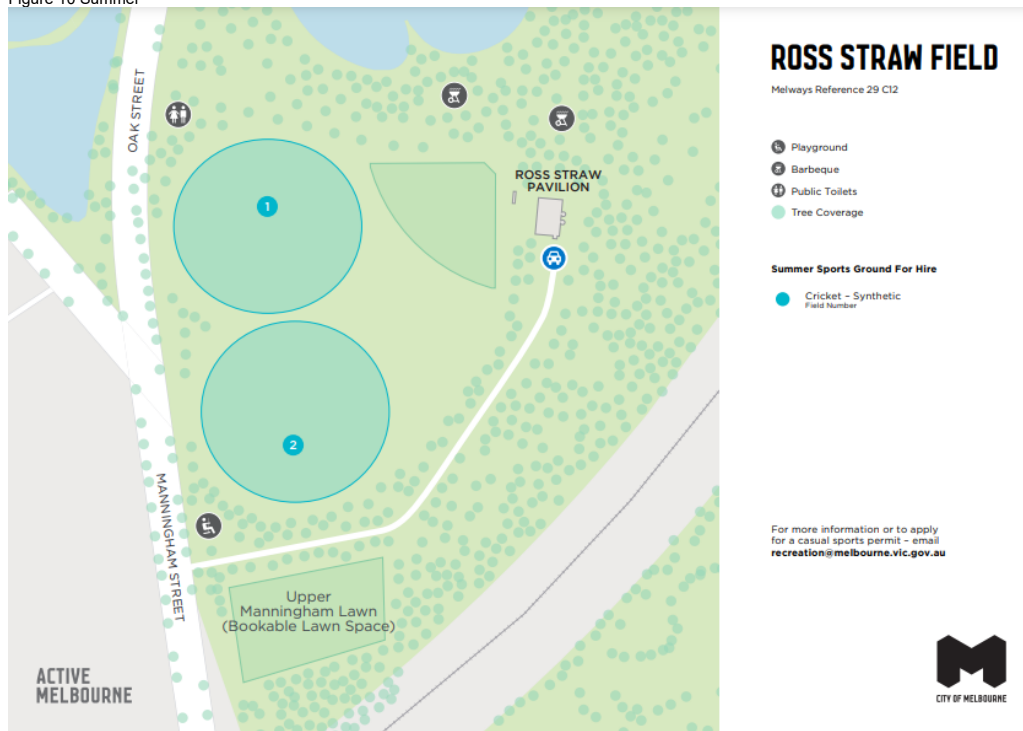
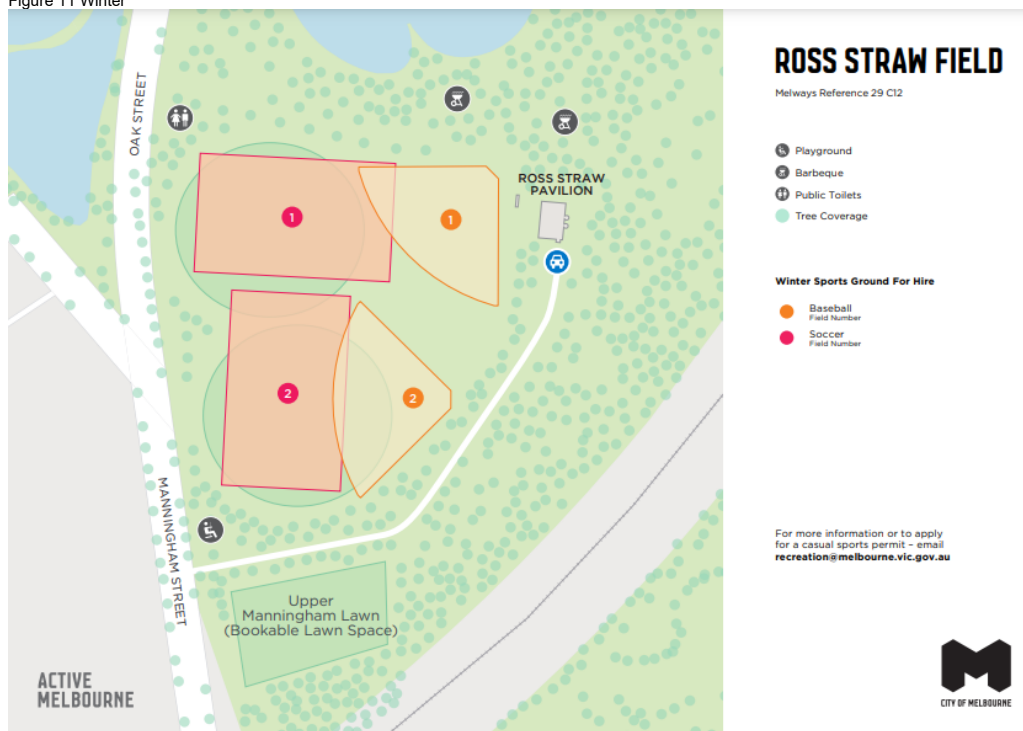


Figure 11 Winter



Princes Park

Figure 12 Summer

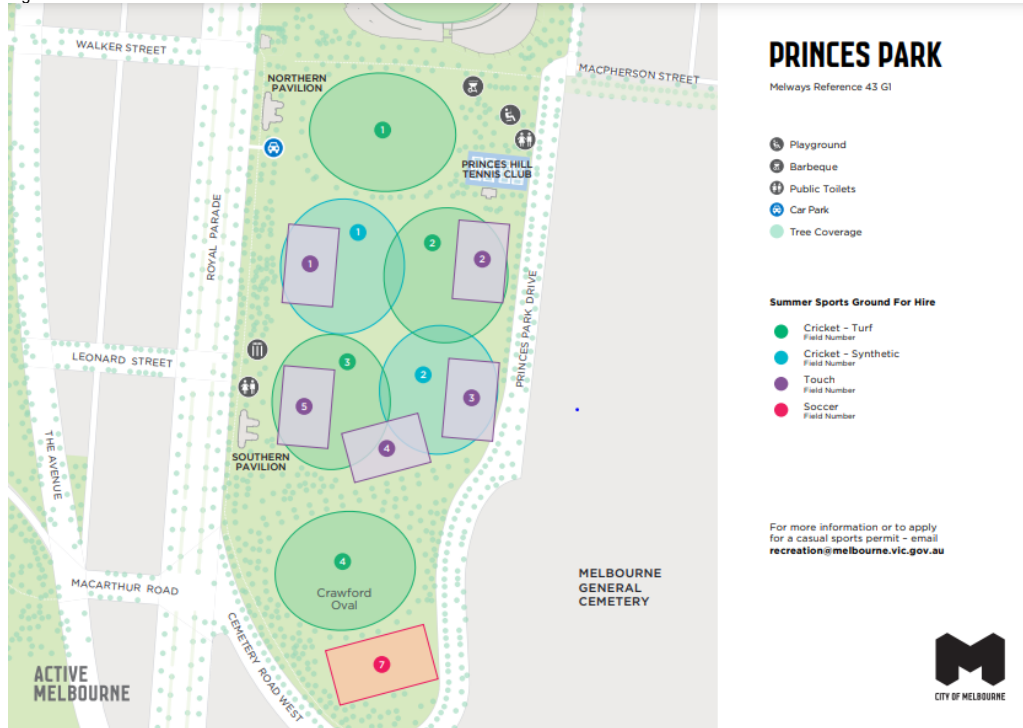
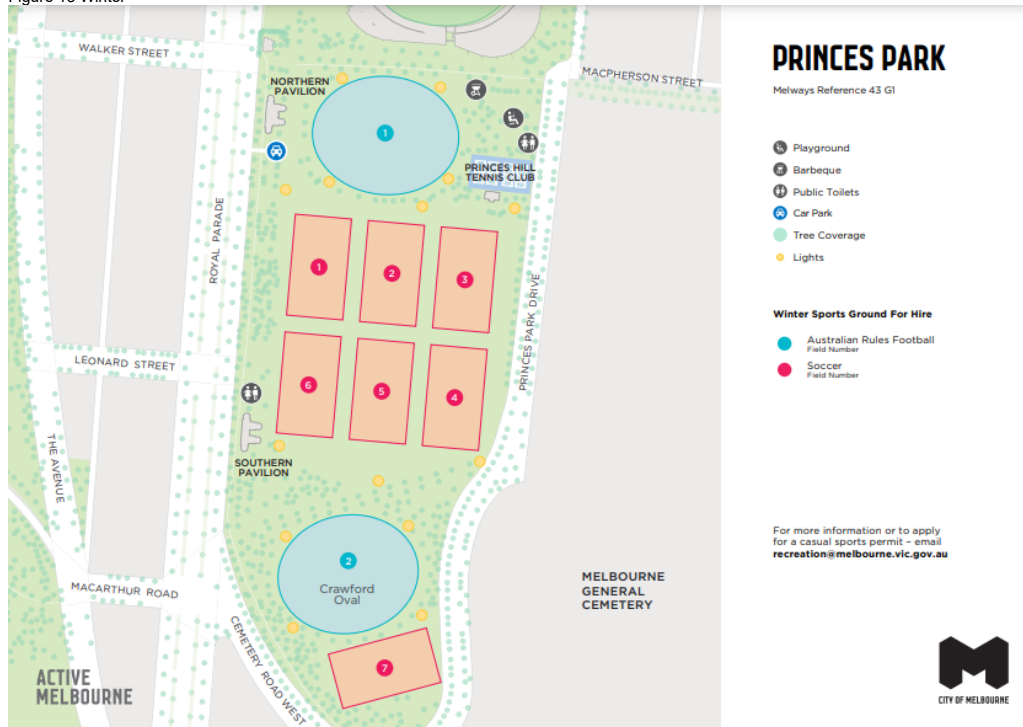


Figure 13 Winter



**Newmarket Reserve**

Figure 14 Summer

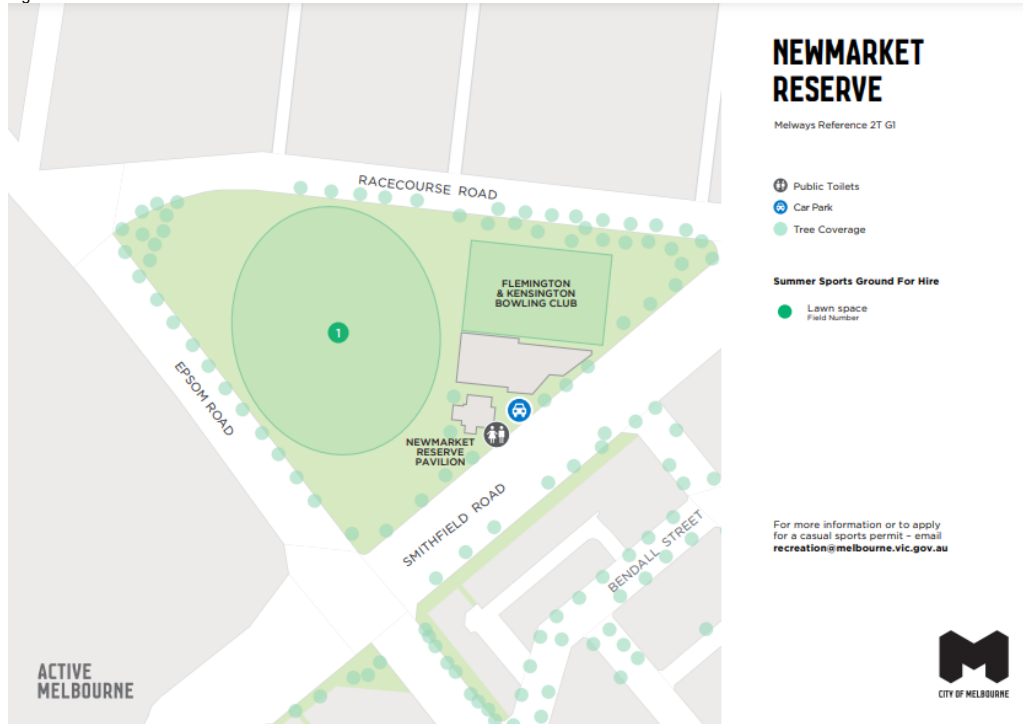
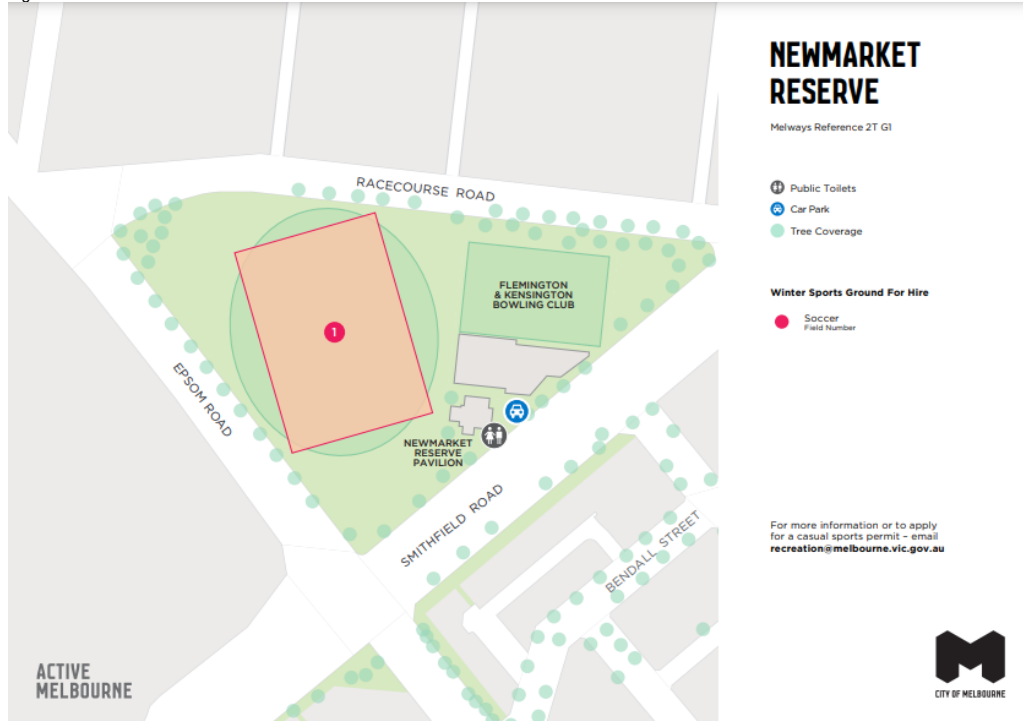


Figure 15 Winter



Fawknor Park

Figure 16 Summer

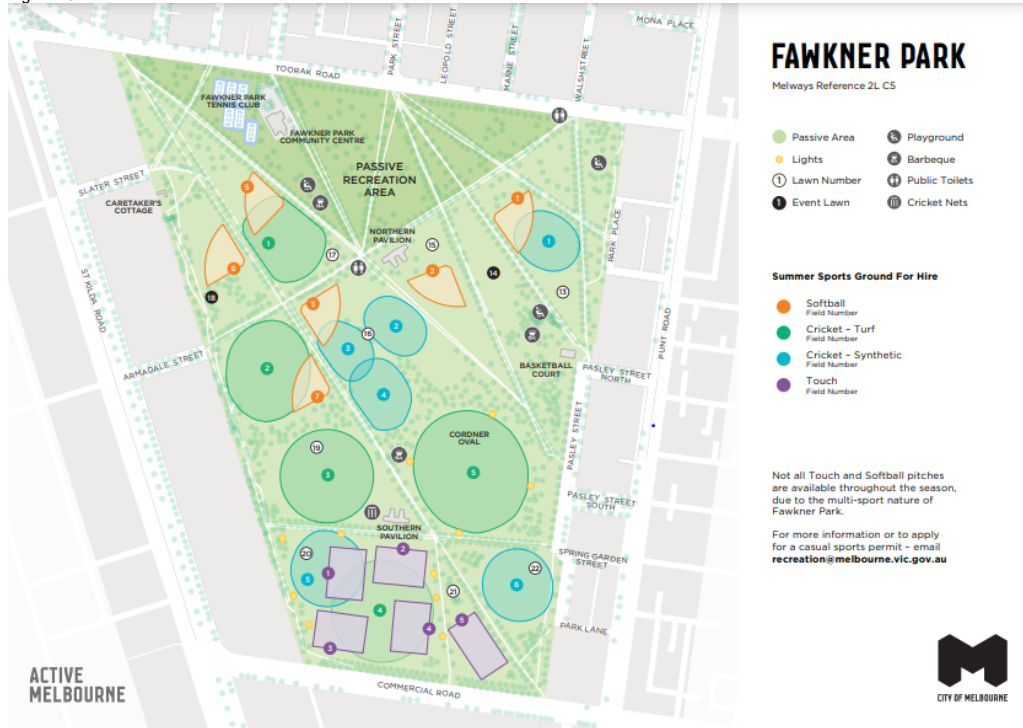
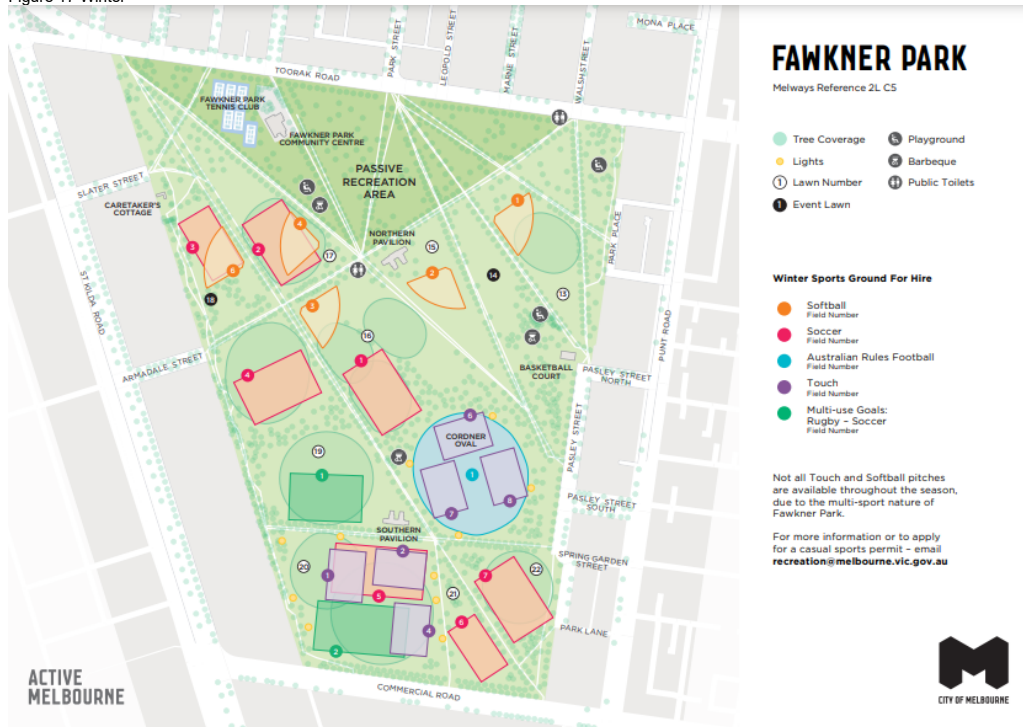


Figure 17 Winter



**JJ Holland Park**

Figure 18 Summer



**JJ HOLLAND PARK**

Melways Reference 42 J4

- Playground
- Barbecue
- Public Toilets
- Skatepark
- BMX track
- Cricket Nets
- Tree Coverage

**Summer Sports Ground For Hire**

- Cricket - Turf  
Field Number
- Cricket - Synthetic  
Field Number
- Multi-use Sports  
Field Number

For more information or to apply for a casual sports permit - email [recreation@melbourne.vic.gov.au](mailto:recreation@melbourne.vic.gov.au)



Figure 19 Winter



**JJ HOLLAND PARK**

Melways Reference 42 J4

- Playground
- Barbecue
- Public Toilets
- Skatepark
- BMX track
- Tree Coverage
- Lights

**Winter Sports Ground For Hire**

- Australian Rules Football  
Field Number
- Soccer  
Field Number
- Multi-use Sports: Synthetic  
Field Number

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### Ron Barassi Senior Park

Figure 20 Summer

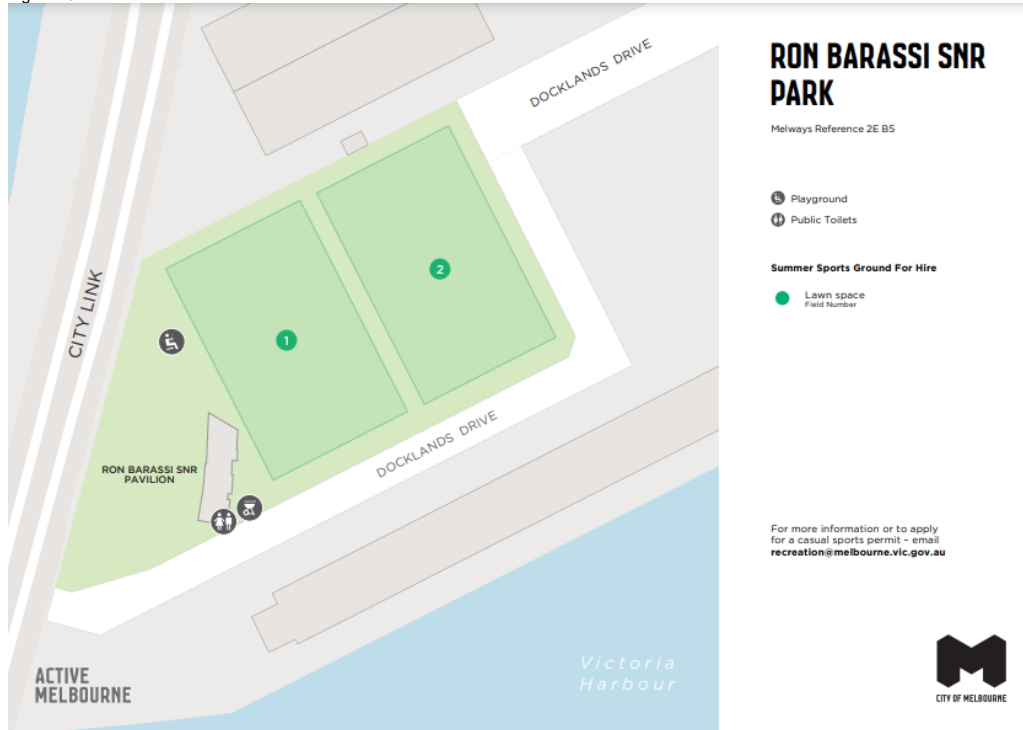
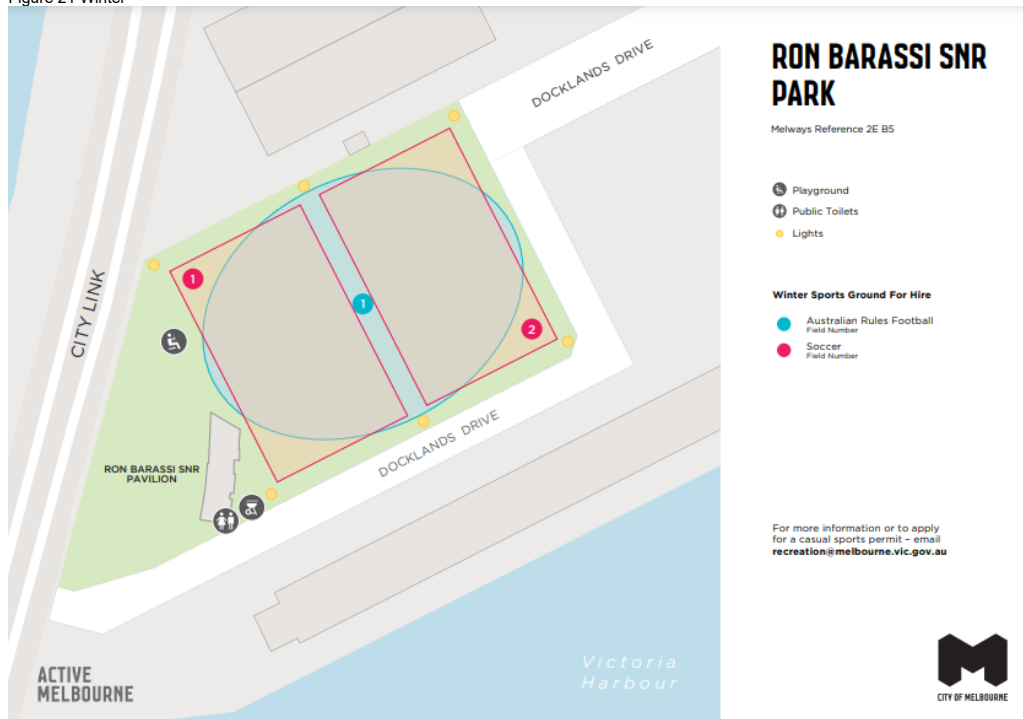


Figure 21 Winter



## How to contact us

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