

1 Introduction/Executive Summary

We present herein a submission to the Beaches Link EIS on behalf of the Balgowlah Suns Junior AFL Club Pty Ltd. The content herein has been discussed amongst our membership and has been endorsed by the clubs committee.

We are a highly committed sporting organisation in Balgowlah as recognised by the AFL, Council and State Government in recent years who have provided support to upgrade our existing facilities and by the awards received by our club and volunteers.

We pride ourselves on being an active participant within our local community providing opportunities for the kids in our area and supporting community initiatives.

We recognise the need for the Beaches Link development and whilst it potentially could significantly disrupt our operations in the short term, we consider it as a once in a lifetime opportunity to transform the area into a sporting and green space precinct that will support and benefit our community for generations.

We agree with the following project benefits identified within the EIS and consider that this submission and our ongoing consultation will ensure these benefits are realised:

- *Return local streets to communities by moving traffic underground, freeing up local streets for local traffic, and supporting the sustainability of local town centers.*
- *Opportunities to enhance the local community by improving active transport (pedestrian and cyclist facilities) connections and providing new public open space and recreation facilities.*

We acknowledge that the EIS proposes that:

A dedicated consultation process jointly led by Transport for NSW and Northern Beaches Council would take place to give the community an opportunity to provide input to the final layout of the new and improved open space and recreation facilities at Balgowlah. This consultation would be separate to the consultation for the Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway Connection environmental impact statement.

Most significantly for the Balgowlah Suns, it is critical that this not only consider the “final layout” of the facilities but also the staging and progressive development to support our club’s viability throughout the prolonged period of disruption during the construction periods.

We have developed some interim development concepts for the 6-year period of construction and set out these options in our submission. We believe the project team and planning process should consider these concepts as the project planning, procurement and planning approvals progress. We believe these options will provide benefit to a very wide cohort of our local community well before the final layout is constructed, whilst also assisting to mitigate the impact on our community and direct neighbours due to the significant construction works. We also believe that these interim development concepts will assist construction staging, early works, minimise redundant works and allow the construction contractor to mobilise effectively and efficiently.

We note that the EIS proposes that “*As part of this consultation process, a community reference group would be established, with representative stakeholder groups and the community, to support Transport for NSW and Northern Beaches Council with the development of this important public space*”. Given the direct impact on our existing club operations, we look forward to participating in the ongoing consultation for the Beaches Link project to achieve outstanding outcomes for our local community and our club members. To achieve this will be seeking that our club achieves representation on this community reference group.

There are 2 key phases of the project that will be critical to the ongoing operations and potentially viability of our club now and into the future:

- Construction Phase - Disruption to the existing club operations and Balgowlah Oval during construction.
- Final Layout - Ultimate redevelopment of the open space and recreation facilities.

With respect to the EIS commentary on the proposed new open space and recreation facilities at Balgowlah, this is aligned with these 2 key phases in that the works are stated to include:

- *Staged construction of the new and improved open space and recreation facilities*
- *Facilities may include shared user paths, open space areas, amenities, car park, playground, netball courts, soccer field, hockey field and new enlarged AFL/cricket oval.*

We present within this submission our observations and suggestions across both of these phases of the works with particular discussion on the Staged construction and their potential for adverse impact or conversely mutually beneficial opportunities to the project, community and the Balgowlah Suns.

Finally we note that the interim and final development configurations we suggest in our submission support the delivery of existing State Government policy priorities:

- **Premier's Priority for Great open spaces** – our proposals clearly address and deliver against the objectives for both more open space in our neighbourhood and free public facilities.
- **Greater Sydney Commission's A Metropolis of Three Cities** – our proposals provide actionable developments supporting at least three of the objectives in the strategic plan for Sydney (objectives 6, 7 and 14).

2 Club History/Status

The Balgowlah Suns are an Australian Rules Football club based at Balgowlah Oval since 2015 when we commenced as an Auskick facility for kids from ages 5 to 8, totally 54 in our inaugural year. The club joined the Sydney AFL Juniors competition in 2016 with two under 9 teams, rising to 98 kids in the club and has been the fastest growing club in Sydney with membership now at 400 kids (& 20 teams in 2021). As we continue to populate older age groups year on year, including 5 girls teams from under 10's to under 18's this year, we forecast the club will be approaching 650 participants by the completion of the Beaches Link in 2028.

Our club motto is Community, Respect, Fun and we pride ourselves on being active in our community on local and social issues.

We are currently already operating at capacity in terms of use of our allocated times for training and games at Balgowlah oval with no current allocation of other sporting grounds. With our current growth we will require a second ground in the next 2 to 3 years to enable us to sustain our current and provide for the future members. We note neighbouring AFL junior clubs such as the Manly Bombers and Forest Lions occupy between 2 to 4 football grounds.

	Season	Auskick	Juniors	Total
Historic Membership	2016	70	28	98
	2018	175	198	373
	2020	120	320	440
Forecast Membership	2022	130	360	490
	2024	140	400	540
	2026	140	440	580
	2028	140	480	620

3 Beaches Link Project Timing and Staging

We understand the construction timeline for the project as follows as extracted from Chapter 6 of the EIS:

Table 6-3 Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway Connection project indicative construction program

Construction activity	Indicative construction program																							
	2023				2024				2025				2026				2027				2028			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Early works and site establishment																								
Construction of driven tunnels																								
Immersed tube tunnel construction and installation																								
Tunnel fitout and finishing																								
Construction of operational facilities																								
Surface road works																								
Testing and commissioning																								
Site rehabilitation and demobilisation																								
New and improved open space and recreation facilities at Balgowlah (subject to further consultation)																								

This program suggests that the Balgowlah Suns can expect 6 years of disruption to its operations during the period of the Beaches Link construction.

With respect to the New and Improved open space and recreation facilities there are 2 stages noted:

- Stage 1 (2023 to 2025):
 - This stage appears to be prior to and on commencement of construction in 2023.
 - We assume this would include the open space areas outside of the “construction site” footprint which is a large area with significant potential.
 - Provides an opportunity to implement staging of the open space works that from our perspective could safeguard our clubs continued growth during this period, or alternatively if not implemented adequately could limit our growth and viability.
 - Perhaps most importantly provides opportunity to mitigate the disruption to our community by improving the existing amenity of Balgowlah Oval and its surrounds.
 - Provides opportunity to support our clubs continuing growth.
 - Provides opportunity to develop a positive relationship with the construction interference in our local area.
- Stage 2 (2028)
 - As this occurs on completion of construction, we assume this would be works to remediate the tunnel construction site and construct the remaining open space and recreational infrastructure.
 - This may also include reconfiguration or supplementing of the Stage 1 open space and recreational areas.

We consider that the staging of the open space and recreation facilities provides a significant opportunity which we describe further in the following sections.

4 Final Layout - Ultimate redevelopment of the open space and recreation facilities

The prospect of improved open space and recreational and sporting facilities post construction of the Beaches Link presents a major opportunity for our club to consolidate ourselves within our community and support children in their love of the outdoors, sport and in our case in particular Australian Rules football well into the future.

We provide herein information regarding our current facilities and constraints and discussion of our suggestions for the final layout in advance of the consultation most importantly to inform the staged development of this which we consider one of the most critical aspects of the projects impact on our community.

4.1 Current Balgowlah Oval Facilities

Over the past 6 years since our inception, we have been active in improving our existing facility at Balgowlah Oval for the benefit of our members. Projects we have completed to date include:

- New lighting for Balgowlah Oval including funding support from NSW State government and Northern Beaches council
- New change rooms facility including funding from the AFL, Northern Beaches Council and NSW State government

However, our oval has several significant limitations that currently constrain our growth as a club, including:

- a) Ground Length and width -- The ground's oval dimensions are currently not considered sufficient by the AFL for age groups older than under 14's. Given our rapid growth this is a major constraint.
- b) Ground shape – The ground has an asymmetric shape with the north western pocket truncated by the presence of the golf course. We have been investigating opportunities to lengthen, widen and improve the ground shape to enable our older age groups to use the ground. We currently have no alternate facility for these age groups and have been losing members to adjoining clubs as a result. This threatens the long-term viability of our club.
- c) Ground surface and drainage – We have had a number of members move to the adjoining AFL club (Manly Bombers) due to concerns on the surface of our ground. We have been considering future projects to resurface the ground and improve drainage. This also includes potential alternatives to the cricket pitch which has caused some injuries in recent years.
- d) Car parking and ground access – We have been working with our neighbours particularly on Pickworth Avenue to manage traffic and car parking for training and game day. Given the narrow dimensions of the road there have been a number of incidents over the years. Our members and visiting clubs also often park within the golf course parking which we note will be consumed by the construction site. Given our location adjacent to Sydney Road, which is without parking, our members and visitors must often park significant distances, disrupting side streets and also requiring them to cross Sydney Road in busy evening or weekend traffic. Access to our ground now is currently a safety concern for our members which will be further disrupted by construction.

4.2 Consultation with other groups

In preparing this submission, we have undertaken consultation with some other community groups which we summarise as follows:

4.2.1 Pickworth Avenue Residents–

We have had an ongoing relationship with our direct neighbours on Pickworth Avenue since the club's inception given the close proximity of their homes to our facility. They are extremely concerned about the impact of the Beaches Link on their homes. Key issues we have identified from these interactions include:

- Traffic on Pickworth Avenue – with the removal of the golf course access during construction this will be significantly worse.
- Parking on Pickworth Avenue – similar to traffic this will be made worse and has caused several incidents in recent years without the added disruption of construction. This includes blocking driveways, hitting other cars, safety of pedestrians, etc.
- Noise – we have had numerous complaints about the noise generated from our events that we have been managing.
- Visual amenity – Whilst there is some vegetation screening of our facility along Pickworth Avenue, we understand this is a priority for some residents. This would also likely screen the construction site.

4.2.2 Northern Sydney and Beaches Hockey Association

The hockey club has been identified as a major beneficiary of the redevelopment of the open space. We have met with them to understand their objectives and how we could collaborate on the redevelopment. From this interaction we have considered the following issues in our submission:

- Hockey shares our view that other sports (soccer, rugby, netball) have ample facilities in our local area relative to our limited fields. The Balgowlah Suns note that Hockey is significantly underrepresented for fields on the Northern Beaches.
- The specific needs of a Hockey synthetic facility surface does limit some use by other sports but can be used by soccer, frisbee, gridiron.
- A hockey field can be constructed on a concrete surface so could be underlain by other facilities (eg car parking, other facilities).

4.2.3 Balgowlah Boys High School & 5 Junior schools in the surrounding area

A number of our members attend Balgowlah Boys high school which has become a leading academically performing secondary school in the state. However, it has limited facilities on campus. Being connected via the Sydney Road pedestrian bridge we expect that the future redevelopment will provide a significant mutual benefit to Balgowlah Boys further supporting our local community.

We also believe the junior schools in the immediate area (Balgowlah Heights, Seaforth, Manly West, Balgowlah North and St Cecilia's) will benefit from the redesign of the recreational facilities, providing future benefits for kids of all ages in the community surrounding Balgowlah.

The increased sharing of infrastructure and facilities in walkable neighbourhoods such as sports grounds and green open space is a key recommendation found in at least three of the objectives set out in the Greater Sydney Commission's *A Metropolis of Three Cities* (see objectives 6, 7 and 14).

As such we believe this project will provide an outstanding opportunity for the State Government to put this policy objective into delivery with new sporting facilities supporting Balgowlah Boys High School and the other surrounding schools.

4.2.4 Seaforth Cricket Club

A large proportion of our members participate as members of the Seaforth Cricket club during the summer. Seaforth cricket through the Manly Warringah Junior Cricket Association and some senior social cricket utilise Balgowlah Oval during summer. Given AFL and cricket facilities are readily useable by both sports, we are confident that any facilities developed for the Balgowlah Suns will be mutually beneficial to cricket.

4.2.5 Indoor Sports, including Basketball

Given the synergies of skills and athleticism between AFL and basketball participants often partake in both sports so as a club our members have a vested interest in providing facilities for basketball in our community. The northern beaches are significantly under resourced for indoor basketball facilities. Many of our members are unable to have their children play basketball as they are required to travel to Warriewood to train and play.

The inclusion of an indoor sports facility would enable our community to participate in basketball and would also be a major benefit to the use of the area for recreation. Other sports that would also benefit from such a facility include: netball, indoor soccer/hockey, gymnastics, dance, etc. Such a facility would be a major benefit to our community and we would be a major supporter of such a facility being included in the redevelopment.

We have had preliminary discussions with basketball, including the team that run the Warriewood facility as well as representatives from the St Augustine's school sports program. Both parties are keen to support an indoor stadium for basketball and other indoor sports and ovals (for the school) in this design.

4.2.6 Manly Wolves AFL club

Whilst we have not consulted directly with the Manly Wolves, our members are channeled to the Manly Wolves so many of our members will be members of the Manly Wolves on completion of the Beaches Link tunnel. With the Manly Wolves being a participant in the AFL Premier division in Sydney, the Balgowlah Oval redevelopment presents an opportunity to have a flagship sporting facility that is both prominently located and also ease of access for visiting teams being at the portal to the Beaches Link tunnels. The Balgowlah Suns would strongly support any potential to share this ground with the Manly Wolves and the AFL senior clubs.

4.2.7 AFL NSW / ACT

Initial discussions with AFL NSW / ACT have also recognised that the redevelopment presents an opportunity to have a flag ship sporting facility that could be leveraged for preseason AFL fixtures (Swans and Giants), Women's AFL games (AFLW) and to host finals for the AFL Sydney Junior competition that is currently a challenge for our club on the existing Balgowlah Oval.

4.3 Masterplan comments

4.3.1 New Balgowlah Oval

We understand a major feature of the sporting precinct will be the relocation of Balgowlah oval to the current golf club area. This is currently indicated as being a full-size oval which is ideal to be the center piece of the precinct for cricket and AFL. We strongly support this aspect of the redevelopment as it provides:

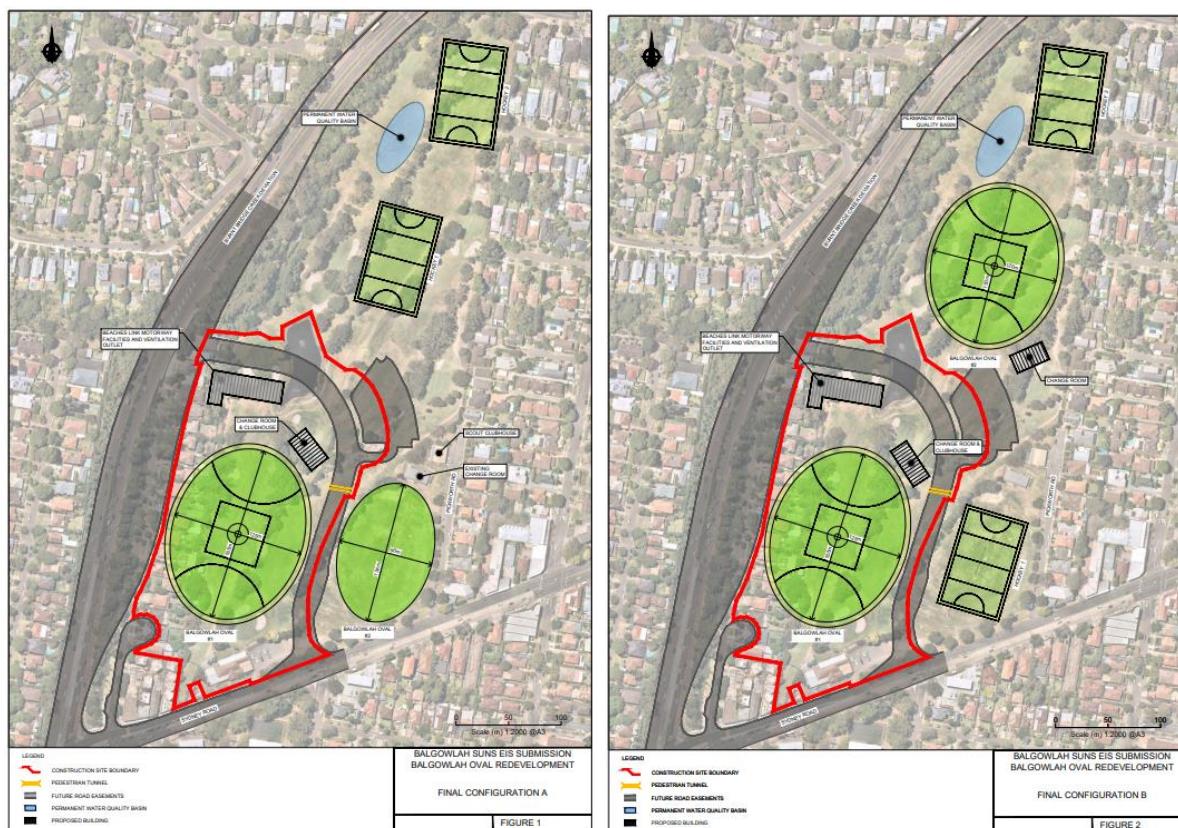
- Ground of dimensions suitable for all our age groups, including adults (ideally 165m x 135m).
- Modern surfacing, drainage and ground fencing for the safety of our players. We assume this ground will be a turf surface on the basis it would be shared with cricket.
- Maintain our prominent location of being visible from Sydney Road.
- New Club house facilities, including changes rooms, canteen and formal club house to establish the 'Home' of the Balgowlah Suns (and other sporting clubs where applicable).

4.3.2 Second AFL Ground

As described earlier, the viability of our club requires a second ground to enable us to cater for the number of members at the club now and into the future. There are 2 potential means to achieve this:

- Upgrading of the existing Balgowlah Oval to overcome the aforementioned limitations of the ground.
- Develop a second AFL ground to the north of the main ground.

These options are indicatively shown on the figures below, noting that higher resolution images are provided in the Appendix to this document.



We recommend the following be considered for this second ground:

- To accommodate our junior teams, the ground dimensions would need to be a minimum of 140m x 100m, noting the current Oval is 128m x 80m (but also narrowed at the northern end of the ground). These dimensions also assist the multipurpose of the ground as a larger size AFL ground can accommodate numerous other sports as has been achieved at Lionel Watts, Gore Hill and Narrabeen Sports High School.
- Synthetic all weather surfacing – this would provide our community an all weather facility whilst also assisting in preserving the surface of the new Balgowlah Oval by providing an adjacent synthetic alternative.
- Club/change rooms – similar to our recently procured new facilities at Balgowlah Oval which were acquired to permit relocation if required.

4.3.3 Car Parking and ground access

We strongly support the provision of a dedicated parking facility for the open space redevelopment given the relative isolation from surrounding connecting streets and/or being bounded by major roads. When our members cannot park at the designated car park, the access to the sporting grounds would become extremely challenging, potentially being required to walk over a kilometer to the ground.

The number of parking spaces provided for the ground will need to ensure it is adequate for peak events to ensure the ongoing amenity of the open spaces.

We recommend the design consider how using the contours of the area can facilitate multi-story or underground / field carparks close to each of the grounds / fields to 'spread' the concentration of parking across multiple locations in the precinct.

4.3.4 Club house/change room facilities

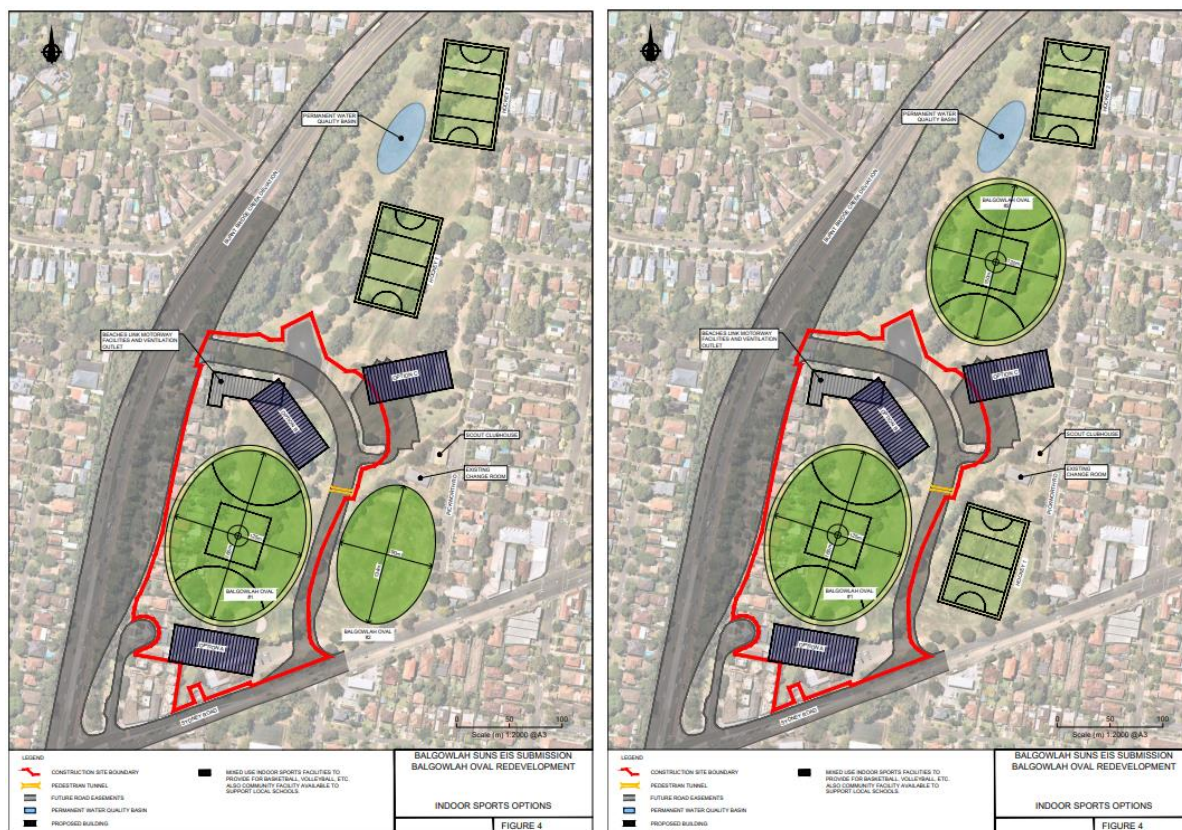
Our new change rooms were deliberately acquired to be amenable to relocation due to the redevelopment so should be able to support one of the AFL grounds (ie either the existing Balgowlah Oval or a future second AFL ground).

We strongly support the new Balgowlah Oval including modern change room and club house facilities for the use of our members and the community. This would include rooms that can be hired for recreational and other interests whilst providing a facility that our members can utilize throughout the season including for sporting events. This could potentially be integrated with an indoor sporting facility or community centre.

4.3.5 Indoor Sports Facility and Community Centre

As described earlier, the lower northern beaches is without a suitable indoor sporting and community facility (hall). Given the synergies between basketball and AFL we strongly support the inclusion of an indoor sport facility within the Balgowlah Oval recreation precinct. The scale and size of the facility would clearly be a function of the available funding, but this presents an opportunity to provide a facility in our community that could provide significant value for many generations. Ideally a facility of the scale that it can support 2 basketball courts would be a valuable addition to our community infrastructure. We also expect such a facility would be highly valued by surrounding schools, particularly Balgowlah Boys high.

We have provided an indicative view including an indoor sports facility and would see value in combining such as facility with the main (larger) oval club house, change room and canteen facilities. The figures below capture this initial view.



5 Construction Phase - Disruption to the existing club operations and Balgowlah Oval during construction

The disruption resulting from the Beaches Link Tunnel construction will be a major impact on our viability over the next decade. As has been demonstrated our growth over the past 6 years has been significant, and this next 6 years is a critical period of our clubs growth and long term sustainability is at risk of being significantly disrupted, particularly our home ground and surrounding area.

We would seek that the EIS outcome informs the construction planning including early works and staging of the Beaches Link to mitigate the impact on the Balgowlah Suns.

We emphasise that we have examined the EIS documents and have identified what we consider are mutually beneficial opportunities that will mitigate the effects of construction during this time and in addition have the potential to provide added value to our community and the members of the Balgowlah Suns.

Conversely, where these opportunities are not incorporated into the project, we are fearful that our football club may become non-viable or as a minimum that we would lose membership and potentially strain relationships with our neighbours and the community.

We have identified the following key concerns during the construction phase. We have also proposed potential mitigation strategies that we would like to be considered within the construction planning for the Beaches Link project.

5.1 Second AFL Ground

As has been described, we will require a second AFL ground to sustain our growth in membership prior to the completion of construction. Whilst we could adopt a second sporting ground in the council area, supporting our growth via the provision of a second ground on the Balgowlah recreation precinct prior to the completion of the construction would be a positive contribution to our community.

5.1.1 Mitigation Options

A second AFL ground could readily be accommodated to the north of the construction site. Subject to the ultimate configuration of the sporting grounds, this could be a new permanent second AFL ground or a temporary sporting ground that we could use during construction phase, prior to completion of the ultimate redevelopment of the precinct.

Where a temporary sporting ground is provided during the 6 years of construction, those earthworks would remain suitable for use for the conversion to the ultimate functionality following the completion construction. This conversion could include modification to hockey, indoor sports facility, or other uses.

5.2 Existing Balgowlah Oval Ground functionality

We understand the construction footprint excludes the existing Balgowlah Oval so the ground can remain open during construction. However, as described previously, our ground is currently not approved for use for our older age groups according to the AFL requirements and has some other safety and functional limitations. Whilst we had been planning to work with Council to modify our ground to overcome these constraints and support our growth, we are concerned that the disruption due to the Beaches Link may mean we are unable to attract funding for such an effort. As a result, we expect will be required to tolerate our sub-standard functionality until the completion of the Beaches Link in 2028. This may be too late for us to sustain our membership and impact our ability to continue to provide opportunities for the local community to access sporting and recreational facilities.

5.2.1 Mitigation options

The options for mitigation of this issue would be subject to the ultimate masterplan. Assuming that 2 AFL grounds would be included in the ultimate masterplan, mitigation during construction would be subject to the ultimate masterplan adopted. We comment on the 2 scenarios we have identified as follows:

- Existing Balgowlah Oval retained for AFL – The existing ground could be upgraded via earthworks to fulfill the minimum dimensions for AFL (or potentially with some compromise due to the site geometric constraints) whilst also rectifying drainage and surfacing issues. This ground upgrade would provide a suitable and long term second ground from commencement of construction prior to the new Balgowlah Oval becoming available.
- Existing Balgowlah Oval to be converted to Hockey/other use – The existing Balgowlah oval could remain as is throughout construction with a new second AFL ground developed to its ultimate configuration north of the construction site prior to construction commencement. The new AFL ground would support our growth into older age groups, whilst the existing Balgowlah Oval would sustain training and younger age groups until completion of construction when it would be reconfigured for other sports (eg Hockey or other use).

5.3 Parking and ground access

This is currently a major safety and operational constraint that will be significantly worse during construction. Members and visiting teams typically access the ground from Pickworth Avenue or the car park at the southern end of the ground accessed from the golf course access. With the golf course car park being part of the construction site, this will significantly limit our options. The adverse impacts will include:

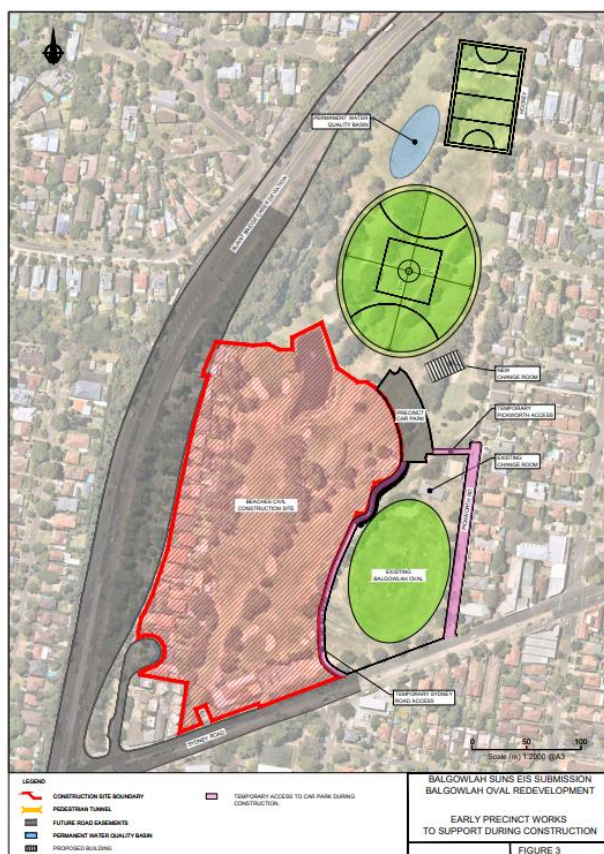
- Traffic congestion into and on Pickworth Avenue – This is already a problem with regular accidents. With our growing membership and reduce parking options this will be a significant impact.
- Safety – we remain concerned that visitors or members may be forced to park across Sydney road and cross the road to access the ground.
- Impact on our neighbours (particularly Pickworth Avenue) – These residents who are also significantly affected during construction will be highly affected by our reduced parking options.

5.3.1 Mitigation Option

We have identified an opportunity to provide a temporary access from Pickworth Avenue into the future car parking area on the masterplan. This could be a temporary or permanent facility but would significantly improve the safety and amenity of the grounds throughout construction. We expect this would also significantly reduce the impact on our neighbours on Pickworth Avenue during construction though would likely not be preferred in the ultimate configuration given through traffic to the car park.

Another alternative would be to have a temporary car park access paralleling the construction site access so that the car park could be accessed away from Pickworth Avenue.

We have sketched both these options on the following figure and Figure 3 in the Appendix:



5.4 Security/use of area

The land use surrounding a construction site is often challenging to a community as it can attract vandalism, graffiti and delinquency. With our members being regular inhabitants of the area throughout the winter months, including after hours and weekends, we would be regular attendees around the site contributing to its vibrancy and utilisation through active and passive surveillance.

Whilst the southern end of the precinct will be inhabited by the construction site, subject to the nature and extent of the early works performed for the precinct, the northern end of the site could remain vacant and unused which increases the risk of security in this area with potential knock-on effects to the local residents and broader community.

Where the early works develops the precinct for the use of community groups such as the Balgowlah Suns, this will ensure these areas enjoy the vibrancy and utilisation throughout the Beaches Link construction.

5.4.1 Mitigation Options

The development of the proposed open space to the north of the construction site prior to tunnel construction commencement would provide additional amenity to the community and avoid this area being a disused, delinquent space throughout construction.

Appendix – BALGOWLAH SUNS EIS SUBMISSION FIGURES