



AK Have Your Say

Auckland Council – Long-term Plan 2021-2031

Executive Summary

Introduction

Sport and recreation matters to all Aucklanders. It is a past-time that cuts across many sectors and is an activity that plays a key role in developing and sustaining Auckland's communities. Research has shown that increasing community participation in organised sport and recreation contributes to social capital which acts as the fabric that binds Auckland communities. Sports clubs, community organisations, and recreational parks and facilities are important conduits for developing social capital and are good indicators of Auckland community strength.

These benefits highlight that society would ultimately be poorer without sport and recreation. Try picturing Auckland without it, what would our community, health and environment look like? What would we do for enjoyment, to challenge ourselves, to achieve?

Harbour Sport is a charitable trust that was established in 1989 to support the community in the delivery of sport and recreation in the community. The scope of Harbour Sport has increased over the years as their relationships, knowledge and ability to support the community have become significant. The addition of large health contracts, management of significant community events and a critical support role in the school's sector has seen the important of Harbour Sport to be a pure community facing organisation.

Harbour Sport is a key delivery partner of Auckland Council, the Waitemata DHB, ACC, Active and Sport New Zealand. They also are a significant advocacy partner of the 5 local boards in the region, and a critical support partner of the 21 high school, 100 primary and intermediate schools, the 300 sports clubs, and the 30 plus regional sports associations. Harbour Sport is community facing that supports the local organisations and people that implement projects and initiatives that will get more people recreating and playing sport, in the North of Auckland.

More than one million Aucklanders – adults and children – are active each week. They are supported by 308,880 volunteers contributing 22.1 million hours of their personal time per annum, worth \$391 million to keep the sport and recreation sector moving. The rapidly growing population of the North is closing in on 400,000 people, with over 120,000 registered and members of organised sport.

This sector contributes at least \$1.9 billion to the Auckland economy, providing more than 25,000 jobs for Aucklanders. In addition, there is an estimated \$372 million in healthcare savings in Auckland .

Sport, recreation, physical activity connects Tāmaki Makaurau, and delivers significant physical and mental health and wellbeing, social, economic and educational benefits.

We are pleased to read the statement that Council will continue working with key partners to invest into and target populations of low participation, and or are high risk of becoming inactive.

The key benefits of Sport and Recreation:

- Creating a strong and inclusive city
- Builds peoples connection to the outdoors and the environment
- Building Auckland's community connectedness, pride and belonging
- Reduced anti-social behaviour within Auckland's communities
- Improved educational outcomes for Auckland's youth
- Improved health and well-being for all participating Aucklanders
- Contributing to Auckland's economic growth
- Provide both safer local streets and more regional off-road routes for cycling. Make the Regional Cycle Network an infrastructure focus for the city in order to increase recreational and transport related cycling and ensure routes are effectively connected
- Greater consideration given to the sport and recreational needs of older people

With almost 76% of Auckland residents actively participating in sport and recreation once a week, 97% of residents participating once a year, 21% volunteering along with an economic contribution of \$1.6 billion (2.4%) of Auckland's GDP the Auckland Council has an opportunity to make a considerable difference to Aucklanders via sport and recreation.

Key Submission Points:

The key strategic issues highlighted by Aktive are fully supported by Harbour Sport and remain as in previous years key submission points for consideration:

- Continued recognition and use of the Auckland Sports Sector: Facilities Priorities Plan 2017, to guide good decision making
- Continued use of the Sport and Recreation Strategic Action Plan (SARSAP), to ensure the plan is continued
- Recognise the economic, social and community value of the Sport and Recreation Sector
- Recognise the impact Covid 19 has had on our sector
- Retain the Sport and Recreation Facilities Fund, the Regional Sport and Recreation Facilities Operating Grant and the Sportsfield Development Capacity Fund
- Increase the funding level of the Sport and Recreation Facilities Fund, the Regional Sport and Recreation Facilities Operating Grant and the Sportsfield Development Capacity Fund to reflect sector demand
- Support Local Board sport and recreation projects and priorities
- Support the Local Board sport and recreation One Local Initiatives projects which address regional priorities
- Support reinstating the local Board Transport Capital Fund to previous levels
- Seek clarification about Council's proposal to moving from an asset-based approach to alternative ways of delivering services
- Supporting a focus on renewals and proactive asset maintenance
- Urging caution around the implications and potential impacts of community asset divestment
- Ensuring Council has the capacity to deliver the budgeted projects

Overview

The impact of Covid-19

We acknowledge that Covid-19 has had a significant impact on revenue of Auckland Council and has exacerbated a challenging fiscal investment environment. However, the pandemic has also had a significant impact on the health of our sport and recreation provider

We know our Regional Sports Associations took significant financial losses due to a destroyed winter sports season in 2020, and loss of partnerships. A significant number of clubs and recreation providers are vulnerable and struggling. Auckland Council's investment in supporting the recovery from the pandemic could be significant. Some short-term solutions could include:

- Support for sport by reduced hire age of council facilities
- Funding to enable making membership fees affordable or free
- Budget to fill the gap for the reduced revenue due to lack of membership fees, loss of income, funding and sponsorship reductions and ongoing administration costs
- Operational support for a loss of staff, not having enough hours for staff, staff affordability and lack of and retention of volunteers.

Getting Aucklanders active

Auckland Council has continuously stated to be the world most liveable city. The reality is the physical health of the city is under threat.

The obesity epidemic and Aucklanders' inactivity remain a significant public health risk. Physical inactivity already costs New Zealand's health system hundreds of millions each year (\$200 million in 2013 alone). Thirty-two per cent of New Zealand children are expected to be overweight or obese by 2025, with 21 per cent of 4-year-old children in Auckland already in this category. These obesity rates are crippling our communities and our economy¹.

Whilst most Aucklanders are physically active in any given week, their levels of activity are well below World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines. If nothing changes, there is the clear risk that 1.5 million Aucklanders will be underactive or inactive by 2040. 480,000 of these will be tamariki and rangatahi. Significantly the overall numbers hide inequities: women and girls, people with disabilities, those of Asian and Pacific ethnicities, and those living in low socio-economic areas, are less active.

Without a significant focus and targeted investment, the recovery of the sport and recreation sector from the Covid-19 pandemic will take many years, while the current obesity epidemic will continue to remain a major health issue. The survey results showing that junior membership appear to be most affected is particularly concerning as there is evidence that healthy lifestyle habits are formed at a young age. It is well documented that lower levels of physical activity are linked to negative outcomes for both physical and mental health, including loss of muscular and cardiorespiratory fitness, weight gain, psychosocial problems, and poor academic achievements (Haapala E.A., Vaisto J., Lintu N., 2017; Jiménez-Pavón D., Carbonell-Baeza A., Lavie C.J., 2020; Korczak D.J., Madigan S., Colasanto M., 2017). Evidence suggests that the negative impact may extend to adulthood (World Health Organisation, 2010).

¹ Sport New Zealand Value of Sport and Recreation Auckland Report 2015 and Sport New Zealand Regional profile Auckland 2013-2014

Response to the Long-term Plan Consultation Documents

Commentary on the key themes and issues identified

Capital investment

The primary vehicle for Council capital investment in sport and recreation infrastructure is the current 10-year \$120 million Sport and Recreation Facilities Fund. The fund is aimed at regional and sub-regional level facility development and is a critical funding stream for the sector.

Known, current, and well-researched regional facility plans prepared by sports codes demonstrate current, short-, and medium-term shortfalls in facility provision before this current Long-term Plan period is over. This demonstrates that we are already struggling to meet demand in certain geographical areas of Tāmaki Makaurau.

Examples of these shortfalls include :

- Indoor courts shortfall of at least 30 courts right now (Indoor Court Facilities Plan), rising by an additional 24 within the life of the Long-term Plan. The growth of Basketball, Volleyball and Badminton in the North Harbour region in the last two years suggest these numbers are already outdated. You can not hire an indoor facility in the winter season in the North Harbour region. This has driven increased facility hire significantly causing indoor sports events to be moved out of the region. Participants are being turned away by organisations as there is not the space to play now.
- Winter sports fields shortfall in hours the equivalent of circa 30 artificial turfs within the life of the Long-term Plan
- Outdoor netball courts shortfall of more than 70 courts. This is multiplied in the North region with all netball facilities stretch by current use, with netball limiting entries of young participants in the region due to full facilities.
- Outdoor tennis courts shortfall of approximately 40 courts
- Hockey turfs shortfall of an estimated 15 new turfs plus replacement surfaces on existing turf.

We believe that while this fund goes some way to address the identified shortfalls it simply does not reflect the capital investment the sector needs now and into the future. We recommend that this fund be reviewed and increased to at least partially address the shortfall. This needs to be balanced across the region to match the significant growth areas, and representing all the ethnicities in the region.

We are also concerned that this fund only applies to regional and sub-regional projects, leaving investment in local facilities to Local Boards who themselves have had their capital budgets reduced. We recommend either widening the criteria of the fund as well as increasing the quantum or increasing the local board budgets to enable them to address local demand. We recommend that advice is sought from relevant council staff in support of this matter.

The ability of club participants to access fields is a key constraint for the growth of many codes. Improvements to playing surfaces, such as sand carpeting, can greatly increase the use of fields, particularly in the winter months. The Sportsfield Development Capacity Fund is an important funding source for upgrading playing fields across the region. However, the \$5 million budget is

inadequate to meet the demand. We ask that consideration be given to increasing the quantum of this fund to help address this challenge.

Operational investment

As Council notes in its LTP documentation, Auckland Council owns and operates a large and aging community asset portfolio, inherited from the amalgamation of legacy councils. As the portfolio of assets has grown over time, so too has the level of funding needed to support the portfolio. Limited funding, an aging community asset portfolio and Auckland's population growth has put the community facilities portfolio under pressure, requiring prioritisation resulting in deferred investment.

We acknowledge and support the focus of this LTP on funding of renewals – urgently required and in many cases long overdue. However, it is concerning that Council has stated in the LTP documentation that it has insufficient renewal funding for assets assessed as being in the most need of renewal (condition 5 assets), and investment requirements will continue to rise as the portfolio ages and deferred investment becomes more costly to deliver. We are concerned that the condition of Council's current assets will continue to decline with a lack of investment and the impact this will have on club membership and participation.

The Council's focus is on capital investment, often leaves operational costs to facility users such as clubs. These users may struggle to manage the operational side of facilities, therefore impacting the quality and condition of the asset with capex implications. We know our clubs can find operational costs, such as cyclical maintenance, challenging. We see an ongoing need to also include budget for operational costs to ensure the facilities are appropriately maintained and managed.

Auckland Council has introduced the contestable Regional Sport and Recreation Facilities Operating Grant, offering it for the first time this financial year.

It is very clear that the Regional Sport and Recreation Facilities Operating Grant is a critical mechanism for improving the sustainability and viability of our clubs, however the sector demand far outstrips the fund's budget. We recommend that advice is sought from relevant council staff in support of this matter.

Community Asset divestment

The Council is looking to divest aging assets that are no longer fit for purpose and "maintain the same service levels for our communities, just delivered differently." As an external party it is unclear which assets are to be divested or how the new approach to move away from an "asset-based approach" to alternative ways of delivering services is to be funded or achieved. Selling off community assets has the capacity to impact on sports and recreation delivery at a local level and undermine the wider regional network. As noted previously in this submission there is currently a significant shortfall in facility provision. Therefore, we urge the Governing Body to consider the impact asset divestment can have on peoples' access to sport and recreation opportunities, particularly at a local level and listen to the views of the relevant Local Board.

We note Council is proposing to also fund investment through a programme to sell or lease surplus properties \$70 million a year over the next three years. It is not clear which properties have been identified for this process and what impact this might have on the sector.

Council's Delivery Capacity

Since the impact of COVID-19, Aktive understands Auckland Council has reduced its staff numbers by more than a thousand employees, including the majority of contractors. We have a real concern that Auckland Council is not adequately resourced to deliver the capital projects it has budgeted for. Again, we acknowledge the challenging fiscal environment facing Auckland Council, but given the Council is already reducing the level of capital investment in community infrastructure over the next three years the impact might be exacerbated by an inability to deliver. We ask that projects which are funded be delivered.

Creating sport and recreation opportunities

We are pleased to note an ongoing commitment to active transport modes through proposed investment in walking and cycling and the ongoing investment in public open spaces in the city centre including the commencement of stage one of the Te Hā Noa Victoria Street linear park and the Downtown Investment programme.

We also welcome investment which can improve water quality of our streams and beaches to enable greater and safer use for water sport activities.

Supporting Local Board projects

Local Board projects

Local Boards are voices of their communities and recognise the value of sport and recreation. This is demonstrated by the key local priorities set out by Local Boards in the current LTP with 15 of the 21 Local Boards having at least one sport and recreation project a delivery priority and 16 out of 21 Local Boards identifying a sport and recreation project in their key advocacy list and where there is strategic justification should be supported by the Governing Body. Of particular merit are those projects which seek to address the highest needs and greatest shortfalls across the region such as aquatic facilities in the northwest, indoor courts across the region and sportsfield investment in the southern local board areas. Among other projects, these include:

- Aquatic facilities proposed for the north-west (Whau)
- Aquatic Facilities at Flat Bush Aquatic & Leisure Centre (Howick)
- Scott's Point Sustainable Sports Park (Upper Harbour)
- Covered Courts in Albany and Kumeu (Rodney and Upper Harbour)
- Chamberlain Park (Albert-Eden)
- Sports field improvements (Ōrākei, Ōtara-Papatoetoe, Manurewa)
- Manukau Sports Bowl (Ōtara-Papatoetoe)
- War Memorial Park Improvements (Manurewa)
- Seaside Park improvements (Mangere-Otahuhu)

We understand that Local Board locally delivered initiatives capital budgets have been significantly reduced particularly those projects funded by growth. This is of concern given Local Boards are the primary capital investors in facilities that sit below a sub-regional level and are therefore those facilities that are not eligible for funding through the Sport and Recreation Facilities Fund.

We know Auckland is growing quickly and the Unitary Plan has greatly enabled increased residential density throughout the existing urban area as well as opening up large areas of greenfield

development. We know the growth of many of our clubs are already constrained by the limitations of their facilities such as fully booked and used fields. As population density increases the demands for access to sport and recreation facilities will grow.

We are concerned that Local Boards will not have the necessary capital budgets to progress much needed local projects with a consequential impact on sport and recreation participation. Growth funding has previously enabled local boards to deliver significant capital projects that they would not have been able to fund otherwise. Frequently local sport and recreation delivery can be significantly enhanced through relatively low-cost investments, such as sand carpeting of sports fields, which has been successfully undertaken by Local Boards. Such investments also improve the viability and sustainability of our sports and recreation clubs through increased membership and strengthen communities. Most Local Boards and their communities have invested significant budget and time in developing masterplans. Without the necessary capital budget Local Boards will not be able to implement the desired outcomes of these masterplans and they will lose value and currency. Masterplans that sit on shelves rapidly become obsolete and inevitably cause reputational damage.

We believe that Local Board funding and the role they play in the sector needs to be closely considered, to ensure that the locally delivered sport and recreation opportunities are not lost in the funding of regional and sub-regionally facilities.

One Local Initiatives (OLI)

We note that the OLI programme has its budget allocation deferred to outer years for all except two projects in the first three years: the Orewa seawall and the Flat Bush community hub. This is disappointing given the purpose of the OLI programme was to identify each Local Board's most important local initiative beyond their funding capability and ensure that funding would be made available. Local Boards and their communities have committed many hours and funds into the OLI projects and we believe that they should be prioritised for funding in the first three years of the LTP.

Many of the projects which were nominated as an OLI, such as Rodney Local Board's Kumeū-Huapai indoor courts facility and Upper Harbour Indoor Facility Albany. The OLI projects have high levels of community support and address clearly identified areas of shortfall and need. Without delivery much of the work already undertaken will become obsolete and areas of shortfall will continue to grow.

Local Board Transport Capital fund

There is evidence that busy roads create a perception of safety and encourage Aucklanders to use motorised vehicles in preference to active modes. The Local Board Capital fund was an appropriate programme for Local Boards to invest in localised road safety measures and also to provide active transport infrastructure. Auckland's streets are important public spaces. We note that 14 of the 21 Local Boards are seeking the Transport Capital Fund to be reinstated to pre-emergency budget levels. We support those local boards and welcome well designed and appropriately located active transport initiatives that support Aucklanders to be active and provide alternative options to private car use.

Recommendations

Acknowledging the impact of Covid-19

- Recognise the economic, social and community value of the sport and recreation sector

- Recognise the impact Covid-19 has had on our sector

Capital and Operational investment

- Retain the Sport and Recreation Facilities Fund, the Regional Sport and Recreation Facilities Operating Grant and the Sportsfield Development Capacity Fund
- Increase the funding level of the Sport and Recreation Facilities Fund, the Regional Sport and Recreation Facilities Operating Grant and the Sportsfield Development Capacity Fund to reflect sector demand

Supporting Local Boards

- Support Local Board sport and recreation projects and priorities
- Support the Local Board sport and recreation One Local Initiatives projects which address regional priorities
- Support reinstating the local Board Transport Capital Fund to previous levels

Asset management and delivery

- Seek clarification about Council's proposal to moving from an asset based approach to alternative ways of delivering services
- Supporting a focus on renewals and proactive asset maintenance
- Urging caution around the implications and potential impacts of community asset divestment
- Ensuring Council has the capacity to deliver the budgeted projects

We acknowledge that that Auckland Council is contending with reduced revenue and capital constraints and has to make difficult choices about the mix of services it provides. The impact of Covid-19 will be with us for some time to come, so too the decisions made in this 10-year Budget. Sport, active recreation and physical activity makes an enormous contribution to the health and wellbeing of all Aucklanders, of all ages, socio-economic levels and ethnicities. As demonstrated, physical activity, its wide-ranging benefits and its importance to our communities are fundamental to meeting the outcomes identified in the Auckland Plan. Council itself notes "community infrastructure supports the essential services in helping people to participate in society, promote health and wellbeing and create a sense of belonging."

We urge greater investment in the sport and recreation sector under this Long-term Plan. Without this commitment from Council our current and future community sport and recreation spaces will be compromised. This means our growing, increasingly diverse population will not have access to suitable infrastructure and spaces to participate in physical activity – whether it's a competitive rugby match, social tennis, outdoor netball, school sports events, ki o rahi or kilikiti.

We believe all Aucklanders, regardless of age, ethnicity and ability level, should be able to participate in sport, recreation and physical activity in fit-for-purpose facilities and spaces to enable them to connect with their community and live active, healthy lives.

Let's recognise the social, cultural and economic value of the sport and recreation sector and let's make Auckland the World's Most Active City: Tāmaki Makaurau – te tāone ngangahau rawa o te ao