



## 7. PETITIONS AND JOINT LETTERS

### **Item 7.1 - Petition Response - Request to access the St Kilda Peanut Farm Pavilion and oval lighting by the Dog Owners Group of St Kilda.**

A Petition containing 238 signatures, was received from St Kilda Dog Owners Group of St Kilda, and presented to a Council Meeting on 15 July 2020.

#### **The Petition states the following: -**

*As discussed on the phone to you today I am the President of the St Kilda Dog Owners Group of St Kilda (<https://www.facebook.com/DOGSTKILDA/>)*

*We represent a social group of dog owners who started in the Peanut Farm Reserve in St Kilda.*

*Approximately 360 owners regularly use the park daily, with many more joining us frequently. This group is a forum for our Dog related news and social interaction.*

*Our highly socialised dogs provide a safe and supportive environment for introducing new dogs and puppies, helping them become balanced and happy animals when around others. Highly socialised, trained and well balanced animals make pet ownership a joy and also improve the St Kilda and Port Phillip areas attracting increased use of dog friendly cafes and community facilities.*

*Our regular group of dog owners are friendly, inclusive and from a diverse background. We welcome new locals and new pet owners to join our group, happy to offer them advice, company and a few laughs during our daily walks and exercise.*

*We represent the concerns of many of the 7,000 dogs and their owners registered in the 21 sq km of Port Phillip area. We want to ensure the council continues to support fair access to the facilities and services currently provided for our pets.*

*We are growing stronger in numbers every day and now have Friday evenings 16.30 to 19.00 as a regular formalised meeting time for dogs, owners, and friends in all seasons. Dogs and their owners are present all days in large numbers mornings and evenings as well spread during the day. There would be few times when there is not a dog in the Peanut Farm Reserve.*

*Our expanded diverse numbers (360) have highlighted the justification for our members to be able to use all the amenities available at the Peanut Reserve.*

*I believe presently 2 cricket clubs use the newly revamped Peanut Farm Pavilion over some summer weekend days and a football club uses the pavilion over some winter days.*

*The Dog Owners Group of St Kilda has cooperated and worked in sharing the oval use with sporting clubs and other uses and has always given priority use to these groups at all times.*

*We have calculated that the Dog Owners Group of St Kilda members spend far more time (conservatively 18,250 man hours per year) on the Peanut Farm than any other group and yet have no access to the Pavilion or oval lighting at any time. This does not include dog owners who are not members but use the Peanut Farm oval.*

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*I request from the Shire the opportunity to use the Peanut Farm Pavilion on various occasions for group meetings and other special events and to be able to use the oval lighting on various occasions.*

*During the winter months, many members of the club working 9 to 5 have to exercise their dogs during night hours. The Peanut Farm is used at this time for many reasons including security for male and female members being there in number, the park is an off-leash zone and is fenced, and the park has rain shelter.*

*The only thing lacking is adequate lighting. This is an obvious hazard. Some dogs wear lighted collars so owners can see them.*

*The new LED oval lights that have been installed have been turned on for various reasons while the members of the Dog Owner Group of St Kilda have been there, and the difference it makes to the overall experience is considerable. Apart from the wellbeing, the safety risks to members and dogs are dramatically reduced.*

*The lighting requirements of the Dog Owners Group of St Kilda during winter months would be at a maximum 2 hours starting at dusk and finishing no later than 7.30 pm. Again, this is a maximum figure and most occasions lights would be off earlier than 7.00 pm*

*These hours would be of little or no concern to local residents and the power costs of the LED lights would be well justified for the community benefits created.*

*The Dog Owners Group of St Kilda understands that the Peanut Farm oval is a shared resource and has practiced this with cooperative workings with the Cricket and Football Clubs and other public. The Dog Owners Group of St Kilda is another group that contribute and add diversity to the City of Port Phillip.*

*The constant presence of dog owners on the oval day and night is a deterrent to graffiti writers and other people doing undesirable things to the amenities in the area.*

*We understand that sporting clubs using the Pavilion during matches and match training would have automatic priority use for the Pavilion.*

*The Committee of the Dog Owners Group of St Kilda are all senior in years, professional and responsible. The Committee overseeing the use of facilities would not delegate their responsibilities. I would make myself personally responsible and can assure you the Dog Owners Group of St Kilda would cause no concerns.*

*I hope my requests on the above matters get the consideration and respect it deserves as a large community group positively contributing to the Shire in many ways.*

*Could you please put this request for the access to the Peanut Farm amenities by our group to the responsible management or Council members.*

## **OFFICER COMMENT**

Peanut Farm Reserve is located in St Kilda. It is 3.11ha and is classified as a municipal open space with a primary character classification of sporting usage. Approximately 90% of the local population in this area live in high density housing which greatly contributes to demand for open space. Peanut Farm Reserve is home to five sporting clubs which utilise the pavilion, courts and oval. Under their licence agreements, sporting clubs pay a licence fee to

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use the sporting facilities at permitted times. The exclusive use at permitted times is to enable training and games to be undertaken in a safe and effective manner.

Council has various permanent and seasonal designated dog off lead areas throughout the municipality. A full list of foreshore and inland park locations is available on our website. Peanut Farm Reserve is already designated as a dog off lead reserve. Whilst the sporting oval is not officially a designated dog park, it has been a popular gathering location for our community to socially connect with their pets outside of sporting operations. A community group has been established called the 'Dog Owners Group of St Kilda', which has over 360 members.

Council aims to maximise the community benefits out of all of our assets. Supporting dog walking at sporting ovals where we have available space, satisfactory ground conditions and appropriate lighting is one way we can do that. Across the municipality there are challenges meeting the growing demand for organised sport with most of our grounds at capacity. Peanut Farm is heavily utilised by sports clubs during the winter months, Mon 4-6pm and Tue-Fri 4pm – 8pm for training, and all weekend for competition. COVID-19 impacts to formal sport have meant that since March clubs have either been unable to train or have been training with reduced numbers, temporarily reducing the use of the park by organised sport. In a normal season there is only 1 mid-week night available for dog walking prior to 8pm.

Lighting on Peanut Farm was upgraded to assist with the growth of sport and assist the condition of the ground with a more even distribution of ground usage at night. Currently lighting on the reserve is only used for sporting activities which is standard process across the municipality (except for Lagoon Reserve where a trial is underway providing lighting for dog walking when Sport is not occurring). Council is developing an Outdoor Sports Lighting Guidelines to formalise standards for sports fields lighting and other opportunities for the community, like dog walking. Council has been gradually upgrading all our sporting reserves from floodlighting (that can impact resident amenity) with modern sports field lighting that has limited light spill outside the playing surface.

The sports lights at Peanut Farm are manually operated by a key system by the sports clubs to turn the lights on and off at the allocated times. The preference to manage sports ground lighting going forward is to install timers and a centrally controlled system that helps us increase non sporting usage and protect the amenity of residents in close proximity to these sporting fields. The recently upgraded pavilion has also been designed so it can be used as a community space when not being used by sport, Officers will work with the 'Dog Owners Group of St Kilda' to gain access into this facility.

The popularity of this oval for sport and dog walking has led to some conflicts between both groups for several years. Most common concerns raised to Officers have been;

- Access to the oval for dog users, as sport occurs there every night
- Off lead dogs on the oval during active sports training sessions
- Dog owners not supervising or cleaning up after dogs (although it is recognised that most of the dog owners do take responsibility)

This has required Local Laws Officers to address some of these concerns on site, and Sport & Recreation Officers are considering a communications plan and site signage to inform the community of the use and access times. This high utilisation of the oval is leading to

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deterioration of the sports field surface. Usage will always need to be closely monitored with ground protection measures proactively required especially in the wet winter months.

The impact of COVID-19 restrictions on winter sports in 2020 means more nights can be made available for dog walking in the short term until sport is allowed to be permitted again.

## **OFFICER RECOMMENDATION**

That Council:

1. Thanks the community for their petition and acknowledge the community benefits and social connectiveness the dog walking community groups provides.
2. Recognises the primary purpose of the Oval and Pavilion is sporting community groups, supporting the exclusive use when permitted by Council.
3. Recognises that the Oval and Pavilion is for broad community use and passive recreation including dog walking is encouraged when sport is not using the facilities.
4. Supports the use of the Pavilion by the dog walking group through the usual booking process, when COVID-19 restrictions are amended to allow the pavilion to reopen.
5. Installs a timer on the lighting system that enables the lights to be turned on and off at programmed times
6. Permits the use of sports ground lighting in 2020 (prior to daylight savings) Monday to Friday, between the hours of 6pm – 8pm for the community use whilst no sport is permitted.
7. Notes in a normal winter season the ground is traditionally only available on a Monday night for non-sporting activities.
8. Requests 'Outdoor Sports Lighting Guidelines' are developed to formalise standards for sports fields lighting and other opportunities for the community, like dog walking.

**TRIM FILE NO:** F20/1

**ATTACHMENTS** Nil