

Management report to Council**Agenda item 6.7****Westgate Park Committee of Management****Council****Presenter:** David Callow, Director Parks and City Greening**14 December 2021****Purpose and background**

1. The purpose of this report is to recommend that the City of Melbourne (CoM) seek Committee of Management status for Westgate Park.

Key issues

2. There is a current and strategic opportunity for Council to pursue Committee of Management status for Westgate Park. The park will be an important component of the future Fishermans Bend open space network and has significant biodiversity and other natural values. Management of the site would directly align with Council objectives within the Open Space Strategy, Parks Policy and Nature in the City Strategy.
3. The community-based not-for-profit organisation Westgate Biodiversity: Bili Nursery and Landcare Incorporated (WBI) has been advocating for over ten years for CoM to assume Committee of Management responsibilities for Westgate Park.
4. The CoM Annual Plan 2019–20 included Annual Plan Initiative 8.6, “Consider and assess future Committee of Management options for Westgate Park”. Management undertook a triple bottom line assessment and due diligence investigations to understand the opportunities, risks and liabilities associated with Westgate Park.
5. The Triple Bottom line assessment indicates that maintenance and capital renewal costs are estimated to be \$900,000 annually to maintain the park at a Level 2 standard, which is equivalent to Royal Park.
6. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has provided in-principle support for CoM to seek Committee of Management status. The site is currently managed by Parks Victoria with significant volunteer input from WBI. A draft Master Plan was developed for the site by Parks Victoria, but has not been finalised. A \$2.5 million Ministerial grant was awarded to the site in 2015 for works related to the draft Master Plan.
7. Significant soil and groundwater contamination exists within the site. The site conditions are detailed in an Environmental Risk Assessment and Site Management Plan that was provided by DELWP. The Site Management Plan procedures and protocols do not appear to limit the existing activities or uses of the site. The procedures and protocols are likely to limit substantial site development in the future.
8. Asset due diligence was completed for the site in September 2021. All assets were assigned replacement values based on the current unit rates for equivalent assets in the CoM Asset Management System. The total cost of parks asset renewal to CoM condition standards and branding is estimated to be \$254,000.

Recommendation from management

9. That Council writes to the State Government to request Committee of Management for Westgate Park under the following arrangements:
 - 9.1. that the State Government provide funding for operating costs at Westgate Park for five years (\$900,000 annually); or
 - 9.2. If funding is not available for operating costs, Council requests that Committee of Management arrangements commence in 2026; and
 - 9.3. Council requests a new funding arrangement is established for the balance of the existing Ministerial funding, such funding proposed to be used for asset renewal and site improvements aligned with the Master Plan including the construction of a depot and nursery facility to support Westgate Biodiversity: Bili Nursery and Landcare Incorporated.

Attachments:

1. Supporting Attachment (Page 2 of 2)

Supporting Attachment

Legal

1. Legal has and will continue to be provided in respect to the subject matter of the report..

Finance

2. The annual open space and tree maintenance costs for the site are estimated to be \$900,000. Costs to renew existing assets to CoM standards are estimated to be \$254,000. The report recommendation outlines proposed financial arrangements that would ensure no financial liability for maintenance for five years and the use of existing Ministerial funding to complete any asset renewal.

Procurement

3. No procurement required at this stage.

Conflict of interest

4. 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.

Health and Safety

5. Due diligence has been undertaken to understand liability associated with the site, particularly in regard to contaminated soils. The site conditions are detailed in an Environmental Risk Assessment and Site Management Plan that was provided by DELWP. The Site Management Plan procedures and protocols do not appear to limit the existing activities or uses of the site which include passive recreation, revegetation, site maintenance and community use.

Stakeholder consultation

6. There has been ongoing stakeholder consultation with Westgate Biodiversity: Bili Nursery and Landcare Incorporated and The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning regarding the site and any changes to Committee of Management responsibilities. Parks Victoria are aware of CoM due diligence activities and interest in Committee of Management status.

Relation to Council policy

7. The Committee of Management recommendation is consistent with the objectives of the Open Space Strategy and Parks Policy to maintain and expand a quality open space network for residents, workers and visitors to the City of Melbourne. The recommendation also supports the achievement of strategic objectives within the Nature in the City Strategy to increase biodiversity.

Corporate social responsibility

8. Westgate Biodiversity: Bili Nursery and Landcare Incorporated (WBI) is a local, not-for-profit community group that actively contributes to the management and sustainability of Westgate Park. It is anticipated that should CoM assume Committee of Management responsibilities for the site, CoM would seek to continue to work with WBI as a key stakeholder and partner.