

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations

Melbourne—Wednesday, 10 March 2021

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

Ms Sarah Connolly—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Mr Tim Smith

WITNESSES

Mr Luke Connell, Manager, Policy, Design and Growth Area Planning, Cardinia Shire Council;

Ms Jo-Anne Elvish, Open Space Planning and Projects Coordinator, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council; and

Mr Phil Murton, Manager, Recreation, Projects and Parks, Yarra Ranges Shire Council.

The CHAIR: Thank you, everyone, for joining us today at this public hearing for the Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations. On behalf of the committee I acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of this land, and we pay our respects to them and their culture; their elders past, present and future; and elders from other communities who may be joining us here today.

I also extend a welcome to members.

This is one of several public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee will be conducting to inform itself about the issues relevant to the inquiry. Before we begin I would like to point out that all evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that you may speak freely without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give; however, it is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments made outside the hearing, even if you are restating what you said during this hearing. You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check and approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

I just want to say a big thankyou on behalf of the committee for taking the time out of your day to meet with us and speak with us. I know that we all have probably learned this last year doing so many Zoom meetings, but can I remind members and witnesses to mute their microphones when not speaking to minimise interference.

I think we will go around and members can introduce themselves to council reps. My name is Sarah Connolly. I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee and I am also the Member for Tarneit. Tarneit is one of the country's largest growth corridors.

Mr MORRIS: I am David Morris, the Deputy Chair and the Member for Mornington.

Mr FOWLES: I am Will Fowles. I am the Member for Burwood. I have no other roles, unlike these other two.

Mr HAMER: And I am Paul Hamer. I am the Member for Box Hill.

Ms GREEN: I am Danielle Green. I am the Member for Yan Yean, Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria and Parliamentary Secretary for Sport, and the others are really important as well. It is a great committee to work on and great to join in.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Danielle. Luke, can we start with you? Just tell us your position there at Cardinia, and we will go Luke, Jo and Phil.

Mr CONNELL: No worries. Thanks, Sarah. My name is Luke Connell. I am the Manager of Policy Design and Growth Area Planning at Cardinia Shire Council.

Ms ELVISH: I am Jo Elvish. I am the Open Space Planning and Projects Coordinator at the Mornington Peninsula shire.

Mr MURTON: Thanks, Sarah. Hi, everyone. My name is Phil Murton. I am the Manager of Recreation, Projects and Parks at Yarra Ranges council.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. I know committee members have a lot of questions to ask you based on your submissions, but I think what is really helpful is if we start off with a 5- to 10-minute presentation. Luke, we would be happy to start with you.

Mr CONNELL: Yes, no worries. More than happy to do that, Sarah. I am just going to give a bit of an introduction, I guess, about Cardinia Shire Council and the premise for our submission, also considering that I

think Cardinia Shire Council took a bit of an approach that there was a consideration of open space and environmental factors with regard to the response to the inquiry. I think whilst we are a growth area council, we are also a large municipality, so I will get into that with a bit of an introduction. Hopefully it will only be a couple of minutes anyway. I have not done a presentation; I am just going to read through, basically, bits and pieces of our submission.

Cardinia Shire Council is a growth area council located approximately 50 kilometres south-east of Melbourne's CBD. Cardinia shire is one of the largest metropolitan councils in Melbourne and has a diversity of landscapes, including established areas, growth areas, townships in the hills, Western Port townships, green wedges and state-significant employment land. The population is currently 126 000 people but is set to grow to over 200 000 people by 2041.

The following submission, as I noted, is a quick response to the inquiry, specifically focusing on the questions that were (a) the effectiveness of current legislation and planning provisions securing environmental infrastructure and (b) examples of best practice and innovative approaches to securing environmental infrastructure in other jurisdictions.

So the first part of our submission was really focused on the current legislation and planning provisions, securing environmental infrastructure. Firstly, we are focusing on passive open space. So when I am referring to passive open space, we are talking about your local parks with your play equipment, your barbecues et cetera. The parks can range from around 4000 square metres up to 1 hectare in size generally in Cardinia. We believe that the precinct structure plans adequately deal with the delivery of passive open space through extensive land use planning and methodologies. So in the first part the focus will be on growth areas, but a flaw that often creeps into PSPs is that the land that nobody wants to develop becomes a passive open space, which often means it comes with numerous issues to do with slope, vegetation or drainage, which often causes councils and developers to have to, I guess, use a lot more money to bring them up to standard, and obviously bring in fill levels. If they are low-lying areas, we have to bring in half a metre of fill across the site et cetera. So that is something that, I guess, in growth areas we have tried to focus a lot more on—to make sure that we have the appropriate land, and not just the land that nobody wants, as our passive open space.

Recent development contributions—and I guess noting that Jo and Phil are not from growth area councils, I will be talking about DCPs and ICPs probably a little bit more than they will be—DCPs, which are development contribution plans, and now what we have is the infrastructure contribution plans, or ICPs, do not collect money for the embellishment of parks, which causes issues for councils to deal with the ongoing maintenance. We have got examples in growth areas. It is a bit of a catch 22 for councils. We get these amazing parks but they might cost maybe \$1 million to \$3 million depending on the developers, but council does not have the money to actually do the maintenance regime et cetera to update and fix those parks. So whilst these create amazing destinations, the actual DCPs and the ICPs do not collect money for ongoing maintenance beyond the initial delivery of that amazing infrastructure.

So, as I said, whilst there is a bit of a catch 22 we do not have millions of dollars for every park that is getting delivered in the growth areas. It is obviously a little bit different in our established areas, but in the growth areas the developers, I guess, use these \$2 million parks as marketing tools and probably brand recognition as well for their developments. So that is why they are spending so much money on the parks. But just to reiterate that point that it means a lot of, I guess, considerations to be had at budget time in how we are going to replenish these parks and fix them from a maintenance perspective.

In non-growth area planning areas, public open space charges—we get the funds from the public open space in the *Subdivision Act 1988*, so again, that is probably a bit easier to manage from a council perspective with the parklands. But one of the issues in established areas when we get high-density developments and we go through regeneration in our townships is that you get greater population. How you can actually provide that open space for the new population is one of the hardest things that we have to deal with, because you cannot just buy 1 hectare and acquire 15 different landowners' properties, so there is that pressure that then comes on our regional parks et cetera and what we do with those. There are some good examples of regional parks in most of our councils today, but the embellishment of and obviously the maintenance and upkeep of those is something very hard.

Often accessibility in our older suburbs was not considered and things like pushing strollers with kids and access for wheelchairs are very hard, which results in a lack of utilisation in some of our older areas. So

upgrading accessibility is something that we are constantly dealing with from an urban design and planning and also environmental perspective within councils at the moment. What is often forgotten is that the linkages and the connectivity to these parks, and infrastructure such as shared paths are what makes these spaces more attractive and accessible to the members of the community as well.

The next focus I guess is on our active open space component of things. In our growth areas active open space, as mentioned before, is delivered through our DCPs and our ICPs, and the planning legislation currently has a few issues with the delivery of that element of active open space. When I am talking about our active open space, I am talking about our sports fields: cricket fields, AFL fields, netball courts, baseball fields, softball fields—all those types of sports that go on there. Using the example that we currently have with underfunding in our DCPs and ICPs, if we are to deliver a two-oval, two-netball facility as part of our DCP, the DCP only covers irrigation for one oval, lighting for one oval, gravel car parks and pavilions with not enough changerooms. This is compounded now with the amazing levels of female involvement in AFL and cricket et cetera, which is something that lots of councils are dealing with. But the requirements for these facilities are based on the population, and from the developers through the delivery of PSPs we are getting a lot more high-density at the moment. This is causing some issues for us, and one of the underlying issues—and I will give an example—is over the last 10 years an increase in household numbers. The Victorian Planning Authority has agreed with this as well. It has gone from 2.8 people per household to 3.1 people over the last decade, so what we are getting is a lot more people but we are not getting as much open space across the municipality. For example, in Cardinia our average lot size is under 400 square metres in our growth area and the actual precinct structure plans plan for about 500-to 550-square-metre averages, so the increase in population is something we are dealing with not just from a recreation environmental perspective but also from a community infrastructure perspective.

In Cardinia we find that the best bushland is sometimes located again on the flat land, which obviously is the best for residential and commercial development. As I said, we are a growth area council so that often gets snapped up and we end up in planning panels, through the strategic planning process, arguing that that land should be protected. But it is an easier bit of dirt to deliver I guess for residential developers, so the state planning process such as PSP development is given precedence over the retention of vegetation and bushland et cetera in some cases and waterways. A more recent issue has been bushfire policy conflicting with vegetation retention, with the ability to remove vegetation to protect communities, which is understandable, but on the flipside bushfire policy can also deter people from building in certain areas, which may result in a higher level of retention of existing vegetation as well. Our native vegetation precinct structure plans in growth areas have historically been a good tool to manage bushland and native vegetation, but there is always an out for developers who are willing to offset vegetation for removal and sometimes the offset values do not deter larger developers to retain that vegetation.

For our creeks and waterways, Melbourne Water tend to be the primary managers of this space through our drainage schemes, especially in Cardinia, and the precinct structure plans are generally good tools at determining the locations of creeks and waterways. Definitely in precinct structure plans we do utilise waterway corridors, and to maximise leaning off passive open space we co-locate them together to maximise and to make a bigger space, I guess. So we do work very well with Melbourne Water in that space, and Melbourne Water have a massive role in terms of vegetating those corridors et cetera. They have come in leaps and bounds, I think, over the last probably decade in that space, and we are getting some beautiful corridors—and we have got many examples in Cardinia of that—with shared paths, bridges and connectivity to our town centres et cetera.

Wildlife corridors are generally delivered through our creeks and waterways in our growing areas. The one example within Cardinia, where council has tried to deliver a southern brown bandicoot corridor, has come under criticism from CFA because CFA has deemed that the corridor, which is a 10-to 15-metre-wide corridor, is a potential fire hazard. There is a bit of conflict in legislation I guess there in that we are trying to protect the southern brown bandicoot by creating corridors yet the CFA—their new name is Fire Rescue Victoria—say it is a fire hazard, so we are in a bit of a conundrum there in terms of balancing what the importance is there.

In terms of best practice initiatives and approaches in our corridor, as I said, there are some good examples within the Cardinia shire corridor now, specifically in our growth areas, to do with Gum Scrub Creek, Deep Creek et cetera, through passive open space, with shared paths and creek and waterway works and wildlife corridors and through the establishment of waterways and vegetation. That is a quick summary from me, so that

basically finishes up my introduction. I will hand over to whoever is next, but I am obviously looking forward to the rest of the discussion today. Thanks, Sarah.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Luke. That was a great summary. Jo.

Ms ELVISH: No worries. I am just going to share my presentation.

Visual presentation.

Ms ELVISH: Thank you for the invitation to the public hearing for the Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations. As mentioned earlier, I am Jo Elvish, the Open Space Planning and Project Coordinator for the Mornington Peninsula shire. The Mornington Peninsula is well known for its natural beauty, with over 190 kilometres of coastline, approximately 4500 hectares of state and national parks and over 2000 hectares of local bushland. With its iconic open space and destinations such as Point Nepean National Park and Arthurs Seat State Park, it is seen as the perfect location for a short break or a weekend away, and that is the way that it has been seen for quite a long time.

However, in recent times there has been a shift or a change in behaviour in relation to the Mornington Peninsula. For example, in 2013 Peninsula Link opened, creating a more accessible peninsula; therefore the peninsula became more desirable as a location to live, not just to visit. As a result, it has led to an increase in development, so additional housing density, but also a lot of our holiday properties are now permanent dwellings, in regard to people living there.

I have put up there a bit of an example of, I guess, a significant change that happened to us, which has happened quite a bit across our northern part of the shire. So in 1996 the population in Mount Martha was around 7500 people. In 2016 that had grown to nearly 18 000, so basically 10 000 more people had moved into this fairly small area. I suppose to give you the perspective of where we were at the time and our planning for what we were expecting, our open space strategy, which was adopted in 2002, forecast that our population in Mount Martha was actually going to be 9200—so well short of what actually happened—with one of those main drivers being the introduction of a more accessible drive via Peninsula Link.

Also I guess another example of what has happened in recent times, which has probably added to this behaviour, is COVID. A lot of people have chosen to work from home, or that is what a lot of us are doing at the moment, so people have moved down to the peninsula—seeing the opportunity to have the lifestyle and also the work-life balance that it can offer.

Apart from the increase in population that we have experienced in recent times, there has also been a change in expectations in regard to open space. There is a higher demand for quality spaces and an expectation that we provide those. Luke did allude to developers building quite amazing spaces. That becomes sort of the benchmark and the expectation, and obviously we do not have that same opportunity at all where we have got developers providing space, let alone the embellishment as well. There is a real shift from the community in regard to their expectation of what they want from their open spaces.

Apart from the quality, it is also the diversity of the spaces. I suppose this is an example that I am giving: for years and years Red Hill and Arthurs Seat have been seen as a bushwalking mecca. In the last five to 10 years we have actually had the Red Hill Riders formed at the base of Red Hill. Just to give you an example, there were 120 000 riders that rode the trails around Arthurs Seat national park in 2020, so since 2017 there has been a 432 per cent increase in the number of riders participating through that bushland. One, it is great to see this emerging sport take off in such numbers, but also it creates quite a bit of conflict in regard to the use of the spaces, given bushwalking has been a priority in the past and the environmental concerns that it raises as well. From a Parks Vic point of view as well there is the management and maintenance of these trails. They currently have access to 20 kilometres of trails, are looking to expand and have also been awarded national events to hold at the location.

In addition to the Red Hill example, we have also seen a plethora of illegal jumps being built in natural reserves right across the shire. This seems to be as a result of, I guess, COVID and kids getting out and exploring, which is wonderful to see but creating some very dangerous jumps, booms and all sorts of things as a way to participate when all other sports were not available.

I guess that was a bit of an overview of where we are at as a shire in relation to what we are seen as being and what our current picture is. We do have those beautiful assets and we do have the amazing natural beauty, but I guess the issue that we have is more the diversity of spaces. Luke mentioned as well, in regard to active and passive spaces, that our active sporting spaces are quite constrained and not of great quality. Also we are lacking accessibility to local parks, not so much our regional parks but more the localised parks, to meet this demand from the population that has moved into the shire.

So how have we proposed or suggested we deal with it? We have come up with what we call three key actions, which we think will help to secure parks and open space for a growing population into the future. The first one I have got here is commitment—commitment from all levels—to the benefit of and the need to ensure that we do provide for and also develop and maintain an amazing open space network. That commitment, we feel, needs to be created through the development of policy, the resourcing of that policy and then funding towards that. An example I have given, which probably shows my age a little bit and how long I have been in the industry, and one of the things that the Mornington Peninsula shire really has respect for is the original *Linking People and Spaces* that was adopted in 2002.

This document did provide a strong position on the future of open space. It looked at, from a regional perspective, where regional parks and where open space needed to be acquired, where the metropolitan trail network was outlined in it, and it also just provided that real commitment from that level and all the organisations and agencies that sit under that, whether it is Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water—all of those sorts of agencies would come together under this document. So what we are suggesting from a policy position is that a strong policy on the future of open space is required, one which plans and acquires what we need for future demand and protects and enhances what we have. Our decisions both at the state and local level will be what our future generations inherit. Therefore the Mornington Peninsula strongly urges the revitalisation of the 2002 *Linking People and Spaces* strategy. Its vision was to achieve a linked network of open space for all to enjoy as part of everyday life.

In regard to resourcing, a policy once developed requires resourcing. It needs to be championed by a particular agency and supported and committed to by all. *Linking People and Spaces* was championed by and delivered by Parks Victoria. Funding: not a lot can be achieved without funding, therefore the Mornington Peninsula requests that a funding stream be dedicated to the acquisition, development and maintenance of parks and open space.

The second key action we would like to see is in regard to partnerships. This montage highlights the array of agencies involved in the provision of open space; therefore we feel that there is a genuine collaboration and commitment required to ensure a quality, accessible and diverse network of open space is achieved that provides maximum benefit to the spaces that are available. If I have got time, an example I can provide is looking at where an open space may have a primary function but may also have secondary functions, and if it is not considered holistically it can be lost. The example which was in our submission was the Melbourne Water outfall land in Rosebud, which was deemed by Melbourne Water to no longer be required from a water management perspective therefore was sold and is now in private ownership. These parcels of open space that are deemed surplus to a primary function need to be assessed on their current secondary function or where future potential may be. In this case, a linear open space connection could have been achieved if the land was retained and seen for its other form of value that it could have provided.

Another example that I can provide in relation to partnerships is in relation to a land swap between Parks Victoria and the Mornington Peninsula shire in relation to land in the Arthurs Seat area where there was a parcel of land. In regard to its location and land use, both council and Parks Vic had a parcel of land, and the best case moving forward within each organisation would be to swap those land parcels. It would provide connectivity of the bushland reserve for Parks Victoria and what they maintain, and the parcel of land that they had would open up opportunities for council to develop more recreational facilities, because that land is cleared for more agricultural use at the moment. But after 10 years of negotiation the land swap was not supported due to a change in the Department of Treasury and Finance policy in relation to land swaps, so now we continue to be in the situation where we are in ownership and managing parcels of land which probably do not fit our needs as well as they could.

The final bit is to do with quality and diversity. In regard to this slide, I guess it does provide a bit of an example of what can occur when you have not got space available. Luke did talk in relation to needing money to be able to develop two ovals for a district level football facility. I guess one thing is with the growth areas, at

least through the PSPs they are able to obtain the land suitably located to be able to actually provide those facilities for that community.

However, on the Mornington Peninsula we have an issue where, as I mentioned earlier, we had this huge increase in population in the Mount Martha area, which created quite a demand for soccer. A soccer club was formed in Mount Martha. It is now over 500 members strong within six years of it forming, but the problem is they did not have a home. We had nowhere to put them. They were even training on dog parks because there was no space for them to train. So what happened was—and it was fortunate that we did receive funding towards this—we were able to build them a four-pitch district-level facility, but the issue, I guess, is not so much the facility of the four pitches, it is more the location in regard to accessibility.

As this overhead shows, this is the Mount Martha Soccer Club, who have been in the new facility—no clubrooms at this stage, they have not been built, but the new pitches were in about 12 months ago—however, they are within 500 metres of the Mornington Soccer Club, who are on the other side of Mornington-Tyabb Road. Mornington Soccer Club are a well-established soccer club that have been around for at least about 40 or 50 years. They have been around for a long time. But once again, the land that they are sitting on is landfill and it creates significant issues for us to actually create quality fields. They are constantly having to move off their fields because of just the quality of the ground they are on—so the quality of these grounds and I guess the accessibility in regard to Mount Martha and not being located within their area of Mount Martha. One other thing that I guess this does highlight is the conflict that happens, because these facilities, because of the space available, are quite close to residential areas. The buffer space is just not there, so that creates another form of conflict between the use and the amenity for the surrounding residents.

To bring my short presentation to an end, if we are able to gain commitment and partnerships, the outcome from that will be that we will be able to deliver a network of quality, diverse and accessible spaces. So that is how we put the three key actions together. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Jo. That was really interesting. I have got lots of questions for you that have come out of that. Phil, over to you.

Visual presentation.

Mr MURTON: So, Yarra Ranges council for a bit of context: our land area is about 250 000 square metres and we have a population of about 160 000, which growing but not to the same level that a number of the growth corridors in Tarneit, Casey and Cardinia would likely be. We are quite a unique municipality in that we have some really distinct areas. We have an urban area through the Lilydale, Mooroolbark, Chirnside Park, Montrose area, which is in the western side of the municipality. We then extend out through the Yarra Valley, through Healesville and beyond that, down through the Upper Yarra, out to Warburton and past there. And much of the Dandenongs fall in the Yarra Ranges council—so places like The Patch, Silvan, Selby, areas such as that. We do share a lot of land with Parks Victoria, with national parks, and also DELWP, with state forest. There is a significant percentage of that 250 000 square metres that we share with PV and DELWP, which provides some positives. There are also some challenges with that as well, but touching on the point from Jo before, the partnerships are critically important.

So there are a few different areas from our submission that we touched on, and there are some similarities with what we have heard from both Jo and Luke already. Often that is related to the area of our municipality that we are talking about—so whether it is the urban area, the hills area or the valley. But what we have seen is that the community's demand, both our own community and that of the broader region and even Victoria, in accessing paths and trails and infrastructure is more for passive recreation rather than active recreation.

We are fortunate that we have got funding for three significant projects, which are our Rivers and Ridges projects. So there is a mountain bike park that is planned for in and around Warburton. That is funded for 110 kilometres of mountain bike trails. That is going through an EES process at the moment. That is the first recreation project to go through an EES process, and my understanding is we are the first council who is going through an EES process as a proponent. We are midway through that process at the moment but hopeful for a favourable outcome. So there are trails on both sides of Warburton in the national park on the Mount Donna Buang side, which is the left-hand side of that picture there, and then on the state forest side, which is the right-hand side.

As Jo touched on before, mountain biking is a hugely popular and growing sport in terms of its popularity. There are destinations popping up all around Australia, and not only does it provide for the local community and region but from a visitation perspective it is proving to be hugely popular in developing jobs and boosting the economy. So Derby for example in Tasmania is seen probably at the moment as the benchmark of destinations. It is a really small old mining town in the north-east of Tasmania. They have built about 110 kilometres worth of trails there. That is a municipality that has 9000 people, and obviously Tasmania has about 400 000 or so people full time. That is generating \$15 million in annual turnover for that region alone and about \$30 million more broadly for Tasmania, and there are three or four other mountain bike destinations in Tasmania that are in play. For the Derby trails, over 60 per cent of their visitation comes from interstate and overseas visits, which are high-yield visitations. But it is also providing opportunities for local people as well and businesses.

The second of our projects is RidgeWalk, which is a walking experience and artistic experience through the Dandenong Ranges. It will deliver some linkages between towns that do not exist at the moment and be a real cultural experience where there is a real strong focus on the history of First Nations people through that region. There has been significant engagement of all the First Nations people in that area that has really helped drive that project.

The third project is the picture on the right, which we have delivered the first component of. It is the Yarra Valley Trail. This is stage 1, which goes from Lilydale to Yarra Glen. We have done 1A out to Yering. We are about to start on the second phase now. That opened at Christmas time—the previous Christmas, so prior to COVID hitting—and in its first year it had in excess of 100 000 visitations. And we know that at least 60 per cent of those were locals. These are in addition to the Lilydale–Warburton trail, which is already functioning and which we know gets about half a million visitors a year. Again well over 60 per cent of those are local users. This is infrastructure in places where connections between townships and schools and other things are not great and often the footpath network is not as good as what it could be either that provides people with the opportunity to recreate and to connect with each other in ways they might not have been able to. That is from a more non-traditional sport perspective—the demand that we are seeing and that is continuing to grow. It is something we are trying to respond to and having to respond to, albeit with some challenges.

The second part is increasing open space provision in landlocked or topographically challenged areas. This probably goes more to our urban areas, where we have seen massive growth, as Luke touched on, in the participation of females in Aussie Rules, soccer and cricket. In my previous life, before joining council, I was the CEO of the Eastern Football Netball League. Their participation has gone from less than 1 per cent—females, as a cohort—to above 30 per cent within six years and is tracking to be 50 per cent within 10 years. Effectively this has been delivered on the same number of ovals that we had six or seven years ago, and so the challenge there is that these ovals are getting more use. The maintenance of them is a real challenge. But also the expectations of the community as to what those ovals should be like has changed. Maybe council and government have been their own worst enemy in some respects, in that what we see now is that people see the grounds that have been redone and rehabilitated—often using warm-season grasses that are smooth and flat and look terrific and look like what people see when they turn the TV on and watch AFL or AFLW—and that is what people's expectations in the community are. Combined with the drought, where we did not see mud for 10 years, people's expectations have probably grown above what they can and should be for council-owned facilities that are used every day of the week to their maximum capacity and that are maintained as best they can in that.

That is in our urban areas, where the provision of new open space is difficult to come by. In other areas we have got places where there are smaller townships, where the general rule of thumb is that if there is a flat or open space not being used already, it is either a hill or there are probably some trees on it, and either of those are prohibitive of that becoming further open space. When people think of places like the Yarra Ranges, they often think that there is heaps of open space everywhere—that it is easy and there is lots of open space. But the actual amount of usable open space we find when we do a recreation and open space strategy review, as we are at the moment, is actually less in most parts of Melbourne, because often, as I said, it is a national park or a state forest or there are other limitations.

The third point that I think has been a positive but also a challenge is the impact of COVID, particularly with the reduction in interstate and overseas travel, on areas that are tourist destinations, such as the Dandenongs, the Yarra Valley or the Upper Yarra, and I am sure Jo sees it down on the Mornington Peninsula as well. The volume of people that have been accessing places has been far in excess of what we have seen previously, and

with that comes the challenges of parking and the other infrastructure that comes with it. There are some terrific economic benefits that flow from it, and I think it has demonstrated that there is a really strong demand for the provision of more tourism-related services in these kinds of regions, but it does come at a cost in terms of upgrading infrastructure that can manage and cope with it and also the maintenance of that. Often the sites that are popular are either on PV or DELWP land—sometimes on council land. Again going back to the partnerships conversation we had before, it is really important that we can all work together and access areas of funding that can enable us to deliver what the community is expecting.

There are just a few points to finish up on which were part of our summary. The lack of infrastructure to support active transport is significant, and the distances required for residents to access suitable open space often limit physical activity, which is where some of that shared user paths and trails work really comes into importance. As I said, we are doing a recreation open space strategy review at the moment, and the research is demonstrating that people who reside close to a larger neighbourhood park engage in significantly more recreational walking per week than those with smaller parks. I think Luke touched on before that often through developer contributions you get left with a small pocket park in the middle of a development, and while they provide a really important service in some aspects, when there is the opportunity to develop bigger places like we have seen in our municipality at Lilydale Lake and Elizabeth Bridge Reserve, they become destinations for people to recreate. And if we are trying to increase physical activity, then that is a really important part.

In terms of accessing new open space, I think most councils are going to be challenged, particularly in a rate-capping environment, with the ability to fund the purchase of land, particularly if that is in areas where there are already strong populations and the cost of land is really high. We know that forecasting out to 2040 we are going to lack the required initial 200 hectares of appropriate open space, and again that falls to the partnership question that we had before. The ability to increase open space provision is more difficult where population growth is largely accommodated through infill and redevelopment of existing infrastructure. Combine population growth with increasing participation, and it is a challenge.

An area particularly close to us is the need to protect things like the Healesville freeway reserve. I heard Jo touch on a piece of land that was owned by Melbourne Water down in I think it was Dromana or Safety Beach not long ago, and these are the areas where often open space planning provision needs to be a long game. Fifty years ahead, 100 years ahead, when Melbourne has a massive population, people will say, ‘Who were the people with a lot of forethought to save those parcels of land?’. Often that thinking is not within our current planning framework, either at council level or at government level, nor is the ability to then fund what might need to occur as part of that. And the last point again, if you just look at Melbourne Water, DELWP, PV, Indigenous groups, the Department of Education and Training—which I think is a really important opportunity—and also local councils, we all need to work together to try and make that the best we can. That is just a brief summary of where we stand in the Yarra Ranges.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Phil. It inspires me to come out and try some of the bushwalking out there. Not the downhill mountain bike riding—not up for that.

Mr MURTON: But that is part of what is changing too. Mountain biking—and that is part of what we are doing through this project—is not an extreme sport. There are green trails and blue trails. It is a bit like skiing; anyone can go skiing and there is a trail or there is a run for everyone to ski on. Mountain biking is exactly the same. It is an important part of increasing the utilisation and getting people feeling comfortable doing it. It is both what is provided but also, yes, how people interact when they are doing it. So do not feel like you cannot do it.

The CHAIR: It is actually quite interesting because out in Tarneit it is just flat as far as the eye can see, and then you have got the You Yangs. But it makes riding your bike around the local streets a little bit easier, and I think the most dangerous thing out of there would be cars or trucks.

Look, I have a question I just want to throw open to all of you, because I think your submissions and your presentations were really impressive and there are certainly some common themes starting to come out of councils, even for really large growth councils and other sort of areas that are struggling to access open space. Phil, as you were saying, for fields and things, the quality may not be very good, or it is actually conservation land or locked up with Parks Victoria. I want to ask you about the Growing Suburbs Fund. Zoe unfortunately could not join us today, but the submission from the Interface Councils group noted that the Growing Suburbs Fund really has been critical since its inception in 2015 to bringing forward a lot of essential community

infrastructure, including parks and open spaces and sporting fields. And certainly out in Tarneit we benefit from that fund. But the submission also states that for the fund to remain effective an annual and consistent funding commitment must be made in line with population growth, the consumer price index and building costs. It also notes that there is a persistent oversubscription of priority projects to the Growing Suburbs Fund—and most certainly in my patch that is a comment that Wyndham City Council makes to me on a regular basis. Can you comment on some of these issues, particularly by reference to recent examples of your LGA and what you want to see us do about the Growing Suburbs Fund?

Mr MURTON: I am happy to start. Look, the Growing Suburbs Fund has been hugely important for Yarra Ranges council. I think it has been going for about six years now. Much of the projects I just mentioned as part of the Rivers and Ridges projects, they were all part of a Growing Suburbs Fund application that was successful, along with funding through the federal government and also council as well and also the community. But, yes, as a recurring funding stream—and I am not saying anything out of school here—we are heavily reliant on external funding to fund pretty much all of our significant infrastructure. There are limitations in what council could do if we were to have to fund solely, whether it is pavilion rebuilds, trails like I have just mentioned before. So the co-contribution to that is hugely important, and anything that can be done that would make that a consistent part of the budget framework would be really welcome, because it would provide some consistency, meaning you would be able to plan for it.

The applications—as they should be—are quite detailed and so it does take a lot of time, effort and resource to put in quality applications which, as I said, they should. But if you know that that is going to be recurring each year, from a resource perspective the appropriate resource allocation can be made to that rather than not knowing what is going to happen. As we have seen recently with a lot of the COVID stimulus, it is terrific, but it is also very challenging and time consuming to get applications ready in the times that are outlined for those. You want to try and be in everything, with the level of detail required and making sure our projects are up to scratch, and particularly at the moment there is a really strong focus on having appropriate community consultation. That is quite time consuming to do it properly, and so sometimes within the timing turnarounds it can be challenging.

The CHAIR: I just want to throw something else in there. What is your feeling about how the pressure on the Growing Suburbs Fund has been exacerbated by the recent inclusion of peri-urban councils into that fund? So it has sort of increased the fund a bit but more councils can now apply.

Mr CONNELL: Yes. Well, I guess I can answer that. The reality is we are all trying to do our funding applications. I think they are due today, actually, so everyone is working busily at the moment. But that really has not been a consideration, I guess, in us applying this year, so we have not really thought about it too much or if any. It has not actually come up in any conversations within our council. But I think, reiterating what Phil just alluded to, it is a really important process. Using the examples I did before, you know, we rely on GSF funding to deliver the rest of our active open spaces in our growth areas et cetera because in our most recent PSP that has been approved, at Pakenham East, we calculated that we have got a shortfall of nearly \$30 million from what the ICP gives us. So we have to find an extra \$30 million to deliver what Phil said: our pavilions, our car parks, extra lighting, turf et cetera. So, yes, it is such an important part of our yearly cycle, just to try to get some money and top up what we can. And also in a rate-capping environment its importance is exacerbated again, I think.

Ms ELVISH: In relation to, I guess, the Mornington Peninsula, we have been fortunate we have received some funding through the GSF. Probably one of the biggest issues we have—Phil did mention it as well, which I would support—is the ability to be shovel-ready with your projects and have everything lined up so that the application is the best it can be, so hopefully it is successful. And then also it is the dollar commitment to match. From a council perspective that is often where we are very limited on what we can put up because we have only got so much funding that we can put towards certain projects. So often we have to pick projects that suit what we actually have in our budget, and with the rate capping and so forth that has become more of an issue. We have been a bit cautious this year also—we have been unsure about the level of rate income we will receive because of COVID and so forth. So all of those factors have had a significant impact on what we can apply for.

I guess for us one of the issues we have is when you talk about growing suburbs and growing populations we seem to be chasing our tail. It is the population that has already arrived that we need to cater for; it is not what

we are envisaging into the future. We are looking at that as well, but I guess the example of the Mount Martha soccer—

You know, we have just finished our *Sports Capacity Plan* that looked at eight sports field-based sports. Now we are extending it out to 24 sports, and we are looking at what we need to do to build the capacity in those sports and where we are under-provided for, where we may be over-provided in some sports and where we can transition some facilities into other types of sports. But one of the big-ticket items for us is that we have nominated the need to purchase land to create a regional sporting precinct similar to, I guess, Casey Fields and so forth but not to that level. The Mornington Peninsula does not need it because it will not have the same level of population as Casey, but it does need to look at supporting some of those sports that you would provide at a municipality level, so it is like your hockey and your baseball and your softball and all of those sports that are not so much at a district level—they are at a broader level.

And then also through our *Sports Capacity Plan* we have nominated that in certain areas we need to purchase additional land to be able to cater for certain sports. What I am sort of getting to is one of our biggest issues is acquiring land so that we can provide these facilities. And then on top of that obviously it is actually what you do. Once we do acquire it—and it may take us quite a long time to afford to be able to acquire it—then it is probably a 20-year or more process to actually develop it into the facilities. That population is well and truly here, to be catering for something that we are looking at sort of 20 to 30 years from now, and that is what concerns us.

We are currently looking at how to provide for soccer in Somerville. We do have a parcel of land that we could use. It is not big enough. It is the wrong shape. It does not have main road connectivity. All these things that if I had—because I did work at Casey for a while, so I had the luxury of being able to do a greenfield development and pick the location and the size and the land. But apart from all of that, its primary function is a retarding basin. So in order for it to work to the quality that we need it to work it is going to be very difficult to achieve that with the space that we have on this site. So obviously now we are looking at maybe we need to acquire land, which gets council really nervous because we just, one, do not have the time to spend—we have got the time to look to find the right parcel of land, but then affording that parcel of land and then developing is quite a difficult process. We are in green wedge, so we have got restrictions happening in regard to land use, and then obviously in the areas that are more residential zoned the land is quite expensive, especially when you are looking at 10 hectares or more to be able to provide these facilities. Sport is an expensive land take, and that is the issue that we are having. I am not sure how that fits in with the Growing Suburbs Fund. I know it is great for infrastructure and development and those sorts of things—which is great when we have got the land—but what we are struggling with is having the land to start with to be able to do some of these developments.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr MORRIS: I just want to make a couple of editorial comments. The first one is a bit facetious, but Jo's last comment about soccer provision in Somerville just goes to show the difference between the old shire of Mornington, which did actually invest in land and built these facilities, and the shire of Hastings, which basically did not, and now we are trying to catch up with what did not occur 30 years ago. It is also a half-serious comment because the old shire of Mornington at one stage owned 10 per cent of the municipality. Land was cheap and they saw the opportunity buy it, so this particular patch was probably pretty lucky. But there are so many other parts of the state that either did not have the foresight or the resources to purchase that land, and I think that is a fair comment, which leads me to the next point—and these are editorial comments—and then I will come to a question. I just want to get them out because I think it is important.

Jo's point about Melbourne Water land: members may not appreciate it, and I am assuming we are talking about the same parcel, but there is a lot of Melbourne Water land associated with the south-eastern outfall. That was previously in public hands, and they are seeking to off-load it or have off-loaded it, depending on the parcel. I think this is an important issue, and it is something I would suggest we should give consideration to, because the current Treasury policy is highest and best value, which is not always—frequently it is not—the best outcome for communities, and that is something I think as governments we have moved away from focusing on a little bit too much. So I am just flagging that as something we should throw around in terms of recommendations.

The other point I wanted to make certainly is important on the peninsula but equally, I think, in inner Melbourne as well, where we have got a rapidly growing population in established areas. With Glen Eira it is

because of increased density—subdivision of quarter-acre blocks into eighth-acre blocks or 400-metre blocks or whatever. In places like Rosebud it is more about the holiday homes turning into permanent accommodation and recreational facilities that were built to accommodate a small permanent population and not accommodate all the summer people that came down, lived in their holiday homes during summer and went home again. They did not need to play footy, they did not need to play soccer or golf or anything else, probably; they just wanted to relax. I think they are important issues that we need to keep focused on as part of the inquiry. There is concern. Sorry for taking your time to get those on the record, but I just wanted to make sure that we had them there.

Can I ask a question of Luke to start with. The gap between the income from the PSPs and the actual cost of provision of infrastructure—and you just threw out a figure of \$30 million for one area—the short question, I guess, is why?

Mr CONNELL: Yes. The conversations we have been having with the Victorian Planning Authority and also DELWP, which is the Department of Land, Water and Planning, is that the recreation component is a contribution; it is not a fully funded component of it. So there is a cap on the recreation component that the state government has put in place. So that is why there is a shortfall, and the VPA through their processes, especially using Pakenham East's precinct structure plan, have also noted a shortfall. Our costings may be slightly different in terms of the reality of what we cost versus what an assumption-based cost is. So I think the VPA noted that there was probably a \$15 million shortfall, but our costings associated with upgrades to pavilions—more change rooms et cetera due to female participation in sport—was quite different. So yes, it is a contribution and it is not a 100 per cent cost recovery is the answer that we have been getting.

Mr MORRIS: From a policy approach that seems quite reasonable, but is there scope to refine the system so that at least you are comparing apples with apples? For example, if you are not factoring in the cost of female change rooms—and that is an issue right across the state, but if we are building new stuff and we have got an assumption that only boys play footy, clearly it is a faulty assumption.

Mr CONNELL: Yes. The new ICP system, which has taken over the DCP system—so the ICP system is probably 18 months to two years old—is based on benchmarking costs. So what happens in the western growth areas and the northern growth areas gets the same costing analysis put to it as the south-east growth corridors as well. So to make it a more standardised approach, they have a benchmarking costs process in place. It is a one-size-fits-all approach. Hopefully—the plan was to streamline the development in growth areas and not get very convoluted, and get site-specific outcomes, but it does have its shortfalls in that regard, David.

Developing out where it is flat—I think as Sarah mentioned out in Tarnait and those growth areas out here—versus in Casey and Cardinia, where we have quite sloping land, we have a lot heavier soils et cetera, there can be additional costs in place. It does not factor in things like slope, so if you have got to cut and fill your site, it does not factor in that stuff either. Everything is on a 2D basis basically, so there is no consideration of external elements. Every council area is a little bit different. The benchmarking process I think has made it clearer, but it does expose councils to the shortfalls of delivery of community infrastructure.

Mr MORRIS: Thanks for that.

The CHAIR: Danielle.

Ms GREEN: Thanks for some great presentations. There were a couple of things. Just off the bat, the chair of the Reserve Bank post COVID has been exhorting all levels of government to borrow to fund infrastructure. What do you think the barriers are to local government doing that as well at the moment, when money has never been cheaper, to get ahead of the game?

Mr MURTON: I will have a go at this. Not being from our finance department, but my understanding is that as part of the reporting back to the state government there are loan-to-income ratios that need to be adhered to. I know, particularly in our example, that our council falls close to that line already. So the ability to fund to borrow at any significant level without putting I will use the term credit rating—not knowing what the exact term is—at risk is where the feedback from our finance team has been with regard to that.

Ms GREEN: The state government had offered councils the opportunity to access our borrowing rates. It may be something you do not know, but my experience is a number of councils chose not to go down that path. Do you know if your councils did?

Mr CONNELL: No. I am not aware for our council, sorry.

Mr MURTON: I know we investigated it, but the determination was not to.

Ms ELVISH: I am not 100 per cent sure with the Mornington Peninsula either, apart from that I think that we may have borrowed for our aquatic centre, which is currently being built. We were not that successful at obtaining funding, and it was a commitment that we would deliver the facility for our community. It was well overdue, and obviously aquatic centres are a tad expensive. So that is my understanding.

Ms GREEN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Will.

Mr FOWLES: Thank you, Chair. I have got questions for each of our presenters. Are we going one question and rotate or are we going to blast through each member's block?

The CHAIR: I am easy. Let us go through one question at a time. I note that we should be breaking at 11.30 for morning tea, but with one council not attending this session and Zoe not being in attendance I thought, if everyone is comfortable, we could work through morning tea and perhaps we may not need the session after. So I guess for Luke, Joe and Phil, not making you hang around for morning tea and then coming back, if everyone is comfortable with that approach.

Mr FOWLES: Very.

Ms GREEN: I am happy.

Mr FOWLES: A quick one to start, then. Luke, you spoke about the funding from these development contributions in whatever form not covering the maintenance of these new facilities. Is that not covered by the increase in the rates base as a result of new properties coming online?

Mr CONNELL: Yes, that definitely is part of that coverage as well. One of the issues obviously being is that there is a coverage of rates, there is coverage of the open space contributions that we receive through the subdivisions process et cetera; it is the costs that councils cannot cover, in terms of generally when councils deliver open space it has a barbecue, it has some play equipment et cetera and a few bins—this is water sensitive urban design delivery. As I said before in my introduction, it is a catch 22. They are amazing facilities. I do not think any council officer would walk away from that. It is the uniqueness. It is locating the replacement of some of the infrastructure that they put in. Sometimes the developers source things from overseas in terms of their equipment—we cannot source them locally. Generally, councils like to source the replacement of their infrastructure locally to support the local community and economy. The unforeseen costs that we do not budget for in council is the hard part of that, Will. A \$250 000 park versus a \$2 million to \$3 million park is just astronomical, and that is something that we see in the growth areas only. We do not see that in our established areas. So, yes, I think you are correct in your statement that the increase in rates does fund a component of that, but council may have also planned for that increase in rates for somewhere else in the municipality as well, just on yearly budgets.

Mr FOWLES: Yes, I am not sure that I am entirely convinced by that—with respect. Is it not the case that new-to-municipality properties should not be relied upon to fund pre-existing infrastructure other than in proportion to the new number of residences that they represent? That is, there should be an incremental benefit to council's bottom line from new-to-municipality residences before you take into account new-to-municipality infrastructure maintenance costs. If that is the case, if you are rolling out a housing estate, and let us say it is 400 new dwellings and there is a new \$3 million park, I am surprised to hear that the rates revenue would not more than cover the maintenance costs of that new environmental infrastructure.

Mr CONNELL: Not being involved in the distribution of rates and the finance, the intel there, I cannot answer your question clearly, Will. Obviously, there is no doubt there is an increase in rates revenue in that space. The distribution of where that finance ends is not something that my department is involved in.

Mr FOWLES: Sure. If I can just go to the efficiency of the mechanisms that we have got, the ICP—I think was the acronym—has been rolling out for 18 months to two years. How is that going? Do we have the most

efficient system of collection of revenue for environmental infrastructure and the dispersion of revenue for environmental infrastructure?

Mr CONNELL: The ICP system, whilst being only 18 months old, not many councils have collected any money with them yet, because the way the systems work is that when developers deliver, they generally get credits at the start of the collection of an IPC or a DCP, so we do not see much cash in those ICP or DCP fundings for probably the first five to 10 years. So it is probably too early to say whether the ICP system is working. There have been a lot of reiterations already. I think there have probably been two or three reviews of the ICP system already to do with the purchasing of land and also infrastructure caps and the benchmarking process.

I cannot comment on the efficiency yet because we have not seen the legalities and the actual delivery of ICPs yet, but it is definitely I think an improvement. As I mentioned before in my response before to David, I think it was, everything is benchmarked, so you know what you are in for. It is not a gamble every time a new suburb of 25 000 people is established and you have to go to a three-week independent panel trying to argue the costs et cetera. You know what you are in for, and I think that gives not only the developers but also council certainty of what we have to budget and plan for moving forward. I generally do think the intent is better with the ICPs; we just have not seen the outcomes yet.

Mr FOWLES: Thanks.

The CHAIR: Paul.

Mr HAMER: Thanks. I also wanted to I guess tease out some questions in relation to the funding streams, and then I also have a specific question that was raised in Phil's presentation. I guess my first question is: building on the questions that David asked in relation to the cap on the environmental infrastructure spend and the amount of money that you are raising from the ICP, how in your mind would that be resolved? What would be a recommendation that you could put forward in this committee to actually improve that situation in the long term? You mentioned the lack of available land and not enough money to actually build the infrastructure, but if the shortfall is what you are saying it is, if that was all captured through the ICP and was a direct charge to new households, that would significantly change I guess the economics for the developer and for the new householder. So I was just wondering if you have any thoughts as to what in the system could change to improve that.

Mr CONNELL: Yes, you are 100 per cent right, Paul. The economics of increasing those charges would impact the developability and probably impact the affordability of housing in our new areas as well. So increasing those charges may have a direct impact on people being able to purchase their first homes or whatever it might be. That is a definite concern, because we want to be able to still provide that housing diversity and that difference pricepoint I guess in our municipality. Increasing the charge rate is probably not something that is going to—

Whilst it would help, it is going to impact somewhere else, and that is the concern that we have. There are other funding mechanisms. You have probably heard of GAIC, which is the growth area infrastructure charge. Now, that is generally put aside for state government-scale projects, but we do not see a lot of that money in the south-east at the moment. So using some of that money to potentially deliver some state government infrastructure in terms of state regional parks—I think Jo mentioned Casey Fields before as an example, but that is actually a council facility—and some more regional-scale funding where maybe GAIC can pitch in, because GAIC, from what we have witnessed from the south-east, generally gets spent on roads. A lot of it has been probably focused on the western growth area fronts at the moment, but we are seeing it for upgrades to interchanges, which is completely relevant, and we do not object to that, but we just think that money could be utilised to help the shortfall in environmental or I guess our active open space infrastructure. That would be one suggestion, because that collection is already occurring, so it might be changing I guess the guidelines associated with the spend on GAIC infrastructure.

Mr HAMER: Can it not be used for environmental infrastructure? I thought it could be.

Mr CONNELL: My understanding with GAIC is that it has to be state infrastructure. So when we are talking about the local infrastructure, we are talking about district infrastructure which falls under council's remit, not the state government. So yes, we might have to look at the guidelines associated with GAIC—that

would be my suggestion. I think they are collecting about \$112 000 per hectare—it is \$110 000 to \$112 000 a hectare that developers have to pay. And from speaking to developers—I do not want to speak on behalf of them, but a lot of them would like to see that money invested where they are paying for it as well, not just going into a pool that sits across the seven growth areas. You know, if the charge is paid for in the south-east, it should be spent in the south-east.

Ms GREEN: Can I just say that there is environmental infrastructure coming through with GAIC with a lot of the work-in-kind agreements with the developers. That has only been my experience in the north.

Mr CONNELL: That is good to hear.

Mr HAMER: Jo, did you have a response to my question?

Ms ELVISH: Yes. As I said, before I was with the Mornington Peninsula shire I was with the City of Casey. What Luke was saying was there is a gap between, I guess, the district-level facilities and other facilities that need to be provided that might not be regional parks or parks that are run as Crown land. For instance, when a PSP is done it triggers your main sports of football, cricket, tennis and so forth. But your other sports which are done in a broader catchment, such as I mentioned before—things like hockey, softball, baseball and those sorts of things—are the difficult ones to provide for. Or when you are providing for your pathways in a sport, you tend to have a higher-level facility—for football or soccer you have a higher-level facility like they have developed at Casey Fields, which is the pathway for that sport, given the population they have. So I guess with GAIC, what I can hear Luke suggesting is it is about being able to fund these activities that are not state level but that are not local or district level either; they sit in between—they are stuck in this area. And once again it does take up a lot of land space to be able to provide for those, so that would be great to see from that perspective.

On the Mornington Peninsula we are in the same boat, but we do not have access to GAIC. For instance, at the moment we have endorsed or recommended that we need to purchase a very large—probably around 50 to 70 hectares—site, hopefully as centrally as we can in the Mornington Peninsula to provide for those sorts of sports that are not just the local sports but are just provided for more as a municipal-level-type activity. I would like to know where we sit in regard to gaining funding when we are not in this situation of being able to draw a huge amount of funds from developer contributions. As David Morris mentioned before, our holiday homes are becoming permanent homes; there is no development actually occurring—it is just that the population is becoming more settled there and demanding these activities and these sports. And then adding on to that also is obviously some level of population increase, but our population increase probably happened 10 years ago, and now we need to play catch-up in regard to that provision.

Mr HAMER: Can I ask another follow-up question? This one is probably related to something that Phil raised. I am interested in your comment about the use of what you might call regional parks or larger parks and the use of those parks compared to pocket parks, how they would be used in a PSP and what a developer might provide. They would provide a section of their development and develop a section of park, but the utilisation of environmental infrastructure is a lot higher if it is, in a way I guess, pooled together and put into a regional park. I was just wondering: obviously each of them have benefits, but what changes might need to be made to the development of PSPs or the planning system or the ICP system that could focus that development on regional development, given that for many developers, as I think you mentioned, it is going to be part of their sales pitch that they have got this parkland perhaps in the middle of the development? I am not sure if you have got any thoughts.

Mr MURTON: Yes, from our experience, and Luke and Jo might be able to jump in, we do not have a whole lot of open land sites for development. The one that we are working with at the moment is mainly around the old Lilydale quarry. They are filling up the quarry, and then they are going to develop the land to develop a new suburb. Certainly through that our push has been to try and have fewer but bigger parks, knowing the trends that we see. Pocket parks play a terrific role, and I think during COVID with the 5-kilometre lockdown we saw them probably become even more important to their local communities. But we have got destinations in our municipality like Lilydale Lake—if you think of things in Melbourne like the Tan, or in Caulfield like Central Park—where people can go for a decent walk, where they are not going across driveways, across roads, they can have their dog and there is a nice natural environment for them to be part of. People will travel significant distances to access those places, and I think the further you go out from Melbourne we do not have quite as many of those. We are not going to be able to have them within a small distance of every person, but

we do have a significant number of small pocket parks. How you plan for that, Paul, I am not too sure, because often the developments happen in smaller areas, and so you are looking for the development contribution of open space from each of those individual parcels. So how do you collectively bring all those together? I am not sure exactly what the answer is. But certainly from a utilisation perspective, where there are designated walking paths into bigger open space areas, it leads to better outcomes for the community.

We have got a good example at the moment. At our council meeting last night a petition came up about some land at an old school that is up for sale at the moment—and I heard David mention before about the highest and best bidder—and there is a petition from the community to council to look to buy that land, but it is in an area that has high levels of subdivision in Kilsyth. It will probably be quite expensive. We have been fortunate that we have been leased an area, where the old oval was, for us to be able to use as usable open space. But, yes, there is a real community push at the moment to try and get access to that land on a more permanent basis.

As the density of Melbourne increases and as some of our eastern suburbs might become more like what has happened to Box Hill and what is happening in Ringwood, with a proliferation of apartments and a further increasing density of living, these big tracts of open spaces are going to be hugely valuable. I am not too sure I answered your question directly there, Paul. But from a developer perspective, where there are big parcels, they are obviously reluctant to give up great big parcels of developable land. From what I have seen out in Casey and Cardinia, they have generally been able to have designated areas, particularly for formal sport, which generally have been able to be developed for the community's use.

Ms ELVISH: I guess from a Mornington Peninsula perspective I completely agree with what has just been said in relation to having the larger parks. Our larger parks that we can offer are often our sporting reserves. So what we are working towards, and one of our principles in our sports capacity plan, is to ensure that we can provide for the passive needs of open space within our sporting facilities—so, for example, as Phil mentioned, a loop trail around the boundary, if we can fit it in. The issue we have is that we do not have good buffer space. Most of our sports ovals are quite close in.

We have just recently done a master plan for Emil Madsen Reserve in Mount Eliza, which is a very large park. It is one of our largest sporting reserves, and they are the sorts of things that are really starting to lift the amenity of our sports reserves to be more than just sport. Often with a sports reserve you just build the facilities that are required for sport and do not look at it as a holistic opportunity of how it can be attractive, providing your playground, your skate facility and so forth.

Probably another thing I would raise that has become quite an issue is dogs and dog parks. People have smaller backyards and they want to walk their dogs, so have areas where there are looped paths where they can walk dogs on leads—but also they like to let the dogs off lead, and having dog parks that are fenced off-leash dog areas, if you put that into a passive park, to create one of those you should have at least half a hectare of space. One of the things that I know works best is that they should be in a park which offers other opportunities as well, like a play space and so forth. The idea of trying to get these larger passive spaces is to provide a diversity of opportunities and activities within that park, and what we have in the shire is a lot of our parks are quite small. They are your traditional local park playground that were provided that might be one or two house blocks, which really just allows you to provide the bare minimum of a play area and seating and that is about all. They do not attract that long stay, they just attract people maybe for just a short stay of 30 minutes or so. It is the larger parks that, as Phil said, people are willing to drive to because it draws them there and they tend to stay longer and enjoy the park and what it has to offer.

One thing that I can say from a growth area perspective is sometimes if you want to create a larger park, try to link your encumbered land with unencumbered land. Say for instance your developer is going to give you half a hectare of land but also has to create a retarding basin of space or has a waterway that is running through the development. One opportunity is to link those two. It is working in partnership with Melbourne Water or whoever the other land agency is, because you can lend off and make a park a larger space, being able to lend off whatever else the function of that other space is at the same time. You are starting to see that a lot more where, especially I guess through Casey, where there is a lot of drainage required, there are a lot of waterways and pocket parks sitting off those, because then they have got the connectivity. People can come along a trail to the park and go that way. So that is something else, but from a Mornington perspective we will have to rely a lot on our sports reserves to provide that passive amenity. The opportunity to buy decent-sized parks is difficult.

Probably one other thing though that we are looking towards is accessing and utilising our foreshore better. We have obviously 190 kilometres of it, and especially on the Port Phillip side there are some activity node areas that could be upgraded if we had the funds to be able to do that. The foreshore is central to a lot of these communities. It is what they value and where they like to go to, and there are some really great opportunities in Dromana, Rosebud and along there that could be done. I know that there has been some work and it has been highly successful, so that is something else that I think would work for creating these larger passive park areas.

The CHAIR: I am just pausing there to see if there is anyone else that wants to add anything to that.

Mr FOWLES: If I can just ask a general question, there has obviously been a lot of response to the massive growth in popularity of mountain biking. These things are often reactive, but is any work being done by any of your respective councils to identify what that next trend is going to be?

Ms ELVISH: I laugh, because we are currently doing a sports capacity plan and one of the strong sports that has come out on the peninsula is petanque, so there you go. That is something a bit different.

Mr FOWLES: That is very peninsula, David.

Ms ELVISH: They like their wine and cheese.

Mr MORRIS: I am going to an opening on Friday at Mount Martha, actually.

Mr FOWLES: Of course you are.

Ms ELVISH: That is great. There are about 23 clubs across Victoria, around about, and the Mornington Peninsula has seven, so it has become quite unique on the peninsula. And it is those sorts of things that we are looking at to strengthen where we have relationships or where we would have desires already. So that to us is something that is emerging. Our soccer, which has been emerging, women's sport, women's AFL and so forth, are the common ones that are coming through. As far as the future, I still really think it is access to things that have not the same level of time commitment as some of our traditional sports, so moving away a little bit—the community has moved away from structured, so they like to get out and experience and I think that is just going to continue to grow. I feel that from COVID there has been quite an interest in getting out and connecting with nature and utilising some of those regional parks. At one close to me, which is Frankston reservoir, there have been so many people utilising that space during COVID and I do not think it is going to be lost. I think it has ignited an interest, and I think that will continue to be there. I do not think it is going to go away when people go back to normal lives. I think they will continue to enjoy that side of it because they have now opened up their eyes to other opportunities such as that.

Mr FOWLES: And, Luke, are we going to see a Pakenham dog club, do you think?

Mr CONNELL: I will take that to the council meeting next week and see what the uptake is like, Will, yes. I am not sure about Pakenham. I think the focus is golf and motor racing tracks at the moment.

Mr FOWLES: Just quickly, for Luke and Phil, are there any other emerging trends that we ought to keep an eye on?

Mr MURTON: For me, we mentioned mountain bikes earlier, but it is cycling in general. I do not know if anyone here has ever ridden an e-bike, but they are changing accessibility and how people will use our shared user paths. As a personal example, I have got a 70-year-old mother-in-law who I have never seen do exercise. She bought an e-bike and now rides like 2 hours a day, three days a week. So it is bringing a cohort of people back to recreation that have not been there or are reluctant to do it. If you live in the Dandenongs and you have not wanted to ride a bike because you have to ride up a hill every second street you go down, now on an e-bike it suddenly makes that much more accessible.

So whether it is mountain biking, gravel riding or road racing, all of those various things that are to do with bikes, and then also from an active transport perspective, I think if you have got less than a 10- to 20-kilometre commute and if we have got the appropriate infrastructure in place from a shared user path perspective, rather than sit in your car people would get on their e-bike knowing that they going to get to work without much of a sweat. If they have to ride up hills on the way home, it is not going to be that much of a stretch. I think in the next 10 years and as the cost of e-bikes comes down significantly—five years ago, it was really prohibitive;

now you can pick one up at Anaconda for less than \$1000, which is still a lot of money, but that is going to keep coming down as it continues—e-bikes are something which will change how people commute and how they recreate pretty significantly.

Ms GREEN: Sarah, can I just add in there—

The CHAIR: I am smiling. I just love it: ‘In hilly areas, you need an e-bike’.

Ms GREEN: Phil is spot on. However, what it is going to mean—and I support what Victoria Walks says too—is that we will not be able to have shared user paths for those purposes anymore. We are going to have to have grade separation between walkers and cyclists, because vulnerable users like little kids and older people who do not want to get on the e-bike will then be totally displaced.

Mr FOWLES: Yes, I would certainly second that. The issue we have got in Burwood is e-bikes that have been chipped up to travel at 50 kilometres an hour, zipping in and around the schoolkids who are using the bike track to walk to primary school and that, so that is something that fills me with great fear and trepidation.

Ms GREEN: And the scooters will be coming too.

Mr FOWLES: Yes.

The CHAIR: Out in the western suburbs, Will, we call them hoons. Hoons on a bike.

Mr FOWLES: Boons.

The CHAIR: Members, have you got any other questions to ask? David, have you got another question? You are nodding.

Mr MORRIS: Yes. I have got a couple. I want to come back to Phil just on the points that Will was making and just pursue that. But I might ask a quicker one—well, hopefully a quicker one—first. Phil, you mentioned the EES on the trail. What was the trigger for that?

Mr MURTON: We put in to try and get some comment on whether we needed to put one through. We expected that would get a decision, and the advice from DELWP at the time was that we were likely to get approval but with conditions. We had already done a huge amount of work on the environmental impacts and the other impacts associated with it. Why it went to an EES, we are not exactly sure. I think there are some sensitivities with the project. I think the popularity of mountain bikes across Victoria probably lent itself to this being the one that was the most significantly funded and the biggest development. We are doing a lot of the work that will help other potential developments later on, so there may have been a little bit from the minister of, ‘Okay. If we are going to get a proliferation of mountain bikes, let’s do some significant research into what the impacts and effects might be’. So I think that was where it possibly came from. For us, it is costing a lot of money and it is taking a lot of time, but I think at least at the end of it we will be able to put our hands on our hearts and say we are building the right product in the right place and taking in all of the right concerns, understanding that there was some community concern, particularly around the trails in the national park. So, it has been—

Mr MORRIS: I suspect it is an area that is going to be—I do not think it will be the last one, let’s put it that way.

Mr MURTON: No.

Mr MORRIS: I am already seeing some of my local groups saying, ‘Well, hang on. We need an EES on this or that or something else’.

Mr MURTON: Yes. I think there is something like \$150 million worth of mountain bike infrastructure currently funded across Australia, and some places are not having to go through probably quite as many planning processes. Obviously in Victoria at the moment there are various proposals. There are some smaller, minor-scale works that have been done. And, look, to be perfectly honest, historically mountain bikers have not been their own best friend. Jo will probably vouch for this down at Red Hill. The trails have often been built in the wrong places because they were just the most accessible places, and modern trail building done by experts is completely different to how most mountain bike tracks that have been constructed up until now, yet there is

the hangover of what that has done, either from a social or environmental perspective, and we are trying to change that mentality.

Mr MORRIS: Sarah, I mentioned that I want to come back to the follow-up about maintenance costs and so on, and I will address my question to Luke, but if Jo or Phil have got some thoughts on it, I would love to hear from them. When you were talking before, Luke, I was thinking back to a conversation I had with Murrindindi shire—and Danielle will be across this as well—in the aftermath of Black Saturday. There was a huge amount of money on the table for rebuilding lots of the facilities they had lost, and they were basically saying to me, ‘We can’t afford to build all these new facilities because we can’t finance the depreciation of them’. In listening to what is being said about the ongoing costs and keeping developer-provided infrastructure in a serviceable condition and replacing the bits and pieces when necessary, or the equipment when necessary, are we getting to a point with councils like Cardinia where given the level of provision is relatively high in historic terms—I am thinking over the last 100 years—we are likely to get to a point where the depreciation burden or the maintenance burden exceeds the capacity to pay? Is that a factor? Is that a consideration?

Mr CONNELL: My team is not directly involved in the maintenance, David, of that, but yes, you do hear those conversations had about the depreciation. You know, we have got hundreds of local parks in Cardinia. Like Mornington and also Yarra Ranges we are probably the two largest metropolitan councils, and we spread miles and miles and miles. It would take us an hour to drive from one end to the other—in some cases even more. So I think it is a historical thing. It is trying to keep up. It is a resource-based thing. Do we have the teams that can actually resource and go visit the sites and maintain them? A lot of our complaints come from the public, and they are the ones that tell us that something is broken—because we cannot get across to every park every day, obviously, to make sure that everything is serviceable at that point in time.

So I do not know the answer to your question, David, 100 per cent—you know, is that depreciation and can we actually service it? Where is that sweet spot, I guess? But jeez, we will have a fair crack at it, as councils do. You know, our parks are one of our pride points, I guess, and we will have a fair crack at trying to keep and maintain them et cetera and do it under-resourced or whatever we have to do. It is a very passionate part of councils, I guess, and even more so in the COVID period. It has been discussed already, the utilisation of our parks during COVID, even continuing now with people still working from home. And where do they walk in their lunchbreaks? Sometimes the parks—they take their kids there or whatever—so I think we have seen some of the highest utilisation rates of our parks in the last 12 months, and that has put a lot more pressure on us as well.

So I think it is going to be a real balancing act moving forward about how we resource that, and can we actually maintain them—especially more for Cardinia than probably Mornington and Yarra Ranges, because we are getting these developer-built parks that are amazingly extravagant. But do we have the expertise to replace them? As I said before, can we source some of these products from Germany or wherever else that the Lendleases and the Stocklands and the Mirvac are delivering? They have got their contacts, but we cannot get them at the same price sometimes as they can. They are some of the issues that we have. So, Jo or Phil?

Mr MURTON: We are probably pretty fortunate that in our department we have got both the teams that build them and the team that maintains them, so there is always someone in one ear saying, ‘How are we going to maintain this?’. It is something that I think council is maturing in its response to, the development and the renewal of facilities, about what the long-term maintenance costs are. So as part of our papers that go to council seeking approval—if we are asking to go to GSF or go to Building Better Regions or whatever the fund might be—if it is a new facility or an enhanced facility, what are the maintenance costs annually likely to be, and is it capable of being delivered within our existing resource component or are we going to need to have new resources? And as I think Luke touched on before, we have had a number of new play spaces or sporting fields come online that have been delivered either by Parks Victoria, developers or the school building authority, and so yes, we have had to over the last couple of years put on a few extra people, knowing that we have got more assets coming online.

Ms ELVISH: Probably one thing that I would add to what has already been said is in the planning stage of looking at the provision of facilities and so forth, whether it is play spaces or whether it is sporting facilities and so forth, I think it is key that local government has agreed standards for the development of whatever facility that is. I know Luke mentioned before about a district-level sporting facility. We have headed in that direction too, which then helps, I guess, control maybe overdevelopment on certain sites—that that standard infrastructure is too much for that particular need. So that way that helps in the long term when that facility

needs to be renewed or whatever; it is trying to keep it within a standard that is fit for purpose for that use of whatever it is. Say, for instance, it is a district-level facility. We make sure that the changing rooms are multi-use and that they fit whether it is one oval or two pitches and so forth—so I guess that is from a sporting sense—and also the number of car parks, making sure that the provision of car parks is suited to the type of facility that is being put there. And the same, I guess, with your passive spaces. It is understanding what that is there to deliver. Is it there to really draw people to come and stay for a long time or is it just a short visit-type stay? And that should really determine, or at least guide, the level of provision of infrastructure that goes in, and given the thought of that long-term requirement of what that is going to be in regard to replacement of that.

Mr MORRIS: Thanks for that.

The CHAIR: David, did you have any other questions?

Mr MORRIS: No. That is me done. Thanks for that.

The CHAIR: I will throw it open now to the other members if there are any last questions that you would like to ask. No. Jo, Phil and Luke, thank you so much. This has been a wonderful discussion. You have given us a lot to think about on top of your submissions, but it has been really interesting hearing from you. Thank you. Is there anything that you wanted to add before we say farewell for lunch?

Ms ELVISH: I probably just wanted to add—and I said that if I got the opportunity, I would mention it. And we did talk a bit about mountain biking. One thing in a recent conversation with Parks Victoria—this is down on the Mornington Peninsula, with the chief ranger down there—that they mentioned was that we do not currently have a statewide strategic plan for mountain biking, and it is a bit of a concern obviously that Parks Victoria has because a lot of these developments of mountain biking are happening on state parks and so forth. And something that they would love to see happen, given the demand and what is happening with mountain biking, is about creating—which is sort of what I was just talking about—a statewide strategy that nominates where these locations are and what level of facilities they are going to be. Because I know obviously the Red Hill Riders would love to have the biggest and best and obviously out at Warburton and you have got the one out at Forrest in the Otways and you have got Lysterfield, which was the Commonwealth Games mountain biking park. They are just a few off the top my head, and I think it would be great to have, I guess, a state-level position on what that looks like in the future.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Okay, I guess we will finish up and say goodbye to the three of you.

Witnesses withdrew.