

Atherton Reserve Futsal Pitch – Community Engagement Report



This report provides information on the community consultation for the Atherton Reserve Futsal project and reports on the engagement outcomes. The consultation opened on 10 November 2025 and closed at 9am on 8 December 2025

Overview

Project background

Yarra City Council has secured state grant funding through the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) and Sport and Recreation Victoria's Community Sport and Recreation Projects program to deliver a synthetic futsal pitch at Atherton Reserve, while maintaining its function as a Dog Off-Leash Area.

The project will revitalise a space currently used for dog exercise and informal recreation, including soccer. In recent years, Atherton Reserve has faced challenges accommodating multiple user groups, leading to conflicts over accessibility. This project aims to create clearly defined areas that enable all users to enjoy the site simultaneously.

Community consultation will inform priorities for the reserve and identify valued features for the futsal pitch, guiding the development of the concept plan.

Objectives of this engagement

1. To inform the community about the proposed upgrade to Atherton Reserve, the installation of the futsal pitch and the benefits for the wider community.
2. To understand what small infrastructure (drinking fountain, seating, signage, waste bins) Council should include as part of this project to add value to the installation.
3. To understand any community comments on the project scope before concept design commences.
4. To conduct outreach to nearby and highly impacted residents with an additional focus on gathering responses from the Fitzroy Housing Estate residents.

Level of community influence

The community could influence:

1. Which of the following items Council should consider prioritising to add value to the installation of the futsal pitch:
 - a. A drinking fountain
 - b. Seating options near the pitch
 - c. New waste bins
 - d. Signage
2. Community comments on the scope of the project will be considered and noted by Council.

Engagement methods:

- Online survey tool on Your Say Yarra.
- 2 pop ups at the following locations:
 - a. **Yarra Youth Centre** in Napier Street Fitzroy on Tuesday 18 November from 4pm to 6pm
 - b. **Atherton Gardens** on Saturday 29 November at 10am to 12pm

- Targeted outreach through Department of Families Fairness and Housing to residents of the Fitzroy Housing Estates.

Engagement questions:

Engagement Questions

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. Please mark your level of agreement from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”:

- The installation of a new futsal pitch at Atherton Reserve will help provide an improved experience for people using the field for sport.
- The installation of a new futsal pitch at Atherton Reserve will help create a clearer separation between soccer users and people walking their dogs off leash.
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In addition to the new futsal pitch, we are considering adding some park furniture items to make the space better for all users. Please rank the following park furniture items from 1 to 4 from most important to least important to you.

- A drinking fountain
- Seating options near the pitch
- New waste bins
- Signage for the reserve

Do you have any other comments about the project at Atherton Reserve? (open text)

Engagement reach

Engagement promotion:

Social media (including social media advertisements) reaching 32,000+

Email newsletters including Ward newsletters, Yarra Life and Your Say Yarra email newsletters. This reached a total of 9,127 subscribers.

Digital screens at Yarra’s town halls, libraries and leisure centres.

Promoted via Yarra News which is distributed to every household in Yarra (over 60,000+ properties).

News story on Yarra City Council’s website.

Postcards with QR codes and other printed material available at events and postcards were distributed to relevant Council venues including the Yarra Youth Centre, Fitzroy Library, Fitzroy Swimming Pool and the Fitzroy Learning Network.

Postcard drop to all properties within 200 metres of Atherton Reserve: Approximately 1769 properties with 474 property owners who do not live at the address.

A1 corflute posters with QR codes (x3) displayed on site at Atherton Reserve.

Targeted Communications for culturally and linguistically diverse communities including:

- Radio adverts in different languages (3zzz)
- Translated panels on printed materials
- Ability to translate the Your Say Yarra page into 15 languages.

Your Say Yarra project page:

The success of the Your Say Yarra page is tracked against the following metrics:

- **Views** - The number of times the page was seen.
- **Visitors** – The number of unique visitors that saw the page.
- **Responses** – The number of feedback responses that were submitted.

Views	Visitors	Responses
1,682	1,161	122

In person engagement opportunities:

In-person sessions held at Atherton Reserve	Approximate number of people we spoke to	Responses
Tuesday 18 November 4pm-6pm	45 (approx.)	3 paper copies 35 image board
Saturday 29 November 10am-11am	1	1
TOTAL	46	41

Age	Dotmocracy Responses
>10 years old	4
10 - 14 years old	21
14 – 21 years old	10
TOTAL	35

Engagement results

Who did we hear from?

Demographic data was collected via 117 responses to the online survey on the Your Say Yarra engagement website.

What's your connection to Yarra? (multiple choices allowed)	Numbers	Percentage
I live in Yarra, in a property I own (outright or with a mortgage)	76	62.30%
I live in Yarra, in a property I rent	32	26.32%
Own a property in Yarra, but live outside of Yarra	1	0.82%
I work in Yarra	18	14.57%
I study in Yarra	2	1.64%
Own a business/business occupier in Yarra	4	3.28%
None of the above	5	4.10%
I prefer not to say	1	0.82
What is your relationship to Atherton Reserve?	Numbers	Percentage
I live in the nearby Fitzroy Housing Estate	15	12.30%
I live near Atherton Reserve	62	50.82%
I run a business near Atherton Reserve	6	4.92%
I play sport at Atherton Reserve	13	10.66%
I use the dog off-leash area at Atherton Reserve	52	42.62%
I visit Atherton Reserve	54	44.26%
Other	17	13.93%
What gender do you identify as? (single choice)	Numbers	Percentage
Man	62	50.82%
Woman	50	40.98%
Self-described	1	0.82%

I prefer not to say	9	7.38%
Total	122	100%
What is your age range? (single choice)	Numbers	Percentage
Under 11	0	0%
12 to 17	4	3.28%
18 to 24	2	1.64%
25 to 34	29	23.77%
35 to 49	42	34.43%
50 to 59	26	21.31%
60 to 69	11	9.02%
70 to 84	4	3.28%
85 and older	0	0%
I prefer not to say	4	3.28%
Total	122	100%
What suburb do you live in (single choice)	Numbers	Percentage
Abbotsford	5	4.10%
Alphington	0	0%
Burnley	1	0.82%
Carlton North	1	0.82%
Clifton Hill	0	0%
Collingwood	15	12.30%
Cremorne	1	0.82%
Fairfield	1	0.82%
Fitzroy	74	60.66%

Fitzroy North	10	8.20%
Princes Hill	0	0%
Richmond	5	4.10%
I live outside of Yarra	9	7.38%
Total	122	100%
Select all that apply. I am.... (multiple choices allowed)	Numbers	Percentage
Someone who speaks a language other than English at home.	22	18.03%
A person who was born overseas	38	31.15%
A person living with a disability.	7	5.74%
A member of the LGBTIQA+ community.	21	17.21%
Someone of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.	3	2.46%
None of the above.	48	39.34%
I prefer not to say.	13	10.66%

What did we hear?

Atherton Reserve is a much loved and highly popular open space within the Fitzroy area. A wide demographic of user groups utilises this space for sport, dog walkers as well as community connection.

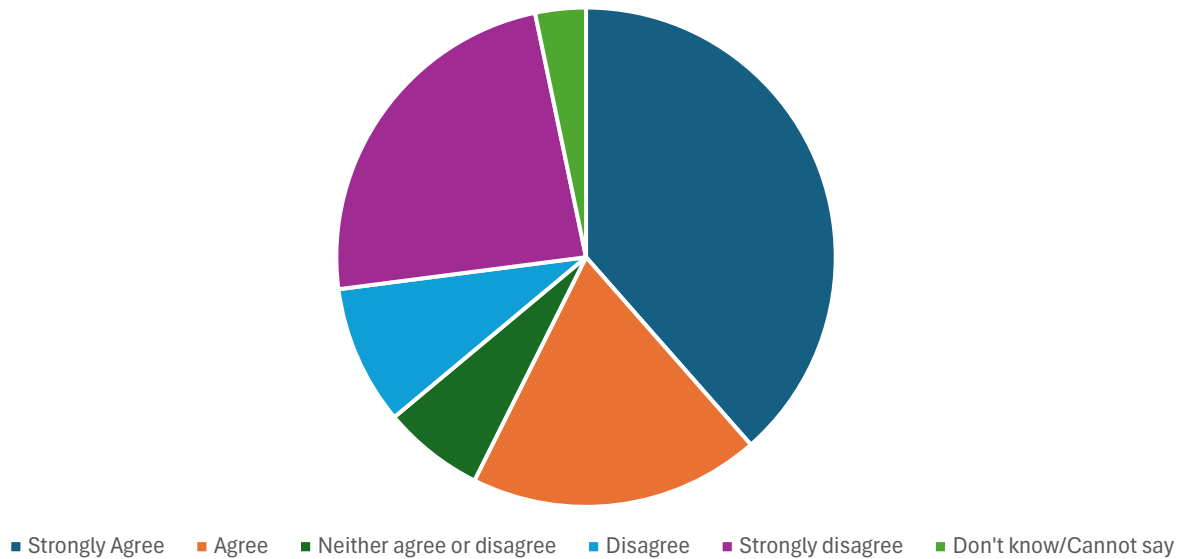
Feedback included concerns with use of synthetic turf for the pitch, loss of shared open space. Significant feedback indicated the need for fencing to ensure soccer balls remain within the dedicated futsal pitch and the benefits for lighting provisions for both the futsal pitch and the Reserve itself.

Council posed two statements for the community to identify their level of agreement with, from “Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree”. The first statement presented was:

The installation of a new futsal pitch at Atherton Reserve will help provide an improved experience for people using the field for sport.

The responses indicated 38.52% (47) strongly agree with the statement, 18.85% (23) agree with the statement while 23.77% (29) strongly disagree and 9.02% (11) disagree with the statement.

The installation of a new futsal pitch at Atherton Reserve will help provide an improved experience for people using the field for sport.

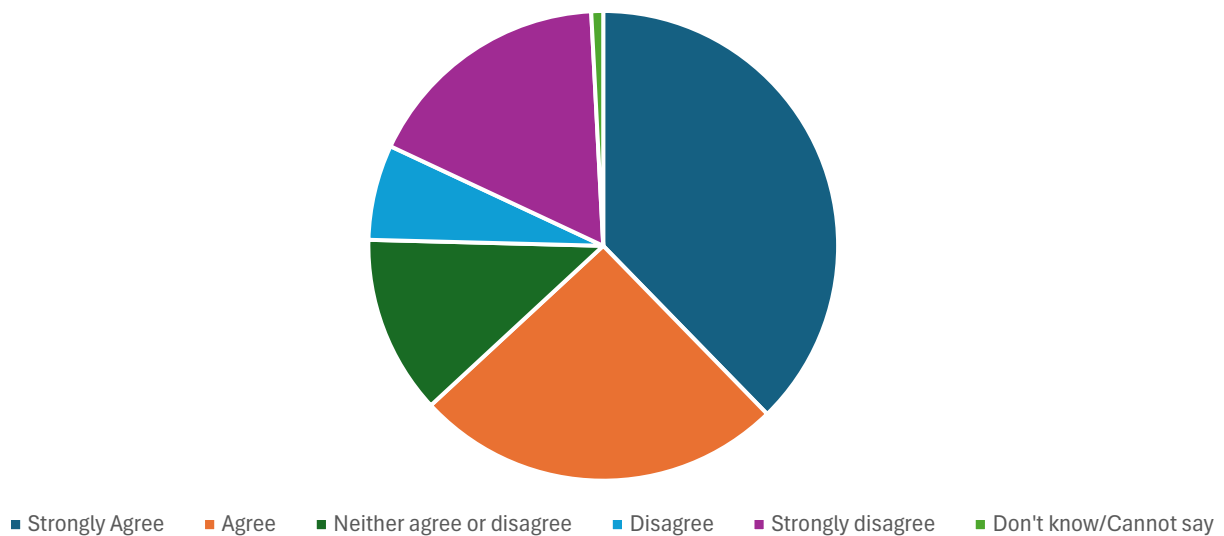


The second statement presented was:

The installation of a new futsal pitch at Atherton Reserve will help create a clearer separation between soccer users and people walking their dogs off leash

This statement resulted in similar levels of agreeance, 37.7% (46) strongly agree, 25.41% (31) agree while 17.21% (21) strongly disagree and 6.56% (8) disagree with the statement.

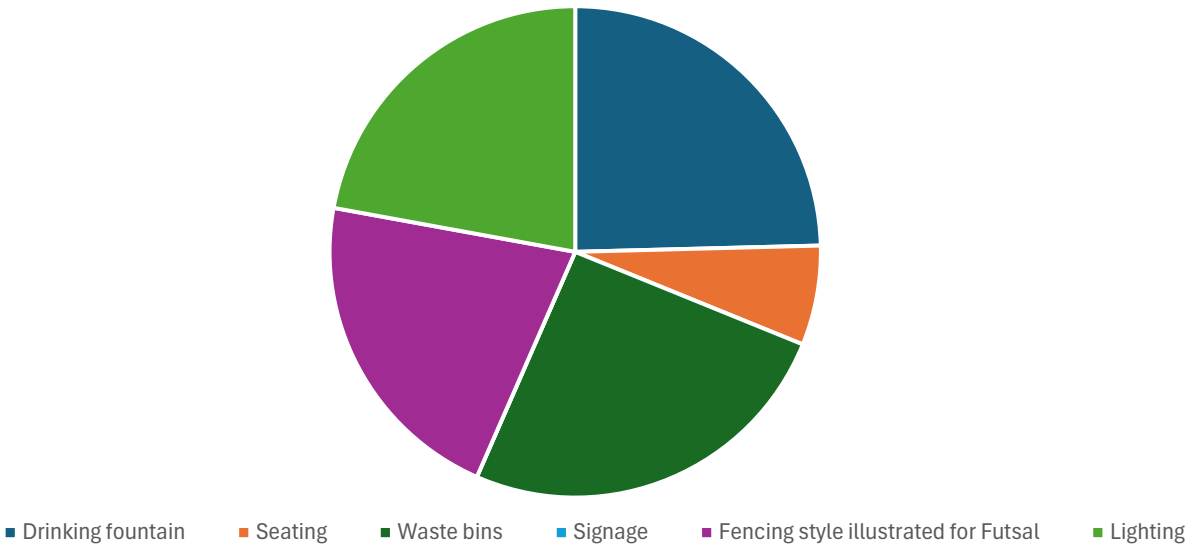
The installation of a new futsal pitch at Atherton Reserve will help create a clearer separation between soccer users and people walking their dogs off leash



Additionally, the community were asked to provide feedback on possible additional elements listed in a ranking scale:

To enhance the experience at the futsal pitch and make the space better for all users, we are considering some additional elements. Please rank the following from 1 to 6 from most important to least important to you (select at least 1).

To enhance the experience at the futsal pitch for all users, which additional elements are most important to you?



The community responses to the ranking varied greatly, with 5 of the 6 options all representing as highly valued by the community.

To best represent the responses from the community, using the data from the number one ranked item has been included. The 3 highest rated elements were 30.93% drinking fountain, 29.81% waste bins and 29.67% lighting with 0% requesting signage as their most important addition.

In analysing the open text questions three key themes emerged. There was also a great deal of useful feedback on the ways in which playground users engage with the park as a whole. While this feedback is out of scope for this project, we have acknowledged it below, and will share it with relevant Council teams, for future projects.

Feedback Theme 1 – Support for the project taking place	
What did we hear	Our response
“Generally supportive! Seems good. How do you ensure that it isn't 'owned' by the nearby housing estate, and that the wider community is invited to use it?”	There are no plans to have the futsal pitch as a bookable or reserved space. Instead, the community will be able to use the space freely.
“Very good idea synthetic pitch which will be used all year as weather won't affect it. Separate by dog users and other users of the park.”	The benefit of using synthetic turf enables users to access the pitch throughout the year, without the surface being impacted by inclement weather conditions.
“This is the only large off lead dog space in Fitzroy. Don't take any more space that is strictly necessary....”	We understand and appreciate the need for open space for the whole community. We aim to find the right balance of creating a usable sporting space while

	ensuring significant space is retained as an off-leash dog area.
“The futsal pitch will offer many young kids an opportunity to focus on something positive and keep fit”	The futsal pitch will be available for the community to use for other activities including running, small scale to kick to kick and even pickleball.
<p>“I am writing to strongly oppose the proposed futsal pitch in our local park.</p> <p>Even with the existing line markings, there has been very little interest or usage from either adults or children. Creating a new futsal pitch under these circumstances will simply waste public funds.”</p>	We acknowledge that currently Atherton Reserve is underutilised by sporting groups, this relates to the space currently not being available for regular hire. The intention to have a better, purpose-built space for futsal will encourage user groups more frequently to access the space.
“Stemming from the success of the Richmond soccer pitch which has been an amazing venue for locals, especially young children, I believe a similar pitch in Fitzroy would serve the same purpose and potentially go even beyond that. This pitch will also help separate dog walkers and people wanting to play sports, protecting the kids whilst also allowing the dog owners to walk their dogs.”	We recognise the success the futsal pitch has been at Richmond and increasing active recreation opportunities. This project differs slightly as Atherton Reserve is Council managed land with multiple user groups needs to be considered. Creating a similar and safe futsal pitch while retaining open space for dog walkers is essential.

Feedback Theme 2 – Creation of separation between dog walkers and Futsal users

What did we hear	Our response
“This reserve should be fenced and create a specific area for dog owners to have an off-leash area. It needs to cater to both soccer players and the dog owners and be partitioned in that way.”	We recognise that Atherton Reserve is a much loved and highly frequented space with mixed uses. Creating separate spaces has been identified as important, ensuring that dogs do not feel restricted in small spaces, therefore, fencing the futsal pitch has been considered the safest and most practical direction.
“Creating segregation of space has positives and negatives, Atherton reserve is a key space where community from the surrounding buildings get to mix and socialize with people from the broader area creating connection and safety.”	We acknowledge the strong community support and connection to Atherton Reserve. The inclusion of lower-level mesh fencing around the pitch has been considered to support the continued feel of open space.
“There are almost no off lead areas for dogs in Fitzroy. This is a disaster as the cultural groups who play soccer are often scared of dogs and mixing the two is culturally insensitive. This should be a dedicated fenced off dog park.”	We acknowledge the different uses of Atherton Reserve and creating separate spaces has been identified as important. Ensuring dogs do not feel restricted in small spaces, the aim is to continue the feeling of openness, therefore, fencing the futsal pitch has been considered the safest and most practical direction.
“It’s great that some money is being spent on creating a useable space for dog walkers and picnickers as well as people who want to kick balls around, good to keep the 2 main uses separated.”	We understand the importance of being able to maintain access for multiple user groups, while

encouraging safe active and passive recreation opportunities.

Feedback Theme 3 – Reduction of open space as an off-leash dog area

What did we hear	Our response
<p>“This project takes away essential open space that dog owners rely on daily, without providing any alternative area. There is ample unused land at Atherton Gardens where birds are being fed. That location does not impact dog owners or regular park users. Why can’t the futsal pitch be placed there instead?”</p>	<p>We acknowledge there will be a loss of space in this project in creating a dedicated futsal pitch. The overall space for the pitch is approximately 1500m², while maintaining 3900m² as open space.</p>
<p>“This area on Atherton Reserve is one of the few places where the community living on and around Napier St shares a space with the families living in the Housing Commission Flats.</p> <p>It's a real shame that this open green space will be lost to a sporting field.</p> <p>The project looks like it will cut this (already not very large) oval in half.”</p>	<p>The existing soccer pitch is 2430m², which if retained and improved for regular use would result in reduced access to Atherton Reserve for the community. Alternative land options within Atherton Reserve are not managed by Yarra City Council.</p>
<p>“Keep the off-leash dog area please. It is a community asset local resident that we value for dogs & community connections.”</p>	<p>We understand the importance of the dog off-leash area to the Fitzroy community. The projects aim is to ensure continued access to Atherton Reserve as a dog off-leash area while providing a safe space for sports.</p>
<p>“This is the last appropriate sized off lead park for dogs to service the many apartment residents in the area who have a dog or dogs. There is a large area of land within the community house precinct that is more suited for the purpose of the sports field.”</p>	
<p>“The current design largely pushes the off-leash area close to the road, whereas many dogs play in the area proposed to be fence off for the pitch in order to keep their dogs in a safe spot away from the road.”</p>	<p>We note concerns raised around safety along Napier Street. The proposed location of the futsal pitch has been considered as it offers as the area with the least encroachment on the Reserve, minimising pinch points for access, while grouping the sporting spaces together.</p>
<p>“The most IMPORTANT thing to include is fencing with gates around the ENTIRE park.</p> <p>This would stop DOGS running onto the road in front of cars! This is especially important with the new proposed changes as the new fenced soccer proposal takes up space that is the most furthest from the road and this is where people let their dogs off lead as less of a chance of dog running onto road.”</p>	<p>We acknowledge the concerns raised in relation to Napier Street and safety for both dogs and community members.</p> <p>The budget and scope for a fence on Napier Street are not currently included these provisions. This feedback will be shared for consideration.</p>
<p>“The whole area needs to be completely fenced off at Napier Street”</p>	

<p>“The dedicated pitch will exclude all Reserve users except for fussball players from almost 1500sqm of the reserve.”</p>	<p>We acknowledge there will be a loss of space in this project in creating a dedicated futsal pitch. The overall space for the pitch is approximately 1500m², while maintaining 3900m² as open space. While the synthetic turf is not appropriate for dog access, the community will continue to have access to this space for recreational use.</p>
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Feedback Theme 4 – Environmental impacts of using synthetic turf for the pitch

What did we hear	Our response
<p>“Very good idea synthetic pitch which will be used all year as weather won't affect it.”</p>	<p>We recognise the current surface has limited the level of sporting use at Atherton Reserve. Having an all-weather surface will enable more all year-round use.</p>
<p>“Synthetic turf will increase temperatures for users by 15-20 degrees Celsius on a 30-degree Celsius day. If Council is serious about managing climate change impacts, then the use of heat-creating and polluting elements like synthetic turf is moving in the wrong direction for sports activities, especially in shared green spaces like Atherton Reserve. Synthetic is obviously more weather-resistant and extends playing ability, but it is also highly polluting (needing disposal and replacement within 10 years on average), expensive and increases UHI impacts.”</p>	<p>We acknowledge the concerns raised relating to the use of synthetic turf in this project and feedback will be shared for consideration.</p> <p>The type of infill explored for use on this project is a natural material and not a traditional rubber infill. Additionally, a Melbourne based synthetic recycling company has been consulted in relation to material disposal once at end of life to minimise future waste.</p>
<p>“Has the environmental impact of synthetic surface been taken into consideration, ie the creation of micro plastics, end of life impacts? Also is the synthetic surface heat up in the summer months and be unusable?”</p>	
<p>“Synthetic turf really!?! In other words more plastic and micro plastics in our environment.. not a fan!”</p>	
<p>“Please consider not utilising synthetic grass”</p>	
<p>“Please don’t use synthetic grass... synthetic grass overheats, pollutes with microplastics, harms biodiversity, increases stormwater runoff, poses health risks, costs more over its lifecycle and creates landfill waste as it has a short lifespan.”</p>	
<p>“Synthetic is obviously more weather-resistant and extends playing ability, but it is also highly polluting (needing disposal and replacement within 10 years on average), expensive and increases UHI impacts. Why can’t the futsal pitch simply be natural?”</p>	

Feedback Theme 5 – Questions and recommendations presented by the public to be considered in future works.

What did we hear	Our response
<p>“Lighting for the pitch is really important to maximise community use particularly during the winter months. Installing environmental controls around the pitch to reduce the spread of microplastics and have a natural infill material.”</p>	<p>We acknowledge the suggestion of improved lighting across Atherton Reserve and how this could benefit the wider community. The budget and scope for this project have not currently included these provisions. This feedback will be shared for consideration.</p>
<p>“The lighting for the pitch should also have some light pointing from the same infrastructure outwards to cover some of the dog off leash areas as in winter owners are in the dark and just adding a couple of additional lights that could be on short timers for after sunset for 60 minutes would extend the usefulness and amenities for all the large number of dog owners who come to the park in winter.”</p>	
<p>“More lighting 24/7 would make the passive surveillance and safety (especially for WoC and PoC) of Atherton Reserve much better — especially on cold winter nights. That and drinking fountains are always a good idea. Not enough water stops/night lights around Melbourne in-general.”</p>	
<p>“I think the fence should be higher as the ball will be kicked over a lot.”</p>	<p>This feedback will be taken onboard during the concept design process and will be shared for consideration.</p>
<p>“Could you please put dog friendly ideas within the gardens too....drinking fountains, dog bags. A separate poo bin could be a new idea and seating along the dog area.”</p>	
<p>“The fencing needs to be thought through. It needs to stop dogs and balls. Not trap in heat. Not be easy to graffiti or damage.”</p>	
<p>“It would be wise to rethink whether the white elephant that is the cricket pitch should be removed.”</p>	<p>We acknowledge the suggestion to remove the cricket nets. The budget and scope for this project have not currently included this provision.</p>

Summary

Community feedback on the proposed futsal pitch at Atherton Reserve was generally positive, with strong support for improving the futsal option, but highlighted key priorities and concerns. Respondents valued the separation of dogs and sports uses, while noting the need for higher fences around the futsal pitch and lighting in the future. There were also concerns about loss of space for dog walkers and the lack of fencing provided near the adjacent road.

The concept design will address the need to provide a suitable space for futsal, while retaining sufficient open space for other uses by the community. Lighting provisions will be costed to better understand possible inclusions within the budget available. Fencing along Napier Street would require funding from alternative budgets.