

SPORT

Harness club vows to fight plan to relocate

BY KIERAN ILES

IT WAS once the nursery of one of Australia's greatest pacing horses.

But now the Marong Light Harness Racing Club is digging in for a fight to save its well-utilised trotting track at Malone Park Recreation Reserve.

A City of Greater Bendigo draft masterplan is recommending the closure of the trotting track to make way for a new green playing surface and two new illuminated ovals.

The council is proposing the light harness racing club relocates to a property at Sebastian, about 20 kilometres north of its current base.

The plan, which the council says was developed following 'extensive consultation' undertaken late last year, has been met by anger the club's members and users.

Club president Wally Newton, who has used the track, which was developed in the early-1970s through volunteer labour, since its earliest days and has devoted more than four decades to maintaining and upgrading facilities, is aghast at the thought the club will be made to move from its long-time home.

"I know the population is going to expand, but we have about 2000 people here in Marong at the moment. What other town with that amount of people has three football ovals? Newton said.

"It's overkill I think... especially if they are getting rid of our trotting track.

"They could comfortably fit two ovals inside the trot-



FIGHT ON-TRACK: Trots Club Victoria delegate John Campbell (left) and Marong Light Harness Racing Club president Wally Newton are opposing plans to close the trotting track at Malone Park and force the club into a move to Sebastian. **Picture: KIERAN ILES**

ting track right now if they wanted, without interfering with the trotting track."

About a dozen Marong-Maiden Gully area trainers regularly use the track, which hosts trials each Thursday for six months of the year.

Those trials are frequented by about another 30 trainers from across the Bendigo region, who use them to educate their horses in preparation for racing.

Some of Australia's biggest harness racing names have graced the Marong track in years gone by, none bigger than Popular Alm.

Affectionately known as 'Poppy', the Hall of Fame pacer had his first trial at

Malone Park before going on to win most of Australia's biggest races, including the A.G. Hunter Cup, Miracle Mile, Australian Pacing Championship and the Winfield Cup (now the Victoria Cup) twice.

While it was more than 40 years ago, Newton can vividly recall the occasion.

"I was there - one of the owners still brags about the fact he (Popular Alm) won the trial and was off the track before the second horse came past the post," he said.

"We've had Brer Rabbit and Transpec, who were both trained locally and both trialled out here before going on to race in the Inter Dominion.

"The Redwoods, who they

named the Redwood Classic after, used to come across, so we've seen a lot of good horses out here over the years.

"It would be a shame to see it go, not just for trotting, but for a lot of people who use it to walk their dogs around the track and other groups who use it."

Among them is the Australian Confederation of Motor Clubs, which hosts regular events at the venue.

The club has been more than just a breeding ground for horses, with plenty more trainers and in particular drivers learning and honing their craft at Marong over the years.

"A lot of kids come out here and learn how to drive

and a lot of trainers bring their horses out here to educate them before they go to the main tracks, like Bendigo and Maryborough to trial," he said.

"The track (surface) itself is good enough to host a race meeting. We used to have what they call a 'restricted' meeting, but that was before the need for electronic timers and the like."

The club has garnered significant industry support in its bid to remain at Malone Park, with Harness Racing Victoria's general counsel John Briffa examining the site and facilities during a visit last Sunday and Trots Clubs Victoria (TCV) also backing the push.

TCV delegate and well-known harness racing breeder John Campbell stressed no one involved in trotting at Marong was against the masterplan, only the removal of the club and its track.

"The masterplan is an exciting proposal for Marong, but it can happen without relocating the track," he said.

"It will be a great opportunity to engage more people to the facility.

"They are already using part of the inside of the track as a cricket oval and it's fine.

"They are talking two ovals and lights - why not one oval and lights and the retention of the trotting track?"

Community submissions close this Friday.

Hawks' dream start to midweek pennant

EAGLEHAWK'S eight-shot win over old rival Bendigo East was the highlight of Monday's first round of midweek pennant bowls.

The Hawks won all three rinks in three tight contests to make a perfect start to their campaign.

Other round one winners were Golden Square, Castlemaine and Kangaroo Flat.

Midweek pennant results:
Division one: Inglewood 4-46 lt Golden Square 12-53 - Shirley Sloan 17 d Taylah Marron 16, Bev Taig 12 lt Mardi Chisholm 22, Vicky Tierney 17 d Julie Ross 15.

Castlemaine 14-68 d Bendigo 2-48 - Maureen Fletcher 22 d Lee Harris 18, Pat O'Shea 17 lt Sharon Koch 18, Pam Hunter 29 d Vicki Greenwood 12.

Bendigo East 0-43 lt Eaglehawk 16-51 - Jenny Clough 13 lt Kaye Rowe 14, Judith Davey 14 lt Irene Godkin 18, Helen Clough 16 lt Janet Robertson 19.

Kangaroo Flat 16-65 d White Hills 0-44 - Desma Budd 26 d Carmel Jansen 14, Gwen Waegeli 18 d Jan O'Bree 11, Susan Howes 21 d Glenda Jones 19.

Division two: Golden

Square 3-62 lt South Bendigo 13-64, Bendigo 16-61 d Castlemaine 0-51, Woodbury 14-63 d Bendigo East 2-49, Heathcote 14-55 d Kangaroo Flat 2-54.

Division three: Eaglehawk 14-58 d Golden Square 2-52, Marong 16-73 d Campbells Creek 0-46, Bendigo East 15-51 d Woodbury 1-39, Kangaroo Flat 2-53 lt Harcourt 14-57.

Division four: Bendigo East 0-61 lt Kangaroo Flat 18-112, Golden Square 14-77 d Woodbury 4-70, South Bendigo 14-82 d White Hills 4-77, Castlemaine 16-85 d

Marong 2-75.

Division five: Eaglehawk 12-44 d South Bendigo 2-36, Castlemaine 14-71 d Bendigo East 0-23, Inglewood 14-50 d Strathfieldsaye 0-41, Bendigo 0-31 lt Woodbury 13-34, White Hills 14-48 d Harcourt 0-27.

Bendigo Bowls weekend pennant results:

Division two: Strathfieldsaye 0-53 lt Bendigo East 18-105, White Hills 16-104 d Eaglehawk 2-65, Kangaroo Flat 13-77 d Harcourt 5-74, Marong 16-104 d Bendigo 2-60.

Division three: Bendigo

East 14-89 d Strathfieldsaye 4-65, Serpentine 4-72 lt Golden Square 14-76, North Bendigo 4-78 lt South Bendigo 14-79, Bendigo 18-100 d Heathcote 0-70.

Division four: Bendigo East 0-61 lt Kangaroo Flat 18-112, Golden Square 14-77 d Woodbury 4-70, South Bendigo 14-82 d White Hills 4-77, Castlemaine 16-85 d Marong 2-75.

Division five: Kangaroo Flat 18-111 d Campbell's Creek 0-44, Eaglehawk 16-91 d Inglewood 2-54, Dingee 16-78 d Calivil 2-71, Marong 18-91 d Castlemaine 0-63.

Division six: Woodbury 0-66 lt Kangaroo Flat 18-88, Harcourt 4-76 lt Eaglehawk 14-84, South Bendigo 16-84 d Strathfieldsaye 2-70, Bendigo 16-107 d Bridgewater 2-69.

Division seven: White Hills 0-45 lt Bendigo East 16-69, Golden Square 2-52 lt Bendigo VRI 14-64, Strathfieldsaye 0-43 lt South Bendigo 16-64, Heathcote 0-51 lt Kangaroo Flat 16-59.

Division eight: North Bendigo 16-71 d Golden Square 0-46, Woodbury 2-55 lt Harcourt 14-56, Kangaroo Flat 15-65 d Marong 1-43.