

3.1. Open Space & Recreation Needs Study

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ATTACHMENTS	Nil
CSP LINK	1. Our Living Environment 1.4 Well utilised open space and recreational facilities

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide information on the progress of the Open Space & Recreation Needs Study (Needs Study).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The new Needs Study will assess current supply of and demand for open space and recreation facilities.

It will provide Council with a strong, evidence-based framework and strategic direction for the ongoing provision, use and management of our open space and recreation facilities for at least the next 10 years, helping to create a connected network of high-quality and diverse open spaces and recreation facilities.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT the Sport and Recreation Reference Group receive this report.

Background

North Sydney LGA (Local Government Area) is one of the most densely populated in Australia, resulting in an undersupply of open space per capita. In addition, the physical distribution of open space across the LGA is uneven and accompanied by a recognised shortage of organised sporting facilities.

Over the past ten years, North Sydney and the broader metropolitan area have undergone rapid changes with significant implications for open space, and recreation planning and provision. The LGA's population density, distribution, and demographic profile have changed, as has the way people use parks and participate in recreation. Changes in State Government strategic directions require review to assess their impact on open space and recreation needs.

Adding to this complexity are the multiple State Government infrastructure projects which are currently eroding open space in North Sydney. Some of our most significant parks are occupied by work compounds and other infrastructure related to transport projects:

- the amount of open space available in Cammeray Park and St Leonards Park has been significantly reduced, and the recreation quality and potential has been heavily compromised as a result;
- staging sites in Anzac Park, and numerous smaller open space pockets adjacent to the State transport projects, have been impacted through tree and habitat losses;
- the imminent construction of a cycleway extension through Bradfield Park north will also result in a permanent reduction in the amount, quality, and usability of open space in this historically important foreshore park.

Several opportunities to acquire new open space have been lost in recent years, including the purchase of the Graythwaite site in North Sydney by Shore School, and the transfer of the Waverton Park Bowling Club land to the Metropolitan Aboriginal Land Council.

New open space has been gained elsewhere in the network, most significantly at the Hume Street Park Expansion Project in Crows Nest, at the Quarantine Boat Depot in Waverton, and at 1 Henry Lawson Avenue McMahons Point. These gains are not considered as replacements or offsets for the losses but rather additions to the existing network.

Additionally, Council continues to invest in our existing playgrounds, sports fields, boat ramps, walking tracks, and other recreational facilities through the capital works program. Combined with the installation of new recreation facilities, this investment helps to improve the quality, capacity, and accessibility of the existing network.

These significant developments and the rapidly changing environment highlight the need for Council to take a considered, strategic approach to future open space and recreation planning and provision.

At its meeting of 13 March 2023, Council unanimously resolved to prioritise the preparation.

Report

Council's commitment to open space and recreation is currently driven by several studies and strategies. The key documents are:

- North Sydney Recreation Needs Study 2015;
- Open Space Provision Strategy 2009;
- North Sydney Council Plans of Management; and
- NSROC (Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils) Regional Sportsground Management Strategy Review 2017.

While this current suite of open space and recreation plans all support Council's commitment to providing high quality open space and a range of quality sporting and other recreation facilities, there is a clear need for a high-level, over-arching strategic framework which would sit between Council's existing Community Strategic Plan and the above-listed existing plans, driving future provision, planning, and design work.

Strategic Open Space and Recreation Documents

The strategic framework will ground future planning, design works, and provide direction for upcoming major projects. It will ensure that future critical decisions around specific sites are made from a well-informed evidence base.

Projects such as the Cammeray Park Strategic Masterplan have the potential to address our community's identified needs for open space and recreation in North Sydney, making the importance of having an up-to-date, accurate and community-endorsed strategic framework that underpins the Masterplan paramount.

A new Strategic Framework for Open Space and Recreation

Preparing the new strategic framework for open space and recreation in North Sydney will be a two-stage process.

Stage 1 - Engage suitably qualified consultants to prepare a new Open Space and Recreation Needs Study (Needs Study). The study will assess current and future open space and recreation needs for the North Sydney LGA and use future population projections and other relevant data to provide the evidence-base to underpin the framework for planning of Council's entire open space and recreation network.

The Needs Study will involve targeted research into open space provision, and sporting and recreation needs. Extensive engagement of people who live, work, study, and play in North Sydney will ensure the study accurately reflects community and stakeholder needs and aspirations.

The Needs Study will guide provision of and improvements to parks and recreation and sporting facilities and assist in their future management.

Stage 2 - An Open Space and Recreation Strategy (the Strategy) will be prepared by Council staff. The draft Strategy will be publicly exhibited, and community and stakeholder feedback will be sought.

The adopted Strategy will provide a roadmap for how Council will deliver public open spaces and recreation facilities that meet the needs of the current and future North Sydney community of residents, workers, and visitors.

The ten-year plan will enable Council to strategically identify, prioritise, and deliver a variety of open space and recreational facilities for our community, and ensure that the current elevated level of community satisfaction with open space and recreation facilities in North Sydney is maintained.

Objectives, strategic actions, and the intended outcomes set out in the Strategy will form the basis of future Council Delivery Programs and provide Council and the community with a shared understanding of the strategic direction in which Council is headed regarding our entire open space and recreation network.

Current Status

The preliminary phases of early engagement have concluded, encompassing activities such as fact-finding, needs/wants identification, addressing pertinent issues, brainstorming ideas, and establishing priorities for the future development of open space and recreational facilities within the North Sydney LGA.

A combination of in-person and online consultation methods has been employed to ensure stakeholders can participate at their convenience. This approach included a presentation delivered at the most recent Sport and Recreation reference group meeting held in November 2023.

Currently, a Discussion Paper is in the process of being crafted for Phase 2 consultation. This endeavour involves collaborating with Council staff and councillors, alongside comprehensive desk top research. The paper will compile insights gleaned from prior audits, consultations, and gap analyses. Additionally, it will propose various avenues to address both current and anticipated demands for open space and recreational facilities

Time Period

The Open Space and Recreation Needs Study could be produced within six to eight months after appointment of the consultants. A further six months would be required to deliver the Open Space and Recreation Strategy.

Consultation requirements

Community engagement will be undertaken in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Protocol.

Financial/Resource Implications

Funding allocated in Council's current 2022-23 Delivery Program for the Cammeray Park Strategic Masterplan (\$180,000) has been re-allocated to enable immediate preparation of an Open Space and Recreation Needs Study, and the subsequent Open Space and Recreation Strategy.