

10.16.Strategic Framework for Provision of Open Space and Recreation Facilities

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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 consider the timing of strategic planning for open space and recreation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- At its meeting of 13 March 2023, Council resolved to prioritise the preparation of an Open Space and Recreation Strategy in the 2023/24 operational plan.
- A new Open Space and Recreation Needs Study will assess current supply of open space and recreation facilities, overlaid with community needs and aspirations. It will provide a strong evidence-based approach to inform short, medium, and long-term planning of Council's open space and recreation network.
- Subsequent preparation of an Open Space and Recreation Strategy will provide a roadmap for how Council will deliver open spaces and recreation facilities to meet the needs of both the current and projected resident, worker, and visitor populations.
- Reprioritising funding from Council's current 2022-23 Delivery Program for the Cammeray Park Strategic Masterplan would enable immediate preparation of an Open Space and Recreation Needs Study and subsequent Open Space and Recreation Strategy. These strategic documents will provide a clearly articulated direction for all future open space and recreation projects, including the Cammeray Park Strategic Masterplan.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. THAT** Council commence the preparation of an Open Space and Recreation Needs Study and a subsequent Open Space and Recreation Strategy.
- 2. THAT** funds currently allocated for the Cammeray Park Strategic Masterplan be redirected to deliver the strategic work.

Background

North Sydney Council manages and maintains almost 150 hectares of public open space across a high-quality but fragmented network of harbourside parks, bushland reserves, sportsgrounds, small pocket parks, and civic spaces. However, the North Sydney LGA is also 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 of an Open Space and Recreation Strategy in the 2024/25 operational plan.

Report

Council's Existing Open Space and Recreation Studies and Strategies

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 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.

Commence our Strategic Open Space and Recreation Documents

There is an opportunity to commence preparation of a strategic framework within which the future provision of open space and recreation needs for open space should be considered.

The strategic framework will ground future planning and 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 a new strategic framework for open space and recreation in North Sydney would 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. Preparation of a Discussion Paper early in the project will be a central element in the community engagement process, highlighting the key issues for consideration.

The Needs Study will be aligned with the North Sydney Vision 2040 as well as relevant State Government objectives, priorities, and actions. It will guide provision of and improvements to parks and recreation and sporting facilities, and assist in their future management. The study will identify strategic directions and priorities to inform a subsequent North Sydney Open Space and Recreation Strategy.

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 high 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.

Time Frame

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.

Options

Council has the following options in relation to this matter:

1. Continue with development of the Cammeray Park Strategic Masterplan as per the current Delivery Program.
2. Prepare an Open Space and Recreation Strategy in the 2023/24 financial year, as per Mayoral Minute MM03: Open Space and Recreation Strategy.
3. Commence preparation of the Open Space and Recreation Needs Study and subsequent Open Space and Recreation Strategy, commencing in the 2022/23 financial year. The new Strategy will then inform future preparation of the Cammeray Park Strategic Masterplan.

These options are assessed in the table below.

Option	Finance/Resourcing	Risk/Opportunity	Consultation
1.	\$180,000 is allocated in the current Delivery Program for the Cammeray Park Strategic Masterplan. Staff have been allocated to the project.	If the Masterplan proceeds before a strategic framework is in place, opportunities to ensure the Masterplan develops from an informed, evidence base to best meet the identified needs of the current and future North Sydney community will be lost.	Engagement for the Masterplan would have a narrower (rather than a Council-wide, and beyond) focus, being project-based. It would also be more targeted to local residents. Public exhibition of the draft Masterplan would be more widely publicised.
2.	Money to carry out the strategic work, (as per the MM03), would need to be added in to the 2023/24 Delivery Program. Staff can be allocated to the strategic work in 2023/24.	Other projects currently scheduled for implementation in the 2023/24 year may need to be delayed to fund the new strategic work.	Engagement for the Open Space and Recreation Needs Study would be Council-wide. Residents, workers, students, and other stakeholders would be targeted. Public exhibition of the draft Needs Study would be widely publicised.
3.	The money allocated in the current Delivery Program for the Cammeray Park Strategic Masterplan can be redirected to deliver the required strategic work, commencing immediately. Staff working on the Masterplan and other projects can be redirected to the strategy work.	Preparation of the Needs Study and subsequent Strategy will provide a clearly articulated direction of all future open space and recreation projects, including but not limited to, Cammeray Park Strategic Masterplan.	Engagement for the Open Space and Recreation Needs Study would be Council-wide. Residents, workers, students, and other stakeholders would be targeted. Public exhibition of the draft Needs Study would be widely publicised.

Option 3, is recommended for the following reasons:

- the available budget of \$180,000 (currently allocated to the Cammeray Park Strategic Masterplan) is adequate to undertake the required strategic works. Staff resources are also available;

- having a strategic framework in place to guide all future open space and recreation projects will ensure future projects are developed to best meet the identified open space and recreation needs of the North Sydney community; and
- Council-wide engagement will ensure the Needs Study and subsequent Strategy are accurate reflections of community and stakeholder needs.

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) could be re-allocated to enable immediate preparation of an Open Space and Recreation Needs Study, and the subsequent Open Space and Recreation Strategy.

Staff resources can be similarly re-allocated.