

2026 / Edition 1



PUBLIC OPEN SPACE HANDBOOK



PARKS & LEISURE
AUSTRALIA
(VIC / TAS)



VicHealth



FOREWORD

Where we live, learn, work and play has an enormous impact on our health. These everyday environments influence things like the foods available to us, opportunities to be active and ways to connect with others.

Access to high-quality, well-maintained public open space is one of the most powerful levers we have to create healthier communities. As our neighbourhoods continue to develop, grow and change, designing and planning our public spaces has never mattered more.

Over the past few years, Parks and Leisure Australia and VicHealth have built a strong and productive working relationship, grounded in a shared vision: that open space is public health infrastructure, not amenity.

Together, we are working to ensure communities have greater access to spaces for physical activity, play, community sport, social connection and mental wellbeing. We are also encouraging built and natural environments that are climate resilient, support healthy ecosystems, and create more opportunities for people to connect with nature.

This handbook brings together existing, contemporary guidance and resources to help create public open spaces that deliver better health and wellbeing outcomes. The handbook outlines the latest in how to design and plan for climate resiliency, inclusivity, accessibility and provide high-quality open spaces for communities.

We know that the decisions made by open space planners, landscape architects, land managers and others involved in planning, designing and managing our public spaces, will shape community wellbeing for decades to come.

We look forward to continuing our work with Parks and Leisure Australia, built on the common vision that open space and public health are inseparable.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AP', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Professor Anna Peeters PhD AM



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

PLA respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the many lands that we live and work on. We value the culture, relationships, connection to country, kinship connections and journeys of the First Peoples of this land and pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

THANK YOU

Parks and Leisure Australia would like to thank everyone involved in the Public Open Space Handbook, from its conception through to the delivery.

Firstly, our sincere thanks to the team at VicHealth – Matt, Kaitlyn and Yusra for entrusting PLA to develop a handbook that responds to the needs of the industry.

Thank you to the Project Control and Reference Groups for sharing their valued experience and insight, from day one through to the final draft.

Finally, a huge thank you to Jenn for taking on the project and holding it so closely to her heart. The incredible amount of work and passion that has gone into this can be felt throughout.

The hard work of many has finally come to fruition, but this is not the end. The Public Open Space Handbook is a dynamic document that will continue to evolve alongside our open spaces, adapting to reflect emerging needs, challenges and opportunities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY.....	3
THANK YOU	4
INTRODUCTION	9
ABOUT THE PUBLIC OPEN SPACE HANDBOOK.....	9
READING THE HANDBOOK	10
CONTINUOUS UPDATES AND IMPROVEMENTS	11
PLAN PUBLIC OPEN SPACE	12
PPN1 – BENEFITS OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE	12
WHY IS THIS MODULE IMPORTANT?	13
PUBLIC OPEN SPACE BENEFITS.....	14
HEALTH AND WELLBEING.....	15
ECONOMIC BENEFITS.....	20
ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS	22
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	24
CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS	25
INTERNATIONAL GUIDANCE	27
PPN2 – PLANNING FRAMEWORK	28
WHAT IS OPEN SPACE PLANNING?	28
LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK	29
VICTORIAN PLANNING FRAMEWORK.....	34
STATE GOVERNMENT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	41
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	41
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	42
PPN3 – OPEN SPACE STRATEGIES.....	47
WHY CREATE AN OPEN SPACE STRATEGY?	47
WHAT IS AN OPEN SPACE STRATEGY?	48
OPEN SPACE STRATEGY LIFECYCLE	49
CREATING AN OPEN SPACE STRATEGY	49
RELEVANT VPP CLAUSES: OPEN SPACE STRATEGIC PLANNING.....	50
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	53
PPN4 – PROVISION STANDARDS	54
WHAT MAKES A GOOD OPEN SPACE?	54
QUANTITY, QUALITY, DIVERSITY AND DISTRIBUTION (Q2D2).....	56
RURAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT	59
RELEVANT VPP STANDARDS AND CLAUSES	62
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	65

DESIGN PUBLIC OPEN SPACE.....	67
DDG1 – LAND SUITABILITY	68
LAND SUITABILITY	68
LAND SUITABILITY CRITERIA	71
VPP – RELEVANT STANDARDS.....	74
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	76
DDG2 – DESIGN PRINCIPLES.....	77
OPEN SPACE DESIGN.....	77
OVERVIEW OF DESIGN PRINCIPLES	78
DESIGN PRINCIPLE 1: HEALTHY, ACTIVE AND CONNECTED COMMUNITIES	79
DESIGN PRINCIPLE 2: DESIGNED FOR EVERYONE.....	82
DESIGN PRINCIPLE 3: WHOLE-OF-LIFE	85
DESIGN PRINCIPLE 4: RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE	87
DESIGN PRINCIPLE 5: MULTI-USE AND CO-LOCATED	88
DESIGN PRINCIPLE 6: INTEGRATED INFRASTRUCTURE.....	89
VPP PROVISION – RELEVANT CLAUSES	93
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	97
DDG3 – OUTDOOR FITNESS EQUIPMENT	101
WHAT IS OUTDOOR FITNESS EQUIPMENT?	101
TYPES OF OUTDOOR FITNESS EQUIPMENT	102
WHO USES OUTDOOR FITNESS EQUIPMENT?	102
PLANNING, DESIGNING AND MANAGING OFE	104
RELEVANT AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS.....	105
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	106
DDG4 – SPLASH PARKS	108
WHAT ARE SPLASH PARKS?	108
WATER MANAGEMENT.....	109
PLANNING FOR SPLASH PARKS	109
RELEVANT AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS.....	110
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	112
DDG5 – PLAY SPACES	114
THE BENEFITS OF PLAY.....	114
WHAT IS A PLAY SPACE?	115
TRENDS IN MODERN PLAY SPACES.....	116
DECISION MAKING	117
RELEVANT AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS.....	118
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	120
DDG6 – SYNTHETIC TURF	122

SYNTHETIC TURF DEFINITIONS	122
STRATEGIC PLANNING	123
DECISION MAKING FOR SYNTHETIC TURF	124
ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY FOR SYNTHETIC TURFS	127
RELEVANT AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS.....	128
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	129
DDG7 – OFF-LEASH DOG AREAS	132
WHAT ARE OFF-LEASH DOG AREAS?	132
STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR DOG PARKS.....	133
NEW OFF-LEASH AREA PROJECT.....	134
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	138
DDG8 – SKATE AND BMX	140
WHAT IS ‘SKATING’ AND ‘BMX’?.....	140
WHO ARE SKATERS AND RIDERS?	141
WHAT ARE SKATE AND BMX FACILITIES?	141
PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS	145
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	147
MANAGE PUBLIC OPEN SPACE	150
MM1 – MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS	151
OPEN SPACE MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES	151
LEVELS OF SERVICE	152
CONTRACT TYPES	152
CONTRACT OPTIONS.....	153
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	157
MM2 – MANAGING MULTI-USE AND SHARED SPACES	159
WHY PRIORITISE MULTI-USE, CO-LOCATED OR SHARED OPEN SPACES?	159
THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER PROVIDERS OF OPEN SPACE	160
DISTINCT DEFINITIONS.....	160
OPTIONS TO ADAPT OPEN SPACES FOR MULTI-USE AND SHARING	162
WORKING WITH SCHOOLS	163
SHARED COST MODELS.....	164
CONFLICT AND MISUNDERSTANDING MANAGEMENT	165
HELPFUL CHECKLISTS	165
VPP PROVISION – RELEVANT CLAUSES.....	166
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	168
MM3 – CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION	170
THE ROLE OF OPEN SPACE IN CLIMATE CHANGE	170
CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION FOR OPEN SPACE.....	173

RELEVANT AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS.....	179
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	180
MM4 – MONITORING AND EVALUATION	184
BEYOND PLANNING, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION.....	184
DATA AND SMART TECHNOLOGY.....	184
MONITORING AND EVALUATION OPTIONS	185
ON-SITE MONITORING AND EVALUATION	185
OFF-SITE MONITORING AND EVALUATION	188
AUTOMATED MONITORING AND EVALUATION	191
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	192
MM5 – ASSET MANAGEMENT	194
WHAT IS ASSET MANAGEMENT?	194
OBJECTIVE OF ASSET MANAGEMENT	195
BENEFITS OF HIGH-QUALITY ASSET MANAGEMENT	195
TYPES OF OPEN SPACE ASSETS.....	196
ABOUT ASSET MANAGEMENT PLANS.....	196
KEY ELEMENTS OF OPEN SPACE ASSET MANAGEMENT PLANS	196
KEY ASSET MANAGEMENT TASKS	197
ADVANCES IN ASSET MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY.....	197
RELEVANT LEGISLATION	200
AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS.....	201
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	203
CONTACT	206

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE PUBLIC OPEN SPACE HANDBOOK

The Public Open Space Handbook (POSH) was commissioned by Parks and Leisure Australia (Vic/Tas) and funded by VicHealth. The Handbook was developed with input from a Project Control Group and a Project Reference Group.

Purpose

The POSH provides a contemporary framework for the public open space industry in Victoria, with guidance that can be useful both for Victoria and wider Australia. It was developed to assist land managers across Victoria to plan, design and manage public open space.

The primary audience for this Handbook is the 79 local government authorities (LGAs) in Victoria, and other significant public open space owners and managers (e.g. Parks Victoria). The POS Handbook will also be useful to managers of other public lands that serve public open space needs as a secondary purpose, such as water authorities, educational institutions, transport agencies and cemetery trusts.

The Handbook is useful for those seeking practical advice on common tasks and responsibilities for open space professionals, and where to find detailed expertise on particular subjects.

The Public Open Space Handbook and other guidance documents

The Handbook gathers resources locally, nationally and internationally to provide a central resource and baseline guidance for public open space in Victoria. The Handbook currently gathers and considers over 700 reports, papers and guidance documents.

The open space industry and academic research community has provided, and will continue to provide, excellent resources outside of this Handbook. If other suitable, relevant and high-quality guidance documents already exist, the Handbook seeks to provide connections and links to those documents rather than duplicating information.

The POS Handbook replaces the *2013 Open Space Planning and Design Guide (OSPDG)*, which was published through collaboration between Parks and Leisure Australia (Vic/Tas), Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development, and the Open Spaces Planners Network in Victoria.

The OSPDG was a useful guidance document for many open space managers and planners, and all others who regularly connect with open space in their work.

READING THE HANDBOOK

The Handbook has been developed in an interactive, modular format with 3 distinct key functions:

- Plan
- Design
- Manage

Under each key function, there are several modules which focus on particular topics relevant to open space. The Handbook structure including key functions and modules is listed below.

1. PLAN public open space: <i>Planning Practice Notes</i>	2. DESIGN public open space: <i>Development + Design Guides</i>	3. MANAGE public open space: <i>Management Manuals</i>
• PPN1 – Benefits of Public Open Space • PPN2 – Planning Framework • PPN3 – Open Space Strategies • PPN4 – Provision Standards	• DDG1 – Land Suitability • DDG2 – Design Principles • DDG3 – Outdoor Fitness Equipment • DDG4 – Splash Parks • DDG5 – Play Spaces • DDG6 – Synthetic Turf • DDG7 – Off-leash Dog Areas • DDG8 – Skate and BMX	• MM1 – Maintenance Schedules • MM2 – Managing Multi-use and Shared Spaces • MM3 – Climate Change Adaptation • MM4 – Monitoring and Evaluation • MM5 – Asset Management

General definitions

Throughout this Handbook the terms ‘public open space’ and ‘open space’ are used interchangeably. In general terms, open space will refer to the land that is provided by public authorities and where this is not the case, clarification is provided.

Relevant documents table

At the end of each module, there is a table of relevant documents and links specific to the module topic.

The relevant documents table is not exhaustive. It provides a starting point of useful information and links. It is important to complete further research for your particular project, particularly for understanding local context and local community need.

CONTINUOUS UPDATES AND IMPROVEMENTS

The list and number of modules can always change; the intention is for modules to be created or updated over time as required. Providing connections to other high-quality guidance and useful information is a strength of the Handbook as the open space industry is constantly evolving.

There are 3 ways the Handbook can remain relevant for years to come:

1. The Handbook is split into functions (Plan, Design, Manage) and modules which can be individually updated as best practice evolves over time rather than a full refresh of the document being required.
2. Additional modules can be developed and added to the Handbook at any time (as required and as funding allows).
3. The relevant documents table at the back of each module has a date attached, and new relevant documents can be added without having to update the entire Handbook if no other material changes are required.

Future modules

There are several module topics which require updated guidance in the coming years due to new or amended legislation or state government guidance.

There are future modules already identified as priority topics through industry engagement, but they require in-depth research or additional expertise to complete.

These are:

- Working with Traditional Peoples,
- Sustainability,
- Climate Change.

These will be completed as funding and resources become available.



PARKS & LEISURE
AUSTRALIA
(VIC/TA5)



VicHealth



PLAN PUBLIC OPEN SPACE



PLANNING PRACTICE NOTES

PPN1 – BENEFITS OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

Public Open Space Handbook – Planning Practice Notes

Edition 1 – September 2026

WHY IS THIS MODULE IMPORTANT?

Public open spaces are critical infrastructure that underpins the health, wellbeing and resilience of communities. Across urban and regional Australia, spaces such as parks, reserves, wetlands, sports fields, playgrounds and natural landscapes provide multiple benefits that extend far beyond their immediate function.

These benefits are interconnected, influencing physical and mental health, social cohesion, cultural expression, biodiversity, environmental resilience and local economic activity.

There is also strong evidence that time spent in nature builds stronger connection to nature, creating greater awareness and positive stewardship behaviours.¹

Parks Victoria notes:

Unprecedented social and environmental changes pose growing risks to people's health and wellbeing with increasing urbanisation and changing lifestyles resulting in more people spending less time in nature, doing less physical activity, reporting higher levels of stress and feelings of being more socially isolated. In just one generation, outdoor play time for children has more than halved. (Healthy Parks, Healthy People, 2020)

Now, green infrastructure is being recognised as a necessity in urban development² and there is increasing legislation to support open spaces, environmental spaces and greening across Victoria through updated planning provisions, the introduction of the Climate Change Act 2017 and the Melbourne Urban Forest Strategy.

Public spaces are internationally accepted as a keystone for sustainable cities.³ Well-planned, inclusively designed and well-managed open spaces support targets within the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This includes particularly SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

However, these issues, solutions and benefits are only words without the action of those planning, managing and delivering this critical fabric of Australia.

Local government is one of the key places where open spaces and green infrastructure are planned for, provided, bought, owned, managed and maintained for public benefit. Local government has a vital role as an owner, operator, advocate and activator for the physical and mental public health benefits of open space.

¹ Parks Victoria. (2020). Healthy parks healthy people framework 2020.

² Urban Green Infrastructure for Resilient Communities, Parks and Leisure Australia (2025)

³ Guidelines to achieve quality public space at neighbourhood level, UN Habitat (2020)

PUBLIC OPEN SPACE BENEFITS

There are multiple benefits provided by open spaces across a wide range of areas.

In this document, these benefits are split into 4 categories:

- Health and wellbeing
- Social connectedness and liveable communities
- Economic
- Environmental

Table 1: Open space benefits and outcomes summary

Open space benefits	Outcome
Health and wellbeing	Improved physical health
	Improved mental health
Social connectedness and liveable communities	Increased social connectedness
	Provision of inclusive spaces
	Protection of culture and heritage
Economic	Increased tourism and number of visitors
	Attraction of businesses and employment
	Higher property values
	Higher worker productivity
Environmental	Stormwater
	Biodiversity
	Urban heat island effect
	Carbon sequestration
	Air pollution
	Noise pollution

The Healthy Active by Design project by the Heart Foundation provides a free and useful commentary on the health benefits of public open space. [This includes over 100 references to academic studies.](#)

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The Victoria Department of Health has a vision for a ‘Victoria free of the avoidable burden of disease and injury, so that all Victorians can enjoy the highest attainable standards of health, wellbeing and participation at every age’.⁴

This vision is supported by 5 domains:

1. Population health and wellbeing in Victoria across the lifespan.
2. Victorians experience social connectedness and community wellbeing.
3. Victorians have access to learning and development opportunities.
4. Strong economic participation and stability in Victoria.
5. Victorians have health-sustaining natural and built environments.

Open space and recreation spaces deliver numerous health and wellbeing benefits that contribute to achieving these domains. In particular, open spaces contribute to ensuring Victorians⁵:

- enjoy high levels of physical health,
- enjoy high levels of mental health,
- are supported to protect and promote health,
- have communities that are fair and inclusive,
- are free from racism and discrimination,
- belong to resilient and liveable communities,
- have access to sustainable and safe built and natural environments.

Physical health benefits

Public open space is well known to encourage communities to be physically active and contribute to their physical health through other nature-based health benefits like lowering blood pressure.

Access to open space is associated with higher physical activity rates and improved physical health outcomes. Academic research tells us:

- Adults who visit parks are more physically active⁶
- When people have access to quality parks, they exercise more⁷
- One extra hectare of open space within 1km of home increases the likelihood of an adult reaching recommended physical activity rates⁸

⁴ Victoria Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, 2023-2027

⁵ Domains, outcomes, and indicators, Victoria Public Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework (2025)

⁶ Stewart OT, Moudon AV, Fesinmeyer MD, Zhou C, Saelens BE. The association between park visitation and physical activity measured with accelerometer, GPS, and travel diary. *Heal Place*. 2016;38.

⁷ Healthy Active by Design, Heart Foundation. www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au

⁸ Kaczynski AT, Potwarka LR, Smale BJA, Havitz ME. Association of Parkland Proximity with Neighborhood and Park-based Physical Activity: Variations by Gender and Age. *Leis Sci*. 2009;31:174–91.

- Green spaces ⁹within a 5km walk of home are associated with lower levels of type 2 diabetes and lower mortality¹⁰
- Living within walking distance of green public open space is associated with higher birth weights and a lower probability of high-normal blood pressure^{11 12}
- Green public open spaces with more amenities, including trails, picnic tables, toilets and gardens, are more used and encourage higher levels of physical activity¹³
- Public open space has a particularly positive benefit for older adults¹⁴
- Adults who participate in sport are 20–40% less likely to die prematurely from all causes compared to non-participants¹⁵
- The presence of trees encourages people to walk and is associated with reduced incidence of heart attack and type 2 diabetes¹⁶
- In ageing communities, physical activity and active lifestyles reduce risk of chronic diseases

[Victoria Walks](#) is an independent walking-for-transport health promotion body, and advocates for increased and improved pedestrian access and use. Victoria Walks notes that walking and active transport are key factors for public health. When an urban area has connected and walkable street networks, it encourages access to local green public open spaces¹⁷ and can increase the number of minutes per week people spend walking.¹⁸

A survey of Australians found that the top 3 ways people are keeping active are walking in their local neighbourhood, using active modes of transportation and using the natural environment such as hiking in a nature reserve.¹⁹

9 Lachowycz K, Jones AP. Greenspace and obesity: a systematic review of the evidence. *Obes Rev*. 2011 May 1;12(5):183–9.

10 Coutts C, Horner M, Chapin T. Using geographical information system to model the effects of green space accessibility on mortality in Florida. *Geocarto Int*. 2010;25(6):471–84.

11 Grazuleviciene R, Dedele A, Danileviciute A, Vencloviene J, Grazulevicius T, Andrusaityte S, et al. The influence of proximity to city parks on blood pressure in early pregnancy. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2014 Mar 11;11(3):2958–72.

12 Dadvand P, Villanueva CM, Font-Ribera L, Martinez D, Basagana X, Belmonte J, et al. Risks and benefits of green spaces for children: a cross-sectional study of associations with sedentary behavior, obesity, asthma, and allergy. *Environ Health Perspect*. 2014;122(12):1329–35.

13 Mowen A. *Parks, Playgrounds and Active Living. A Research Synthesis*. Princeton, NJ; 2010.

14 Takano T, Nakamura K and Wantabe M: Urban residential environments and senior citizens longevity in megacity areas: the importance of walkable green spaces. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. 56: 913-8, 2002.

15 Khan KM, Thompson AM, Blair SN, Sallis JF, Powell KE, Bull FC, et al. Sport and exercise as contributors to the health of nations. *Lancet*. 2012;380(9836):59-64.

16 Sugiyama T, Neuhaus M, Cole R, Giles-Corti B, Owen N. Destination and route attributes associated with adults' walking: A review. *Med Sci Sports Exerc*. 2012;44(7):1275-86.

¹⁷ Kaczynski AT, Koohsari MJ, Stanis SAW, Bergstrom R, Sugiyama T. Association of street connectivity and road traffic speed with park usage and park-based physical activity. *Am J Heal Promot*. 2014;28(3):197–203.

¹⁸ Giles-Corti B, Bull F, Knuiman M, McCormack G, Van Niel K, Timperio A, et al. The influence of urban design on neighbourhood walking following residential relocation: Longitudinal results from the RESIDE study. *Soc Sci Med*. 2013;77:20–30.

¹⁹ McCrindle Research. (2025). *What Australia wants: Neighbourhood design*. National Heart Foundation of Australia.

Open spaces contribute to increasing the physical activity through walking in communities through:

- delivery of recreation trails,
- ownership and management of green linkages, estimated to be over 8000km across parks, forests and public land reserves in Victoria,
- creation of active open space and parks,
- advocacy for urban forests and green infrastructure which can improve walking experience,
- provision of walking paths, seating, lighting, shelter and other amenities that encourage pedestrian friendly spaces.

Mental health benefits

Globally, there is an increase in numbers of the public suffering from mental health disorders. It is estimated that 10.8% of the global population has suffered depression at some point in their life.²⁰

Open spaces provide emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing benefits.²¹ Access to open space is associated with positive mental health outcomes. Research tells us:

- exposure to nature can result in reduction of depressive moods²²
- increased physical activity is associated with access to open spaces. Physical activity relieves symptoms of depression and anxiety, improves mood and enhances psychological wellbeing²³
- natural environments, such as parks, foster recovery from mental fatigue and are restorative²⁴
- sport participation is associated with improved wellbeing, reduced stress and distress²⁵
- observing nature can restore concentration and improve productivity²⁶
- having nature in close proximity (e.g. urban or national parks), or just knowing it exists, is important to people regardless of whether they are regular 'users' of it²⁷

Open spaces are also a key contributor to tree canopies and urban forests. Mature trees, urban forests and canopy cover provide high value for both mental and physical health.

Analysis of people living in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong highlighted that achieving a 30% tree canopy cover target within 1.6km of home reduced the odds of the onset of psychological distress over 11 years by 31%, diabetes by 31%, cardiovascular diseases by 22% and hypertension

²⁰ Lim, G. Y., Tam, W. W., Lu, Y., Ho, C. S., Zhang, M. W., & Ho, R. C. (2018). Prevalence of Depression in the Community from 30 Countries between 1994 and 2014. *Scientific reports*, 8(1), 2861.

²¹ Parks Victoria. (2020). Healthy parks healthy people framework 2020.

²² Clark, S. N., Schmidt, A. M., Carter, E. M., Schauer, J. J., Yang, X., Ezzati, M., Daskalopoulou, S. S., & Baumgartner, J. (2019). Longitudinal evaluation of a household energy package on blood pressure, central hemodynamics, and arterial stiffness in China. *Environmental Research*, 177, 108592.

²³ Townsend M and Weerasuriya R (2010).

²⁴ Townsend M and Weerasuriya R (2010).

²⁵ Eime RM, Young JA, Harvey JT, Charity MJ, Payne WR. A systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents: Informing development of a conceptual model of health through sport. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act*. 2013;10(1):98

²⁶ Townsend M and Weerasuriya R (2010).

²⁷ Townsend M and Weerasuriya R (2010).

by 17%, as well as dementia risk over 11 years by 16%. Furthermore, research links a local target of 30% tree canopy within 1.6km with 22% reduced odds of insufficient sleep over 6 years.²⁸

Social connectedness and liveability benefits

The importance of public open spaces to improving liveability in the urban environment is widely recognised. As cities are planned to have increased density, so the maintenance, management and distribution of parks and other open spaces are likely to have increased importance for liveability.²⁹

Open spaces provide affordable leisure opportunities for local communities and families to come together for a range of leisure, cultural or celebratory activities, enabling relationships and connections to be strengthened while enjoying the benefits of interacting with the natural environment.

In all its forms, open space is an essential ingredient for enhancing the liveability of an area and improving the quality of life of its residents.

The Heart Foundation of Australia (2025) puts it this way:

‘While heart health is fundamentally a physical condition, building communities that prioritise safety, belonging and social connection can create an environment that encourages active living, and ultimately leads to improved overall health.’

Open spaces also provide free, accessible and safe community spaces which have a positive influence upon community attachment and attract people outdoors.³⁰ This increases the opportunities for casual social encounters and fosters the development of neighbourhood social ties.³¹

Open space is a key contributor to neighbourhood and urban liveability strategies, planning and discussion.³² Research tells us active neighbourhoods and cities are more liveable, with higher levels of social capital and community cohesion and lower levels of crime.³³

Benefits for children and youth

Parents and families know the benefits of community facilities. For those with young children, the importance of community facilities is even higher. Two in five people with a dependent child aged

²⁸ Foster, S. et al. (2025). *Designing for density: Delivering healthy, higher-density neighbourhoods in Australia*. National Heart Foundation of Australia.

²⁹ 4 Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission, (2008). *A State of Liveability: An Inquiry into Enhancing Victoria’s Liveability*, Final Report, October 2008

³⁰ National Heart Foundation of Australia. (2010). *Creating active communities: How can open and public spaces in urban and suburban environments support active living? A literature review*.

³¹ Kuo FE, Sullivan WC, Coley RL and Brunson L: Fertile ground for community: inner-city neighbourhood common spaces. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 26: 823-851, 1998.

³² Urban Liveability Checklist, NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence (2019)

³³ National Heart Foundation of Australia. (2019). *Blueprint for an active Australia* (3rd ed.)

0–14 years (44%) say community facilities are very important to them, compared to 35% of those with a dependent child aged 15–24 years.³⁴

Nature is important to children’s development in every major way – intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually and physically. Kellert (2005 p.83) states ‘Play in nature, particularly during the critical period of middle childhood, appears to be an especially important time for developing the capacities for creativity, problem-solving and emotional and intellectual development.’³⁵

The Children and Nature Network³⁶ notes that research indicates nature can result in:

- Better academic performance,
- Enhanced attention,
- Increased engagement and enthusiasm,
- Improved behaviour.

Open spaces provide for many community activities and are a key enabler of sport and active recreation. Sport and active recreation contribute positively to the development of confidence and social skills, social inclusion, community development, health and wellbeing, diversion from antisocial behaviour and improved self-esteem and health-related quality of life in children and youth.^{37 38}

Benefits for inclusive spaces

People from low socioeconomic backgrounds, people who live in rural and regional areas and urban fringe growth areas, and those living with severe mental illness or disability all experience greater barriers to eating well and staying active.³⁹

Lack of access to good quality open spaces and physical activities in disadvantaged neighbourhoods is linked with lower physical activity behaviours.⁴⁰ Further, real or perceived threats to safety in disadvantaged neighbourhoods contribute to lower physical activity and obesity.⁴¹

Providing high-quality open spaces that are safe and inclusive is important for achieving the physical and mental health benefits that are available. These spaces are free, but they are not currently provided equally, or provided with equal quality.

³⁴ National Heart Foundation of Australia. (2025). *What Australia wants: Neighbourhood design*.

³⁵ Kellert, Stephen R. (2005) “Nature and Childhood Development.” In *Building for Life: Designing and Understanding the Human-Nature Connection*. Washington, D.C.; Island Press.

³⁶ <https://www.childrenandnature.org/resources/category/benefits-of-nature/>

³⁷ National Heart Foundation of Australia. (2019). *Blueprint for an active Australia* (3rd ed.).

³⁸ Leavy JE, Bull FC, Rosenberg M, Bauman AE. Physical activity mass media campaigns and their evaluation: A systematic review of the literature 2003–2010. *Health Educ Res.* 2011;26(6):1060-85.

³⁹ Healthy kids, healthy futures, Victoria Department of Health (2021)

⁴⁰ Ball K, Carver A, Jackson M, Downing K, O’Rourke K. Addressing the social determinants of inequities in physical activity and related health outcomes. *Health Promot International.* 2015;Sep 30 (Suppl 2):ii18-9.).

⁴¹ Gordon-Larsen P, Nelson MC, Page P, BM P. Inequality in the built environment underlies key health disparities in physical activity and obesity. *Pediatrics.* 2006;117(2):417-24.

Open spaces provide a flexible set of options for physical activity and social connection. Inclusive open space promotes and supports improved outcomes by:

- Improving real or perceived safety and reducing crime prevalence⁴²
- Providing access to a variety of activities that can suit a range of age groups, genders, life stages, abilities, socioeconomic status and cultures
- Providing free access to physical activity opportunities
- Creating spaces that can create social connection

Protection of culture and heritage

National and metropolitan parks can contain sites of significance for Indigenous communities, including remnant artefacts, rock engravings and artwork. Parks managed or co-governed by Traditional Owners can engender improved social and economic outcomes for their communities.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Local, regional and state economies benefit significantly from open spaces. Open spaces support economic growth and vibrant and healthy communities.⁴³ Open spaces are a key piece of the built environment for the recreation and tourism industries, and significant sources of employment for local communities.

Open spaces also contribute to preventive outcomes, such as lower healthcare costs, reduced energy costs and reduced costs related to environmental issues like urban air quality and floods. Numerous international studies demonstrate that quality parks can boost local economies by attracting visitors and tourists and stimulating economic development opportunities.

Even though the amount of research on the economic value and benefits of open space continues to grow, it is insufficient to fully capture, measure or monitor the scope of benefits related to restoring ecosystems in cities.⁴⁴

Table 2: The economic impacts of active recreation in Victoria, Marsden Jacob Associates (2018)

\$8.3 billion	\$3.1 billion	\$5.2 billion	\$245 million
Estimated total spending on active recreation	Lifetime workplace productivity impact from making physically inactive Victorians active	Estimated gross value add attributable to active recreation	Lifetime avoided healthcare costs from making physically inactive Victorians active

⁴² Koohsari MJ, Karakiewicz JA, Kaczynski AT. Public Open Space and Walking: The Role of Proximity, Perceptual Qualities of the Surrounding Built Environment, and Street Configuration. *Environ Behav.* 2013;45(6):706–36.

⁴³ Healthy Parks, Healthy People, Parks Victoria (2020)

⁴⁴ Sandifer, P. A., Sutton-Grier, A. E., & Ward, B. P. (2015). Exploring connections among nature, biodiversity, ecosystem services, and human health and well-being: Opportunities to enhance health and biodiversity conservation. *Ecosystem Services*, 12, 1–15.

Attract businesses and increase employment

Open spaces have an impact on the location and number of businesses in an area and can be associated with an increase in employment. Attractive and good-quality open spaces attract businesses that want to provide a high quality of life for their employees, and an understanding that they may be able to attract higher calibres of workers.⁴⁵

Crompton asserted that ‘a strategy of conserving parks and open space is not contrary to a community’s economic health, but rather an integral part of it.’

Open spaces create their own workforce and contribute to employment rates. From strategic recreation planners to sports field maintenance staff and sports club managers, open spaces have a workforce all their own. In regional areas, national parks generate employment and provide regional economic activity through the management of the park.

Urban open spaces and associated facilities create opportunities for local volunteerism and generate economic activity through local events, community use of the spaces and community or commercial hire.

Increased worker productivity

It is well recognised that many factors, including psychological factors, affect employees’ productivity in the workplace. Fit and active workers are more productive, take fewer sick days and make a positive contribution to our economic wellbeing.⁴⁶

International research conducted over a 20-year period has demonstrated benefits for workplace mental health arising from green nature. Research indicates that the ability to perceive nature from office windows is a micro-restorative experience, which is believed to provide an employee with a brief respite from the demand for directed attention which functions at a high level during work.

A Swedish study examining the effects of workplace greenery on worker stress levels considered 4 levels of greenery ranging from no view of and no access to a garden, to both view and access to a garden in the workplace. A view of, or access to, a garden improved levels of comfort, pleasure and wellbeing in employees while reducing their levels of stress. Those who had no access or views reported a worse perceived general health status.

Quality green space increases market value of properties

While different types of parks may have different types of effects, proximity to parks can add between 5% and 20% to the value of homes.⁴⁷

An Australian survey found that 63% of urban populations consider proximity to destinations like shops and parks to be the top reason for deciding where to live.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Crompton, J.L. (2004). *The Proximate Principle: The impact of parks open space, and water features on residential property values and property tax base.*

⁴⁶ National Heart Foundation of Australia. (2019). *Blueprint for an active Australia* (3rd ed.).

⁴⁷ DELWP and Parks Victoria (n.d.) *Valuing Victoria’s Parks: Accounting for ecosystems and valuing their benefits.*

⁴⁸ National Heart Foundation of Australia. (2025). *What Australia wants: Neighbourhood design.*

Open spaces provide value for Australian neighbourhoods, supporting ‘safety/low crime’ and ‘shared space/parks’, 2 of the top 5 important things for deciding where to live.⁴⁹

The Government Architect for NSW⁵⁰ notes that urban green infrastructure can boost property values, including house pricing, promote faster property sales and encourage inward investment.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

The environmental benefits of open spaces, trees and vegetation have for some time now been well recognised and documented.

Stormwater management

Green spaces provide a natural water retention and treatment system to manage stormwater. Tree canopies and root systems reduce stormwater flows and nutrient loads that end up in waterways.

Trees intercept rainfall, and unpaved areas absorb water, slowing the rate at which it reaches stormwater facilities. Trees and vegetation more effectively and less expensively manage the flow of stormwater runoff than do concrete sewers and drainage ditches. This alleviates pressures on stormwater management and flow control efforts.⁵¹

Biodiversity and conservation

Mature trees are significant assets to our environment and our society, regardless of where they occur or whether they are native or exotic.

Trees and vegetation support native birds and animals, adding biodiversity to developed suburbs where Australian native habitat is often scarce.

Avenues of trees planted along streets act as green corridors in highly developed areas and help birds and animals to travel through to nearby green spaces or bushlands.

Mitigating urban heat island effect

The urban heat island effect is the build-up of heat in built-up areas. It results from the absorption and entrapment of heat on paved or built surfaces during hot periods.

Established research and ongoing studies confirm that the addition of trees and vegetation in the built environment provides the greatest benefit in terms of mitigating the urban heat island effect. Through the process of transpiration and the provision of shade, trees help reduce daytime and night-time temperatures, especially during summer.

⁴⁹ National Heart Foundation of Australia. (2025). *What Australia wants: Neighbourhood design*.

⁵⁰ Government Architect, New South Wales (2023)

⁵¹ Sherer PM. (2003). *Parks for people: Why America needs more city parks and open space*. San Francisco: The Trust for Public Land.

Carbon sequestration

During photosynthesis, trees convert carbon dioxide (CO₂) and water into sugar and oxygen and store carbon within their biomass as they grow older. Urban trees therefore make an impact in absorbing carbon from the atmosphere.

Melbourne enjoys great benefits from its existing urban forest, which is over 70,000 trees, representing billions of dollars in benefits. In 2012, 982 street trees in Melbourne alone were estimated to⁵²:

- store 838 metric tonnes of carbon at a dollar value of \$19,100,
- sequester 24 metric tonnes of carbon each year at a value of \$548 per year,
- save \$6,370 in energy costs each year through shading buildings in summer and providing solar access in winter,
- avoid carbon emissions by reducing energy use by \$114 per year.

Air pollution

Open spaces make an important contribution to the reduction of air pollution, especially carbon dioxide particulate levels. Trees act as the ‘green lungs’ of our cities and towns. The urban forest in Melbourne alone is estimated to remove 0.5 metric tonnes of air pollution per year.

Noise pollution

Green spaces can help to reduce the negative effects of exposure to noise pollution both physically and by alleviating our perception of noise to create a calmer environment.⁵³ Vegetation acts as a buffer against anthropogenic noise and serves as a source of natural sounds.⁵⁴

Climate change adaptation

Open spaces can provide a wide range of solutions for adapting to climate change and provide climate change adaptation plans with great opportunities for improvement.

Climate change adaptation practices that can be used in open space include:

- planting the right kind of trees and vegetation that will thrive in a changing climate
- protecting existing local habitat
- enabling the introduction of green roofs, which can improve air quality in urban areas and reduce temperatures
- using water-sensitive urban design practices for green infrastructure that reduce the risk of flooding
- local habitat being supported through good green infrastructure design⁵⁵

⁵² Making a Great City Greener, City of Melbourne (2014)

⁵³ Dzhambov, A. M., & Dimitrova, D. D. (2014). Urban green spaces' effectiveness as a psychological buffer for the negative health impact of noise pollution: A systematic review. *Noise and Health*, 16(70), 157–165

⁵⁴ Rey-Gozaló, G., Barrigón Morillas, J. M., Montes González, D., & Vélchez-Gómez, R. (2023). Influence of green areas on the urban sound environment. *Current Pollution Reports*, 9(4), 746–759.

⁵⁵ Greener Places, Government Architect, New South Wales (2023)

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information.

This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (PPN1) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Healthy Active By Design, Evidence Review	Australian Government / National Heart Foundation	Links to research and references by topic, about the health benefits of a sense of place, which underlie the Guidance (https://www.healthyactivedesign.com.au/design-features/public-open-spaces) Includes links to international examples and case studies from Australia.	https://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au/design-features/sense-of-place/evidence#publicopen
Built Environment and Health Report	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)	Analyses how proximity to open space relates to health risk factors like physical activity and obesity.	https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/built-environment-and-health
Parks for Health	University of Canberra	Investigates how park characteristics influence health and wellbeing outcomes.	https://www.canberra.edu.au/research/centres/hri/research-projects/parks-for-health
Health benefits and associated economic value of parks and park use in Australia	Parks & Leisure Australia (2016)	Provides evidence on how parks and park use contribute to people's physical, mental and social health in Australia and estimates the economic value of these benefits.	https://parksleisure.com.au/parc-library/409-health-benefits-and-associated-economic-value-of-parks-and-park-use-in-australia-final-report/
Economic Value of Green Spaces	Parks & Leisure Australia (2018)	Discusses the economic impact of parks on property	https://parksleisure.com.au/parc-

		values, local economies, and community benefits.	library/918-the-economic-value-of-our-green-spaces/
Quality Green Space Supporting Health, Wellbeing and Biodiversity: A Literature Review	The National Heart Foundation of Australia (2017)	Summarises evidence on how elements of public open and green spaces support human physical, mental and social health, environmental sustainability, and how these benefits relate to urban planning and design.	https://parksleisure.com.au/wp-content/uploads/parc-library/722-0-Green_Spaces_Evidence_Review_-_FINAL_website.pdf
Urban green space provision: the case for policy-based solutions to support human health	National Library of Medicine	Advocates for policy approaches to improve public health through urban green space provision.	https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39727046/
Pedestrian Access Strategy: A strategy to increase walking for transport in Victoria	Victoria Department of Transport (2010)	This document sets out an array of potential actions to promote walking in Victoria.	https://admin.victoriawalks.org.au/Assets/Files/Pedestrian%20Access%20Strategy%20final%20WEB%20version.pdf
Position Statement on Urban Green Infrastructure	Parks and Leisure Australia (2025)	A position statement that outlines the benefits of UGI and a call to action on 6 recommendations.	https://parksleisure.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/UGI_Position_Statement_2025.pdf

CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS

Cross-Cutting Table (PPN1) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Urban green and blue spaces for public health	The Lancet Public Health	Comprehensive review showing how combined green and water spaces support physical, mental and social wellbeing in cities.	https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(23)00156-1/fulltext

Urban green and blue spaces & health and wellbeing (WHO report)	World Health Organization	Assessment of the range of health, wellbeing, environmental and social benefits of urban green and blue spaces.	https://www.who.int/europe/publications/item/WHO-EURO-2023-7508-47275-69347-69347
Green spaces, blue spaces and human health: an updated review	Frontiers in Public Health	Systematic review summarising associations between green/blue space exposure and reduced mortality, reduced disease risk, and improved mental health.	https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/public-health/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2025.1505292/full
Greening Schoolyards and Urban Property Values: systematic review	arXiv / preprint	Systematic review of evidence on how schoolyard greening relates to nearby residential property values.	https://arxiv.org/abs/2507.19934
Impact of greening schoolyards on residential property values	Preprints.org	Quantitative analysis showing greened schoolyards increase nearby home values, with variation by neighbourhood demographics.	https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/202507.1074
The cooling effect of urban green spaces (systematic review)	Current Research in Environmental Sustainability	Systematic review on how urban green spaces mitigate heat through shading and evapotranspiration.	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crm.2025.100731
Cooling Effect of Urban Blue-Green Spaces	PMC / NCBI	Open-access research showing how combined blue and green spaces cool urban heat islands and reduce thermal stress.	https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9916382/
Urban green and blue spaces: bibliometric analysis	Land (MDPI)	Bibliometric study identifying research trends on designing green and blue spaces for health and environmental benefits.	https://doi.org/10.3390/land14061230

INTERNATIONAL GUIDANCE

International Guidance Table (PPN1) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Healthier Cities and Communities Through Public Spaces	United Nations	Gives an overview of how urban parks, green spaces and waterways can help address major global health and climate challenges by reducing risk factors like physical inactivity and air pollution, etc.	https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2025/01/final_public_space_and_urban_health.pdf
Green Spaces: An Invaluable Resource for Delivering Sustainable Urban Health	United Nations	Outlines evidence about the contribution of urban green spaces to improved physical and mental health, social wellbeing, environmental sustainability, and reduced health inequalities in cities.	https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/green-spaces-invaluable-resource-delivering-sustainable-urban-health
Annotated Literature Review: Health Benefits of Urban Greenspace	Harvard Chan National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences	An annotated literature review that outlines the various benefits of urban green space.	https://hsph.harvard.edu/research/environmental-health-niehs/community-resources/annotated-literature-review-health-benefits-of-urban-greenspace/

PPN2 – PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Public Open Space Handbook – Planning Practice Notes

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

The purpose of this module is to equip planners, councils, developers and stakeholders with an understanding of the legal, policy and strategic planning context for open space in Victoria.

The module covers:

- The role of open space planning,
- Legislative framework,
- Policy context, and
- Victorian planning system.

Why is this important?

Effective open space planning is critical to ensuring the continued provision of high-quality, accessible open space that meets the changing social, environmental and economic needs, particularly as Victoria experiences population growth, increasing urban density and the impacts of climate change.

Excellent open space planning will positively impact the communities it serves for years, if not forever.

Victorian context

The majority of planning legislation, policy and guiding frameworks for open space are provided at a state government level and supported by local policy.

In Victoria, most of the standards for open space are set by the Victoria Planning Provisions.

WHAT IS OPEN SPACE PLANNING?

Open space planning is an integrated planning discipline. It is a cross-section of skills, knowledge, values and analysis that is reminiscent of other disciplines and yet it is its own distinct specialism.

Often, open space planners are required to be a 'jack of all trades' due to the intersection of skills and knowledge. Open spaces are public spaces available to all people. Open spaces are living spaces; they are environments that are alive with plants, organisms, insects and animals. They are also living spaces for people as they adapt and change uses and benefits throughout a day and throughout a lifetime.

The open space planning discipline typically covers a broad range of assets and services, such as:

- Sport and active recreation grassed and artificial fields,
- Seating, shade, BBQs,
- Public toilets,
- Golf courses,
- Beaches and waterways,
- Cemeteries,
- Conservation land,
- Buildings including clubrooms, indoor courts and aquatic centres,

- Play spaces,
- Street trees, hanging baskets, street gardens or median strips,
- Botanic gardens and garden beds,
- Urban, regional and rural forests,
- Outdoor swimming pools, splash parks and interactive water features,
- Civic plazas, gathering places, event spaces,
- Trails, tracks and shared paths,
- Customer services,
- Tourism assets,
- Community programs, activation and events,
- Specialised surfaces and planning for unique activities such as motocross or horse riding.

Open spaces and services can be nearly invisible when they are well planned, well designed and well managed because they simply seem to appear when our communities need them; yet they are critical to the health and wellbeing of our communities.

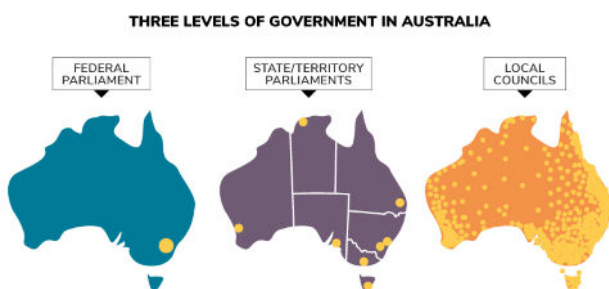
LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Who governs public open space?

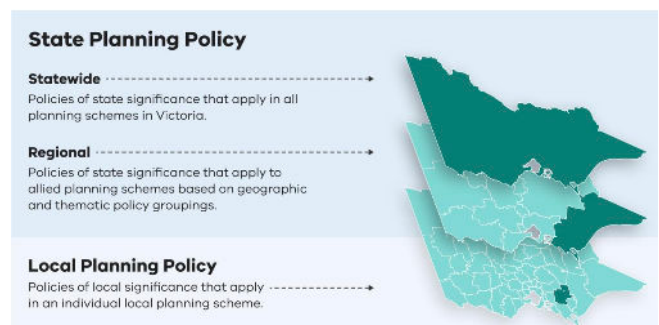
There are 3 levels of government in Australia: federal, state/territory and local. These parliaments and councils pass laws that open space planning, design and management must follow.

For the majority of open space, state/territory parliaments are the key creators of law and policy. For Victoria, the state planning framework has 3 levels: statewide, regional and local.

Levels of Government in Australia



Levels of Planning Policy in Victoria



What is legislation?

Legislation is the law that governs Australia. Open space planning sits within, and is affected by, a large range of government legislation and regulations.

This includes:

- Acts which set national law in the Federal Government,
- Acts which set state law in state or territory parliaments,
- Local laws set by local government,
- Rules, determinations and guidelines.

Table 3: Legislation vs Act vs local law

Legislation	Legislation consists of Acts of Parliament and the subordinate legislation made under them. The term legislation can refer to a single law or to a collection of laws. ⁵⁶
Act	An Act is a statute or law passed by both Houses of Parliament that has received Royal Assent. On Royal Assent, Acts are given a year and number. Once an Act is formally enacted it can generally only be amended or repealed by another Act. When an Act changes, a compilation of the Act is prepared to show the Act as amended. Acts are also known as primary legislation.⁵⁷ As described by Victoria Planning Authority, ‘it provides the machinery that gives effect to state planning policies.’⁵⁸
Local law	Councils utilise local laws to respond to issues and community needs within a local context. They typically deal with, but are not limited to, protection of local amenity as well as regulating activities on council-controlled land and roads. ⁵⁹

What legislation is relevant?

Legislation and policy affect all organisations that undertake open space planning. The relevance of different Acts or policies depends on the type of open space, its owner, location and purpose. Open space managers and planners may require a wider understanding of legislation when:

- They work for a national or state parks organisation,
- They manage land on behalf of the Crown,
- They have endangered species on their land,

⁵⁶ Legislation Australia

⁵⁷ Legislation Australia

⁵⁸ Practitioners Guide to Victoria’s Planning Schemes

⁵⁹ Local Government Victoria, Local Government Act 2020 – Local Laws

- They have national heritage sites,
- The open space network they manage is connected to land owned or managed by a national or state parks organisation,
- The open space network within a municipality partially relies on national or state parks to achieve provision standards or meet community needs.

Key Takeaways:

- Federal government is mainly associated with national parks and reserves.
- The key open space Crown legislation is the Planning and Environment Act 1987.
- state/territory parliament is the key legislator for the majority of local government open space.
- Local government governs open space through policy but also sets law using local laws (e.g. dog off-leash by-laws).

The following table outlines several relevant Acts and their relevance to open space.

Table 4: Acts relevant to open space

Act	Relevance
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999	This legislation focuses on matters of national environmental significance, which include listed threatened species and communities, listed migratory species, Ramsar wetlands of international importance, Commonwealth marine environment, World Heritage properties, national heritage places, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and nuclear projects. This is particularly relevant to refer to if you have (or are adjacent to) an area with threatened species or a place on the National or World Heritage list.
Planning and Environment Act 1987	The Planning and Environment Act 1987 establishes the framework for planning the use, development and protection of land in Victoria. It sets out procedures for preparing and amending the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP) and planning schemes, obtaining permits under schemes, settling disputes, enforcing compliance with planning schemes and other administrative procedures. It also includes mechanisms for Development Contribution Plans.
National Parks Act 1975	A foundational document for protecting land within national parks. It provides for the preservation and protection of the natural and cultural heritage values of the parks within the meaning of the Act,

	including national parks, state parks, marine national parks and coastal parks.
Parks Victoria Act 2018	Establishes Parks Victoria.
Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978	Provides for the reservation, management and regulation of Crown land, including the appointment of committees of management for public parks and gardens.
Local Government Act 2020 (Victoria) Local Government Act 1993 (Tasmania)	Provides councils with responsibilities for local amenity, recreation and community wellbeing. They supersede the Local Government Act 1989.
Disability Discrimination Act 1992	To ensure persons with disabilities have access to buildings and facilities.
Subdivision Act 1988	Sets out the procedures for the subdivision and consolidation of land, including buildings and airspace, and for the creation, variation or removal of easements or restrictions; and regulates the management of and dealings with common property. Includes details on open space contributions.
Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006	Relevant where responsibilities for sites of significance need to be clarified, when areas become protected areas, and when a cultural heritage management plan is required. All Aboriginal cultural heritage values are afforded protection under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006. This protection applies to values regardless of whether they are listed on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register. This Act has various provisions for the protection of Aboriginal cultural values. ⁶⁰ The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs can declare such places ‘protected areas’, to be protected and preserved for future generations. Protection declarations under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 are listed in the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register.

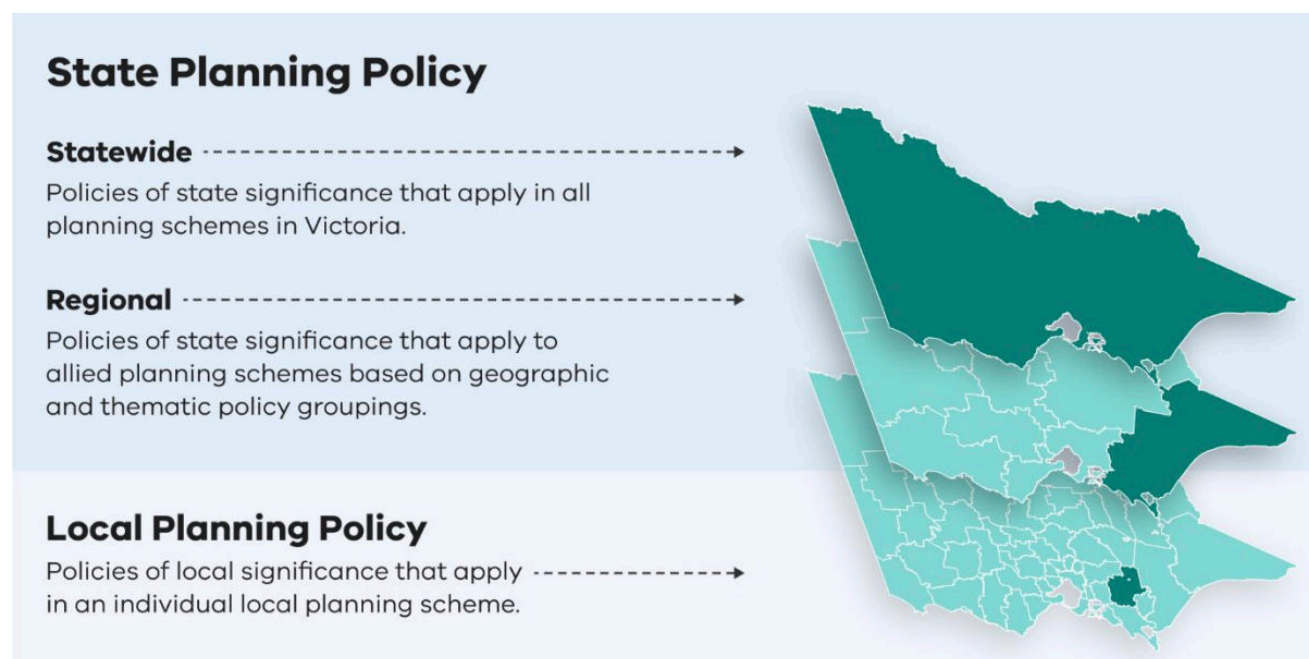
⁶⁰ Strategic Crown Land Assessment Policy and Guidelines, DELWP 2016

	High-impact activities, as detailed in the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2007, which are undertaken in areas of cultural heritage sensitivity will require a Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP).
Heritage (Amendment) Act 1997	For places on or adjoining sites on the Victorian Heritage Register.
Forests Act 1958	The Forests Act 1958 advises management over plans to protect public land from fire and maintain and improve state forests. Also advises licensed occupations including grazing, beekeeping and the sale of forest produce. It establishes the compliance and enforcement framework for managing offences related to the take of timber from state forests. It also provides regulation on management of fire on public land.
Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987	The Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 includes overarching provisions relating to the conservation and productive use of the State's lands, waters, flora and fauna.
Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988	The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 promotes the conservation of Victoria's native flora and fauna. It advises management of potentially threatening processes to flora and fauna. This includes a threatened species list. The Act also advises the maintenance and conservation of biodiversity (sustainable forest management).
Freedom of Information Act 1982	Open space professionals may be required to collate and provide documentation if requested. Open space planning affects many people including landowners, and therefore these requests are not uncommon.
Privacy Act 1988	State or local government organisations should already have strict policies on privacy, and the Local Government Act 2020 requires a public transparency policy. For open space managers, consider the impact on drone policies, monitoring devices like sensors and

	ethical data collection in open space planning (including use of AI).
Wildlife Act 1975	Defines which animals are wildlife and declares all wildlife as protected from harm (with exceptions). The Act sets the rules to protect, conserve, sustainably manage and use wildlife in Victoria. It also regulates how people engage in activities related to wildlife including responsibilities, offences, licences and authorisations. It has a number of related regulations.
Marine and Coastal Act 2018	The Marine and Coastal Act 2018 provides an integrated and coordinated approach to planning and managing the marine and coastal environment in Victoria. This aims to protect the coastline and address long-term challenges such as climate change and population growth. For example, it contains offences for unauthorised development on coastal land.

VICTORIAN PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The Victorian planning framework is set across 3 levels: state, regional and local. Open space is planned according to legislation and the policies set in these three levels. There is the Planning Policy Framework (the PPF) that provides the overarching policy guiding land use, subdivision and development in Victoria.



The **Planning and Environment Act 1987** establishes the framework for land use planning and development, including mechanisms such as Development Contribution Plans and Section 173 agreements to secure open space.

Other legislation, such as the **Local Government Act 2020 (Victoria)** and **Local Government Act 1993 (Tasmania)**, defines roles and responsibilities and delegates authority for key land use and management actions.

The Victorian Treaty establishes a framework for First Nations self-determination, shared decision-making and embedding traditional knowledge in governance, planning and management across Victoria.

Victoria Planning Provisions (VPPs) outline objectives for liveable communities, open space networks and subdivision standards.

Regional growth frameworks such as **Plan Melbourne 2023–2025** guide metropolitan and regional settlement patterns and open space planning principles.

Ministerial Good Practice Guidelines (MGPGs) can be issued by the Minister for Local Government. They are not mandatory for councils (unlike regulations). In the spirit of having a principles-based Act, it is intended that MGPGs be developed where there is a clear need to support councils.

Statewide strategies and plans such as the **Active Victoria Framework** guide planning principles, set vision, create alignment and highlight the multi-functional value of open space.

Local planning schemes

Planning schemes contain policies and provisions that control land use and development. They are made up of maps and ordinances.

Ordinances are the policies and written clauses, and maps depict where zones and overlays apply within a planning scheme area.

Zones and overlays

All land is subject to a zone. The planning scheme zones land for particular uses, for example, public open space. The zones are listed in the planning scheme and each zone has a purpose and set of requirements. This information describes whether a planning permit is required, and the matters that the council must consider before deciding to grant a permit.

An overlay is a complementary planning control to the zone. Unlike zones, which deal primarily with the broader aspects of the use and development of land, an overlay generally seeks to control a specific aspect of the development of land.

Not all land has an overlay. Some land may be affected by more than one overlay. If an overlay applies, the land will have some special feature such as a heritage building, significant vegetation or flood risk.

For detailed advice related to Victorian planning schemes and planning provisions, see the [Practitioner's guide to Victoria's planning schemes](#).

Relevant Victoria legislation, policies and documents

Key Legislation	Key Regulations and Policies
Planning and Environment Act 1987	Victoria Planning Provisions (VPPs)
Subdivision Act 1988	Precinct Structure Plans (PSPs)
Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978	Growth Corridor Plans (for metropolitan Melbourne)
Local Government Act 2020	

	Plan for Victoria – A plan by Victorians, for Victorians (2025)	Key Strategies, Plans and Frameworks	Open Space for Everyone – Open Space Strategy for Metropolitan Melbourne 2021	Plan Melbourne 2017–2050
Integrated Water Management Framework for Victoria (2017)	Land Management Strategy – Protecting our natural and cultural heritage for future generations (2022)	Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021–2026 – Pathway to Stronger Partnerships (2020)	Healthy Parks Healthy People Framework 2020	Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–2027
Victoria’s Climate Change Strategy (2021)	Marine and Coastal Strategy (2022)	Water is Life Roadmap (2022)	Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018–2023	Water for Victoria – Water Plan (2016)
Victoria’s Housing Statement – The decade ahead 2024–2034	Protecting Victoria’s Environment – Biodiversity 2037 (2017)	Victorian Volunteer Strategy 2022–2027	Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umarkoo Yarra Strategic Plan: a 10-year plan for the Yarra River corridor – 2022 to 2032	Inclusive Victoria: state disability plan 2022–2026

Victoria Planning Provisions (VPPs)

The VPP is established under Part 1A of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 as a statewide reference document or template from which a planning scheme or planning scheme provision must be sourced or constructed.⁶¹

The Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP) provide overarching policy to guide land use, subdivision and development in Victoria. The VPPs are informed by Victorian Government policy.

Statewide, regional and local planning policies are grouped by theme, with applicable regional and local policies located under the corresponding statewide policy.

To help identify the reach of each policy, their clause numbers include a character identifier:

- Statewide planning policies include the letter 'S'.
- Regional planning policies include the letter 'R'.
- Local planning policies include the letter 'L'.

Clauses of relevance include, but are not limited to, the following:

Settlement

- Clause 11.03-2S – Growth areas

Environmental and Landscape Values

- Clause 12.03-1S – River and riparian corridors, waterways, lakes, wetlands and billabongs
- Clause 12.05-2S – Landscapes

Built Environment and Heritage

- Clause 15.01-3S – Subdivision design

Infrastructure

- Clause 19.02-6S – Open space
- Clause 19.02-6R – Open space – Metropolitan Melbourne

General Requirements and Performance Standards

- Clause 53.01 – Public Open Space Contribution and Subdivision

Residential Subdivision

- Clause 56.03 – Liveable and sustainable communities

⁶¹ Practitioners Guide to Victoria's Planning Schemes, VPA

Precinct Structure Plans (PSPs)

The [Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines](#) describe and define PSPs as below:

A PSP is a high-level strategic plan that sets out the preferred spatial location of key land uses and infrastructure to guide decisions on staging of development, subdivision permits, building permits and infrastructure delivery.

PSPs are deliberately flexible – they cannot anticipate and control every challenge that may be encountered at detailed design and delivery phases.

As a tool to guide subdivision and delivery of essential infrastructure, they provide certainty of intended outcomes and the flexibility for detailed design to respond to site-specific requirements and solutions, and innovations.

Once prepared, PSPs are incorporated documents within the planning scheme. As such, they have a specific role to address matters within the scope of the planning system – ensuring they are consistent with the regulatory environment they operate in.

PSPs are largely implemented through subdivision applications, and councils are generally involved in the preparation of PSPs in partnership with the VPA. This includes open space and recreation council teams.

PSPs are prepared both in metropolitan Melbourne and across other regions of Victoria in growing cities and towns. While a more nuanced approach to the application of the Guidelines in these areas is required, the same principles, features and targets should be considered in the regional context, particularly where larger growth areas are proposed.⁶²

For more information on applying PSP guidelines in regional areas, see the separate [guidance note](#) from the VPA.

The table below provides an overview of relevant commentary on public open space or related areas from the [Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines: New Communities in Victoria \(2021\)](#).

Table 5: Relevant open space commentary from Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines (2021)

Viable densities	
F1 – Housing Diversity / Amenity-Based Density Model	Establishes that open space (both credited and encumbered) is a key amenity feature for directing higher housing densities. Densities of 30+ dwellings/NDHA required within 50m of open space.
T1 – Performance Target: Density near open space	PSPs should facilitate 30+ dwellings per NDHA within 400m of activity centres/train stations and within 50m of open space (both credited and encumbered), boulevards, and major public transport routes.
F4 – Safe Streets and Spaces	Requires that densities are supported by appropriately scaled streets, blocks and open spaces. Design of public realm should ensure spaces feel safe and inviting. Notes path networks providing access to parks and open spaces.

⁶² Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines, Victoria Planning Authority (2021)

Safe, accessible and well-connected	
F6 – Walking and Cycling	Streets should provide direct, comfortable off-road footpaths, shared paths, and cycle paths connecting open spaces and key destinations. Greater walking/cycling access in areas near community facilities.
T6–T8 – Walking and Cycling Performance Targets	Off-road bicycle paths on all connector streets/arterial roads. Pedestrian and cyclist crossings every 400–800m along arterial roads, waterways and accessibility barriers. Connections to off-road trails.
Offer high-quality public realm and open space	
Overview – High-Quality Public Realm	States that the public realm and open space network are crucial to neighbourhood identity, liveability, social cohesiveness, health and wellbeing, and mitigating the urban heat island effect. Introduces Features F10–F13 and Targets T11–T17.
Climate Resilient Communities	Discusses role of urban greening, tree canopy, stormwater management, and local parks in building climate resilience. Notes importance of open space in cooling and shade provision.
F10 – Local Recreational Spaces and Facilities	CORE OPEN SPACE SECTION. Establishes principles for: (a) local parks ranging 0.1–3ha with diverse amenity experiences; (b) sporting reserves targeted to community needs; (c) accessible recreation facilities; (d) linear open space and waterway corridors; (e) productive use of encumbered land.
F10.1 – Local Parks Principles	Open space network should include local parks with variety of sizes (0.1–3ha), located to enable access without crossing arterial roads/railways/waterways, providing diverse amenity experiences.
F10.2 – Sporting Reserves	Sporting reserves should be targeted to community needs, accessible, appropriately designed, able to use alternative water supply, and responsive to local character. Co-location with stormwater facilities encouraged.
F10.3 – Encumbered Land	Encumbered land (waterway corridors, drainage, utilities easements) can provide recreation and leisure opportunities. Should be designed to maximise community benefit while maintaining primary function.
T11 – Open Space Provision Targets	CRITICAL TARGET: Within residential areas: 10% of NDA for local parks + sports reserves (3–5% local parks, 5–7% sports). Within employment areas: 2% of NDA for local parks. Quantified via land budget tables.
T11 – Innovation Opportunities	Opportunities to enhance/optimize existing open space and encumbered land. Innovative approaches may include using reserves, natural systems, schools. Encumbered land may serve as productive landscape (e.g. community gardens, urban agriculture).

T12 – Open Space Distribution Targets	Open space and sports reserves should be located to meet distribution targets to ensure equitable access across the PSP area.
F11 – Green Streets and Spaces	Public realm and open space design should support climate adaptation (greening, tree canopy for cooling/shade, IWM), be responsive to land use context, encourage passive surveillance, incorporate productive vegetation and community gardens.
T13 – Tree Canopy Coverage Target	Minimum 30% potential canopy tree coverage within public realm and open space (excluding biodiversity/conservation areas). Illustrated via Public Realm & Water Plan showing coverage in road reserves and local parks.
F12 – Environmental and Biodiversity Value	Conservation reserves with appropriate transitions/interfaces to urban land. Waterway corridors considered in open space planning with adequate buffers, diversity of amenity, and protection of visual amenity.
F13 – Sustainable Water	IWM solutions integrated with open space and urban form. Stormwater treatment and drainage systems co-located with open space. Waterways maintained for health, wellbeing, and recreation. Playgrounds considered in flood risk context.
Part 3 – services and destinations (F14–F15)	
F14 – Local Schools and Community Infrastructure	Education and community facilities (including sport reserves) should be co-located within community hubs, linked by walking and cycling paths. Sport reserves listed as key community infrastructure.
F15 – Lifelong Learning Opportunities	Location and design of community facilities should maximise shared use with active open space. Includes alternative funding models and community access to school grounds.
Part 3 – thriving local economies (F16)	
F16 – Activity Centres	Activity centres should include appropriately located public open space as part of their design and land allocation.
Part 3 – infrastructure coordination (F17–F18)	
F17–F18 – Infrastructure Coordination	PSPs coordinate delivery of community facilities, open space, and transport to support 20-minute neighbourhoods. Open space identified as key infrastructure requiring staging and coordination.

Other useful documents

There are several other useful documents that can assist with public open space planning activities and tasks. A list of document types is provided below.

- council strategic plan
- municipal planning scheme and local planning policies
- housing
- self-determination / reconciliation
- health and wellbeing
- biodiversity
- urban forest
- climate adaptation
- sports and recreation
- active transport
- emergency management (bushfire)
- economic development
- trails
- accessibility
- tourism
- community infrastructure
- cultural heritage
- arts and culture
- green wedge management
- coastal management
- environmental sustainability
- integrated water management
- transport
- asset management
- activity centre structure plans

STATE GOVERNMENT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Victorian Government has responsibility for the planning, delivery and protection of open spaces of state and/or regional significance, particularly those with significant environmental and/or cultural values. These are often managed in partnership with other state agencies, local government and Department of Environment and Primary Industry appointed committees of management.

The Government's strategic open space objectives and broad standards are outlined in relevant state legislation and the statewide land use planning policy frameworks contained in the Victoria Planning Provisions.

In addition, the Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines (PSPs) produced by the Growth Areas Authority provide guidance on the planning and delivery of diverse open spaces in new residential developments in growth areas.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Local government is the principal provider and manager of open spaces for its communities. It can take on numerous roles and may play several roles simultaneously. For planning, designing and managing public open spaces, local government could be a:

- Developer,
- Planner,
- Owner,
- Designer,
- Operator,
- Manager,
- Protector,
- Policy writer,
- Standard setter,
- Enforcer,

- Negotiator,
- Mediator,
- Decision-maker, or
- Expert.

Councils may also be appointed as committees of management for Crown land reserved for public parkland under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, managing and maintaining these lands in accordance with their reserved purpose.

While there is a large amount of legislation and guidance to draw from, each council typically prepares an open space strategy and other strategies to guide open space planning, prioritisation, provision and management.

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information.

This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (PPN2) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic
Committees of Management Responsibilities and Good Practice Guide	Department of Water Environment Land and Planning (2016)	Guidelines written to assist committees of management of Crown land reserves in Victoria to fulfil their duties and responsibilities.
Victorian Government Land Transaction Policy	Department of Water Environment Land and Planning (2022)	Outlines the requirements for Victorian agencies in land transactions. Councils are not ‘Victorian agencies’ in this policy. The policy outlines a number of relevant requirements for councils to be aware of in Victorian agency land transactions, particularly around the sale of land with a public land zone.
Victorian Government Land Use Policy and Guidelines	Department of Water Environment Land and Planning (2017)	Outlines guiding principles, roles and responsibilities for undertaking strategic land use assessments for statewide planning, including open space.

Victorian Government Landholding Policy	Department of Water Environment Land and Planning (2025)	This policy sets out the circumstances in which a Victorian government agency can purchase and retain land. It helps to ensure there is consistent decision -making on how government land is managed. The policy also establishes a requirement that Victorian government agencies must first offer to sell surplus land to other Victorian government agencies, local government agencies or the Commonwealth, before it can be sold to the public. This is known as the first right of refusal process.
Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines Website	Victoria Planning Authority (2021 – 2025)	Provides overarching guidance as well as specific guidance topics as a part of an overall toolkit.
Open Space for Everyone – Open Space Strategy for Metropolitan Melbourne 2021	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2021)	Directions to create an open space network that is connected, immersive and shared through planning and investment to protect, optimise and grow open space.
Plan for Victoria – A plan by Victorians, for Victorians	Victoria Department of Transport and Planning (2025)	Outlines Five Pillars for Action, including: Pillar 3: Great places, suburbs and towns. Relevant actions include, but are not limited to: Action 12: Protect and enhance our canopy trees. Action 13: Introduce minimum standards and guidance for open space in established urban areas. Action 15: Update design guidance to deliver better public places.
Victoria’s Housing Statement – The decade ahead 2024–2034	State of Victoria (2024)	The Victorian Government’s plan to build 800,000 more homes across the state over the next decade, including 425,600 in regional Victoria.

<u>Land Management Strategy – Protecting our natural and cultural heritage for future generations (2022)</u>	Parks Victoria (2022)	Sets out long-term directions, priorities and outcomes for the protection, management and use of Parks Victoria managed land for the next 10 years.
<u>Healthy Parks Healthy People Framework 2020</u>	Parks Victoria (2020)	Developed by Parks Victoria. Outlines the critical role that Victoria’s parks can play in encouraging healthier, more liveable and more connected communities.
<u>Protecting Victoria’s Environment – Biodiversity 2037 (2017)</u>	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2017)	Priority 4 is to increase opportunities for all Victorians to have daily connections with nature. Connecting with nature enriches our lives, improves our health and wellbeing, and drives positive environmental attitudes and values that can promote a lifelong positive relationship with nature.
<u>Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–2027</u>	Victoria Department of Health (2023)	Explains the importance of open space in supporting Victorians to be physically active, through creating infrastructure and ensuring amenities in our parks and open spaces.
<u>Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018–2023</u>	First Peoples Relations Victoria (2018)	Goal 18 is that Aboriginal land, water and cultural rights are realised. *Note: an updated framework will be available soon.
<u>Water for Victoria – Water Plan (2016)</u>	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2022)	Puts integrated water management into practice, leading to the 2017 <i>Integrated Water Management Framework for Victoria</i> . Open space provides opportunities to reduce demand for, and more efficiently use, our scarce water resources, by retaining and using rainwater and by harvesting, treating and reusing stormwater.
<u>Victoria’s Climate Change Strategy (2021)</u>	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2021)	Open space plays a critical role in countering impacts of climate change, such as urban heat. *Note: an updated strategy will be available soon.

<u>Integrated Water Management Framework for Victoria</u>	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2017)	An integrated water management approach to urban water planning and shared decision making throughout Victoria.
<u>Marine and Coastal Strategy (2022)</u>	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2022)	A strategy to support sustainable use and improve how we manage the health of the marine and coastal environment.
<u>Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines: New Communities in Victoria</u>	Victoria Planning Authority (2021)	Overarching guideline document for PSPs in Victoria.
<u>Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021–2026 –Pathway to Stronger Partnerships</u>	Local Government Victoria (2020)	Strategic Pillar Four: governance and participation. Aboriginal cultural values, voices, knowledge and rights will be embedded into the work that local councils perform in creating vibrant local communities.
<u>Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umarkoo Yarra Strategic Plan: a 10-year plan for the Yarra River corridor – 2022 to 2032</u>	Melbourne Water (2022)	Action 29: Plan, design and manage the river parklands as one living and integrated natural entity, ensuring that all parklands are managed to a consistently high standard. Celebrate the relationship between the river and its parklands. Action 33: Over the next 10 years, the state government is to investigate opportunities to improve and extend the area of parklands and deliver on priorities for acquisition.
<u>Water is Life Roadmap</u>	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2022)	The Victorian Government’s framework, working with Traditional Owners, to increase their access to water and their involvement in water management while balancing the rights and entitlements of irrigators and landholders, environmental groups and the community. The framework sets out the Victorian Government’s commitments and policy pathways over the short, medium and long term. It also includes the Nation statements submitted by First Nations and Traditional

		Owners across Victoria expressing their cultural and water-related values, goals, aspirations and outcomes.
<u>Victorian Volunteer Strategy 2022–2027</u>	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (2022)	A plan to improve support for volunteers and strengthen the volunteering sector, including in open space related areas such as sports, recreation, environmental management and arts and culture.
<u>Inclusive Victoria: state disability plan 2022–2026</u>	Inclusive Victoria (2022)	Aims to secure fairer access for people with disabilities. Priority area 1.6 is to create more inclusive open space so all Victorians can experience nature.
Planning Guidelines for Conversion of Golf Course Land to Other Purposes	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2020)	Provides advice for converting golf course land to other purposes including public open space.

PPN3 – OPEN SPACE STRATEGIES

Public Open Space Handbook – Planning Practice Notes

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

This module provides a general overview of the development of open space strategies, which draws upon the Guide to Open Space Strategies (DEECA, 2025).

It is recommended to review that document when planning the development of an open space strategy.

Why is this important?

Strategies and plans are crucial to achieving objectives in modern open space planning, designing and managing.

The key and defining decisions made for open spaces can be made 5, 10 or 20 years before the change is seen by the public.

Victorian context

In 2025, the Victoria Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action released the Guide for Open Space Strategies (GOSS). GOSS provides a comprehensive set of guidelines which can be used as the foundation to develop an open space strategy.

WHY CREATE AN OPEN SPACE STRATEGY?

The processes for funding and city- or district-wide strategic planning require open space managers to justify requirements and needs for open space years in advance.

The open space strategy (OSS) answers questions like:

- Who uses this space now or in future?
- What kinds of activities should happen here?
- Where should new open space be, or where is it now?
- When are we going to complete our planned actions?
- Why does a specific type of open space need to be developed?
- How will open spaces be used now and in future?

As the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) states:

‘The open space legacy we enjoy today is the result of bold visions, foresight and many small incremental initiatives over time. It also reflects a history of open space at times undervalued reminding us of the constant need to protect, optimise and grow accessible unencumbered land while complementing the network through creative use of other encumbered public lands.’ (Guide for Open Space Strategies, 2025)

WHAT IS AN OPEN SPACE STRATEGY?

Open space strategies have common elements but can vary in complexity and document length depending on:

- The size of the organisation,
- The size of the city, district or region,
- The number of open spaces,
- The types of open spaces,
- The complexity of internal policies and strategies, and
- The members of the community.

Typically, open space strategies include the following information⁶³:

- an overview of why open space is important and the multiple benefits it delivers
- a strategic framework that communicates future-focused organisational objectives, taking a holistic view that complements the local government's strategic plan for its community needs
- a 'policy to practice' approach, demonstrating a clear line of sight from relevant global to local policy and directions to tangible local actions and practice
- definitions and descriptions classifying the open space network according to its function and hierarchy or catchment
- evidence-based documentation of the existing open space network and current and future needs to determine equity gaps in access, connectivity and high-quality provision
- a summary of community needs and aspirations identified through engagement, which may include social research, to understand relevant social behaviour, trends and dynamics
- an implementation or action plan guiding resource allocation and identifying varied funding sources to address priorities and gaps in open space provision
- a review and monitoring approach to track delivery and respond to changing circumstances over time

What is not an open space strategy?

Open space strategies have a particular place in the planning, design and management of open spaces. However, they are one of several types of guiding documents and should not try to have every piece of open space information in one document.

Open space strategies are not:

- Detailed funding plans,
- Masterplans,
- Design guidelines,
- Used for maintenance contract negotiations,

⁶³ Guide for Open Space Strategies, DEECA, 2025

- Used to set policies or laws,
- Levels of service,
- Individual open space management guidelines.

Open space strategies should work together with other relevant organisational strategies, documents, policies and objectives. The OSS should not conflict or overlap significantly with other documents.

Ultimately, the OSS should complement, affirm and strengthen the planning, design and delivery of open space.

OPEN SPACE STRATEGY LIFECYCLE

Open space strategies are typically for a 10-year period. There are some open space strategies that have a long vision with a horizon of 20, 30 or 50 years.

However, open space and recreation strategies have an expiration date, typically considered to be 10 years. Therefore, even if a strategy is for a 20-year period, the strategy should still be refreshed, renewed or rewritten after 10 years.

Open space strategies that are over 10 years old create risk for open space managers because they are often used to base decisions on both in the community and for new developments. Older open space strategies present the risk of:

- Strategic framework or requirements being dismissed as out of date,
- No longer reflecting fast-evolving communities and spaces,
- Under-providing for open space due to population growth,
- Underfunding for open space needs,
- Organisational misunderstanding of urgent and non-urgent actions,
- Community confusion on priorities,
- Incorrect or inappropriate strategic planning decisions by professionals outside of the open space industry.

CREATING AN OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

The Guide for Open Space Strategies (GOSS) sets out a clear pathway for developing an open space strategy with 9 specific stages. The Guide gives an in-depth list of considerations and actions for each project stage. In the Guide, each stage has the following information:

- Stage objective,
- Key messages, and
- Activities to consider.

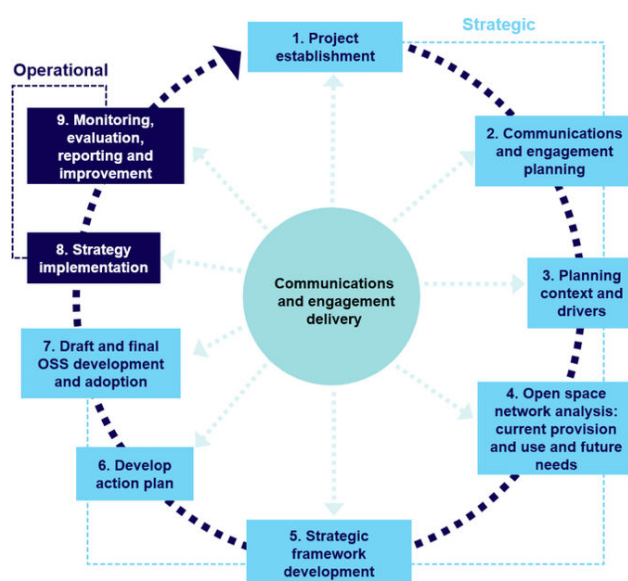


Figure 1: Open Space Strategy Project Stages, Guide for Open Space Strategies (DEECA, 2025)

RELEVANT VPP CLAUSES: OPEN SPACE STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP) provide overarching policy to guide land use, subdivision and development in Victoria. The VPPs are informed by Victorian Government policy. Clauses of relevance include, but are not limited to, the following:

	Reference	Summary of relevant strategies
Settlement	Clause 11.03-2S – Growth areas	Deliver accessible, integrated and adaptable community infrastructure, including a high-quality network of public open space with opportunities for passive and active recreation. Retain unique characteristics of established areas impacted by growth. Protect and manage natural resources and areas of heritage, cultural and environmental significance. Create well planned, easy to maintain high amenity, environmentally resilient and safe public realms that contribute to a sense of place, support cooling and greening, reduce opportunities for crime, improve perceptions of safety and increase levels of community participation. Develop and implement plans for growth areas that will: - Identify the location of open space to be retained for recreation, and/or biodiversity protection and/or flood risk reduction purposes guided and directed by regional biodiversity conservation strategies. - Show significant waterways as opportunities for creating linear trails, along with areas required to be retained for biodiversity protection and/or flood risk reduction purposes. Develop precinct structure plans consistent with the Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines: New Communities in Victoria (Victorian Planning Authority, 2021).
Environmental Landscape Values	Clause 12.03-1S – River and riparian corridors, waterways, lakes, wetlands and billabongs	Protect the environmental, cultural and landscape values of all waterway systems as significant economic, environmental and cultural assets.

		Retain and enhance the recreation and amenity values along waterway systems by: - Planning for surrounding green spaces as recreation and tourism resources without adversely impacting environmental values and flood management capacity. - Protecting and enhancing parklands for their economic, social and environmental values. - Protecting and enhancing public access to waterway systems and surrounding parklands. - Enhancing existing and providing new green links, pedestrian and cycle connections and open space. Design and site development to maintain and enhance the natural environment of waterway systems by: - Minimising the visual intrusion of development on the natural landscape views from major roads, bridge crossings, public open space, recreation trails and within waterway systems themselves.
	Clause 12.05-2S – Landscapes	To protect and enhance significant landscapes and open spaces that contribute to character, identity and sustainable environments. Ensure significant landscape areas such as forests, the bays and coastlines are protected. Improve the landscape qualities, open space linkages and environmental performance in significant landscapes and open spaces, including green wedges, conservation areas and non-urban areas. Ensure important natural features are protected and enhanced.
Built Environment and Heritage	Clause 15.01-3S – Subdivision design	Creating urban places with a strong sense of place that are functional, safe and attractive. Creating landscaped streets and a network of open spaces to meet a variety of needs with links to regional parks where possible. Protecting and enhancing habitat for native flora and fauna, and providing opportunities for people to experience nature in urban areas.

		Being accessible to people with disabilities. Creating an urban structure that: - Responds to climate related hazards.
Infrastructure	Clause 19.02-6S – Open space	Entire clause is relevant. Objective: To establish, manage and improve a diverse and integrated network of public open space that meets the needs of the community.
	Clause 19.02-6R – Open space – Metropolitan Melbourne	Entire clause is relevant for designing within metropolitan Melbourne. Objective: To strengthen the integrated metropolitan open space network.
General Requirements and Performance Standards	Clause 53.01 – Public Open Space Contribution and Subdivision	Entire clause.
Residential Subdivision	Clause 56.03 – Liveable and sustainable communities Standard C4	A subdivision should: - Implement any relevant regional and local community facility strategy, plan or policy for the area set out in this scheme. - Locate community facilities on sites that are in or near activity centres and public transport. School sites should: - Adjoin the public open space network and community sporting and other recreation facilities. - Be integrated with community facilities.
	Clause 56.03 – Liveable and sustainable communities Standard C5	The built environment should: - Implement any relevant urban design strategy, plan or policy for the area set out in this scheme. - Contribute to a sense of place and cultural identity.
	Clause 56.03 – Liveable and sustainable communities	Subdivision should: - Protect significant vegetation and site features.

	Standard C6	
--	--------------------	--

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information. This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (PPN3) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Guide to Open Space Strategies (GOSS)	Department of Energy, Environment, and Climate Action	This guide provides comprehensive advice on the development of an open space strategy.	https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/open-space-for-everyone/guide-for-open-space-strategies
Planning Schemes Search	Victoria Planning Provisions	This website allows you to search for planning schemes which contain policies and provisions that control land use and development and apply to all private and public land in Victoria.	https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/planning-schemes
Open Space for Everyone - Open Space Strategy for Metropolitan Melbourne	DEECA (2021)	Provides an overview of Melbourne's focuses for open space.	https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/520594/open-space-strategy-2021.pdf
Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines: New Communities in Victoria	Victoria Planning Authority (2021)	Outlines targets for new communities within Precinct Structure Plans, including open space targets.	https://vpa-web.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/VPA-Precinct-Structure-Planning-Guidelines-New-Communities-In-Victoria-October-2021.pdf

Introduction

This guidance provides a contemporary framework for the provision of Public Open Space (POS) in Victoria. It expands on existing frameworks by clarifying what constitutes good-quality public open space, not just how much land is required.

Why is this important?

Provision standards set the scene both for land owners/managers to understand and measure their success based on clear needs.

They also provide clarity for developers and external parties on what is required of them.

Victorian context

This Practice Note complements other guidance such as:

- Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Victorian Planning Provisions (VPP), including Clause 53.01 (Public Open Space Contribution and Subdivision)
- Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines (VPA)
- Development Contributions Plans (DCPs)
- Infrastructure Contributions Plans (ICPs)
- Plan Melbourne and relevant regional growth strategies
- DEECA Guide for Open Space Strategies
- Draft Victorian Public Open Space Function and Hierarchy Classification Framework (2025)

WHAT MAKES A GOOD OPEN SPACE?

Open spaces are delightfully varied and multi-functional and provide numerous benefits. More than that, open spaces are made possible through land use, and therefore no open space can be the same or deliver identical benefits. Conservation open spaces focus on delivering for biodiversity, and sports fields focus on delivering for community benefit.

This means that determining what makes a ‘good’ open space does not depend on strict application of characteristics, quality or function.

Instead, a good open space is one that delivers on its purpose.

The planning process of setting provisions assists open space planners, designers and managers to articulate the vision and needs for open space. In this way, provision standards help to set the purpose of open spaces throughout an urban area or region and ensure that purpose is realised.

Creating or following provision standards is intertwined with several other open space planning tasks:

- Establishing a vision and strategic principles for open spaces,
- Considering wider planning and policy context,
- Setting open space type hierarchies and classifications,
- Understanding the wider land use context, and
- Understanding the community both now and the potential future community.

Therefore, this module should be read with consideration to:

- PPN1 – Benefits of Public Open Space
- PPN2 – Planning Framework
- PPN3 – Open Space Strategies
- PPN5 – Classifying Function and Hierarchy
- DDG2 – Design Principles

Provision setting process overview

The Guide to Open Space Strategies (DEECA, 2025) outlines the tasks involved in the development of open space provision standards. The table below provides a summary of the activities.

Table 6: Provision setting process overview (adapted)

Activity 1 Undertake provision analysis	Activity 2 Undertake current and future community needs analysis	Activity 3 Gap Analysis
• Undertake audit/evaluation of current open space network • Map network of existing open space using function and hierarchy classification • Identify data that is needed to undertake analysis and any gaps in knowledge • Use a precinct or suburb planning approach to analyse open spaces • Assess and map impacts of climate change risk • Assess and record any potential loss of total open space • Forecast and record expected new open space in the network	• Consider housing type, and settlement patterns, existing and new activity centres, • Refer to council planning schemes and consider their policy guidance, zoning and overlay provisions • Understand changing community demographics and needs • Complete research for access and inclusion, equity and disability • Research emerging trends for open space, lifestyle, recreation, events, community sport and tourism • Set local vegetation and canopy targets • Analyse equity in access to leased, licensed and programmed use of open space	• Set the criteria, standards and targets to be used to understand gaps • Understand differences between measures for urban, regional and rural settlement areas • Consider walkable catchments that use actual street and pathways analysis • Highlight council-owned and other Crown/public land, including public schools • Integrate policy and strategy review, research and community engagement findings • Integrate emerging trends research • Apply provision standards matrix to understand gaps or opportunities to improve quality of existing open space • Assess topography and other physical features

	Investigate patterns of ‘loss of open space’	- Assess connectivity of network - Assess urban canopy targets
--	--	---

QUANTITY, QUALITY, DIVERSITY AND DISTRIBUTION (Q2D2)

As discussed earlier, a good open space is one that delivers on its purpose. Setting provision standards is one of the open space planning activities that help determine the purpose of an open space.

A full set of open space provision standards should describe the quantity, quality, diversity and distribution of open spaces in a network⁶⁴.

Table 7: Quantity, quality, diversity, distribution summary table

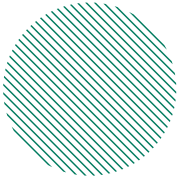
	Quantity		Quality
How much public open space is required to serve existing and future populations?		What characteristics make open space usable, safe, inclusive and resilient?	
	Diversity		Distribution
What mix of open space types is required to meet varied community needs?		How equitably and strategically is open space located?	

⁶⁴ Concept adapted from Dan Ferguson. Quantity, quality, diverstiy, distribution can also be used in other disciplines such as data science.

Quantity

Provision standards for the number of open spaces and the size of the open spaces are often provided within planning and policy documents. For example, Residential Subdivision VPP Clause 56.05-2, Standard C13 states a provision of 8 hectares for active open space in an area within 1km of 95% of all dwellings.

However, there will always be some types of open space where the quantity and size of open space will be set by each council. Quantity standards are generally expressed as:



- a percentage of the total amount of land (% of total ha)
- an amount per capita (ha/1000 people)
- an area size (number of hectares for an open space type)

For quantity provision, questions to ask are:

- How many hectares in total do we have or do we need?
- How many hectares do we need for open space in urban, regional and rural areas?
- How many hectares do we need for each open space type?
- What is the minimum size for open spaces by type (based on our hierarchy)?

Quality

The quality required should not be the same for all open spaces, as the purpose of each type of open space will be different.

Quality provision standards should consider land suitability requirements and design. Minimum quality standards should also be set according to open space type and hierarchy.

For complementary information on quality, see DDG1 – Land Suitability, DDG2 – Design Principles and PPN5 – Classifying Function and Hierarchy.

Quality criteria could include (but are not limited to):



- Accessible and well-connected,
- Safe and visible,
- Inclusive and universally designed,
- Climate-responsive (shade, canopy, water),
- Comfortable (seating, shelter, amenities),
- Ecologically functional,
- Culturally responsive and recognising Traditional Owners,
- Durable and maintainable,
- Aligned to strategic plan and vision,
- Adaptable to changing needs.

For quality provision, questions to ask are:

- What level of quality is required for each open space type?
- Is the level of quality different for different areas (urban, regional or rural)?
- How should our open spaces align with quality design (e.g. accessible, connected)?

Distribution

The term urban green infrastructure (UGI) supports the view that open spaces can be a part of a network of green spaces throughout a city and region. Green infrastructure is described by Greener Places as:

a network of green spaces, natural systems, and semi-natural systems that support sustainable community and includes waterways; bushland; tree canopy and green ground cover; parks and open spaces that are strategically planned, designed and managed to support a good quality of life in an urban environment. (Greener Places, NSW Government Architect, 2020).

While not all green infrastructure is open space, open space contributes to the network of urban green infrastructure through strategic distribution planning of open spaces, particularly in precinct structure plans.

Distribution should not only consider owned and controlled open space, but also open space outside of the municipal area. Open space networks do not start and stop on borders; these networks should continue to connect throughout the region.

Analysing the distribution of open space requires having a clear open space hierarchy and classification, and an excellent data set and complete knowledge of the council's open spaces.

For distribution provision, questions to ask are:

- What is the minimum walkable distance for different open space types and different activities (close to schools, dwellings, activity hubs)?
- How do pathways, active transport routes and shared paths integrate into the open space network?
 - What is the role and minimum standard for linear open spaces and linkages?
 - What kinds of activities or land use should be co-located with open space?
 - Does population density change open space distribution needs?
 - How does the provision standard respond to inequity of access? Can all residents access all open space types?
 - Do we have different settlement types? If so, how does our provision respond to different settlement types (urban areas, growth areas, regional/rural, activity centres)?
- How should our open space provision connect with other municipalities and landowners?



Diversity

Open spaces are unique places. While land can be developed to provide similar activities and look or feel similar, the land itself is always different and the context is different. No two open spaces are the same.

It is important to recognise the need to understand how open spaces work (function), the catchment they provide for (hierarchy) and how accessible they are (access).



The ability to classify open spaces in this way enables checking and assessing the diversity of the open space network. While there are standard provisions to adhere to for some open space types (e.g. local parks), every community and area will require a different set of diverse open space types.

Examples of functions:

- Sports and active recreation
- Community gathering/assembly
- Recreation/social
- Coastal foreshore
- Nature-based recreation

Examples of hierarchy types:

- Pocket
- Local
- Neighbourhood
- District
- Municipal
- Regional
- State/National

Beyond basic open space provision standards, diversity provision can support more detailed planning, such as the diversity of activities within types (e.g. sport and active recreation reserves) or setting maintenance levels of service.

For diversity provision, questions to ask are:

- What are the different types of open space we have?
- What is the hierarchy for our different open space types?
- Do we have a number of one type of open space and a small amount of another?
- Do the types of open space we have reflect changing recreation trends, demographics, climate impacts or other influences?
- Do our open spaces reflect and celebrate their heritage and significance?
- Within each open space type (e.g. sports reserves), do we have a diverse range of activities?
- Should all our open spaces within a certain type provide the same activities?

RURAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

Urban open space planning has limitations that are not applicable to regional and rural settlements. The application of provision standards in these areas requires pragmatic provision rather than strict formulas, and a clear understanding of future needs.

Population growth and new developments can change an area quickly. Understanding the potential future needs in a high-growth scenario is important for open space planning, particularly for regional and peri-urban councils.

Table 8: Rural and regional provision planning considerations

Settlement Type	Description	Considerations
Rural municipalities	Rural areas comprise smaller towns or farming communities. They are generally experiencing population stability or decline (although some rural areas are experiencing growth and peri-urban characteristics).	• Travel-based access rather than walkable standards. • Single-purpose facilities for smaller communities may be unsustainable. Travel to single-purpose facilities may be required instead. • Look for multi-use and flexible community spaces. • Often the planning zones are not residential.
Regional cities	Regional areas include larger cities and towns with a focus on employment, education and health services, and are experiencing growth. Regional areas include both existing urban and growth areas.	• May provide destination parks serving broad catchments. • May provide key tourism and visitor infrastructure. • May provide more regional sporting facilities due to more land availability and lower density. • Walkable standards may need to be achieved over time as development occurs.
Peri-urban and growth interface councils	In growth areas, open space planning is generally dealing with provision of new open space. In growth areas, there are opportunities to plan an 'ideal' open space network based around natural features with enough flexibility to cater for future needs.	• Experiencing rapid population growth pressures. • Open space planning requires balancing environmental and recreation assets with development.
Urban areas	Established areas that may be located in the inner, middle or outer areas of metropolitan Melbourne.	• Experiencing difficulties providing for community needs within land constraints. • Ability to increase open space is limited due to either encumbered land or considerable or unreasonable capital cost to acquire land. • Relies on multi-use and integration with other urban areas for green spaces and recreation activity. • In a constrained environment, consider a hub-and-spoke model

		for specific sport and recreation activities with strategically aligned public transport routes, instead of delivering every activity in every neighbourhood. • Often requires establishing partnerships, sharing facilities and creating a network of facilities with adjoining municipalities.
--	--	---

RELEVANT VPP STANDARDS AND CLAUSES

Relevant Q2D2	Relevant Standards	Reference
Quantity	Provide new parkland in growth areas and in areas that have an undersupply of parkland.	VPP 11.03-1 – Open space planning objectives and strategies
Distribution	Public open space should be provided along foreshores, streams and permanent water bodies.	Standard C13 - VPP-56.05-2 Public Open Space Provision objectives
Distribution	Provide a network of well-distributed neighbourhood public open space that includes: - Local parks within 400 metres safe walking distance of at least 95 percent of all dwellings. - Additional small local parks or public squares in activity centres and higher density residential areas. - Active open space of at least 8 hectares in area within 1 kilometre of 95 percent of all dwellings. - Linear parks and trails along waterways, vegetation corridors and road reserves within 1 kilometre of 95 percent of all dwellings.	Standard C13 - VPP-56.05-2 Public Open Space Provision Objectives
Distribution	Ensure that land is set aside and developed in residential areas for local recreational use and to create pedestrian and bicycle links to commercial and community facilities.	VPP 11.03-1 – Open space planning objectives and strategies
Distribution	Ensure that open space networks: - Are linked through the provision of walking and cycle trails and rights of way. - Are integrated with open space from abutting subdivisions. - Incorporate, where possible, links between major parks and activity	VPP 11.03-1 – Open space planning objectives and strategies

	areas, along waterways and natural drainage corridors, connecting places of natural and cultural interest, as well as maintaining public accessibility on public land immediately adjoining waterways and coasts.	
Distribution	Ensure land identified as critical to the completion of open space links is transferred for open space purposes.	VPP 11.03-1 – Open space planning objectives and strategies
Distribution	The provision of public open space should be linked to existing or proposed future public open spaces where appropriate.	Standard C13 - VPP-56.05-2 Public Open Space Provision Objectives
Distribution	An application for subdivision that creates public open spaces should be accompanied by a landscape design that provides for walking and cycling networks that link with community facilities.	Standard C12 of VPP – 56.05-1 Integrated urban landscape objectives
Quality	Ensure public access is not prevented by developments along stream banks and foreshores.	VPP – 11.03-2 – Open space management objectives and strategies
Quality	Ensure public land immediately adjoining waterways and coastlines remains in public ownership.	VPP – 11.03-2 – Open space management objectives and strategies
Quantity / Quality	Appropriateness for active open space – size, distribution, dimension and orientation. Active open space of at least 8 hectares in area within 1 kilometre of 95 per cent of all dwellings that is: - Suitably dimensioned and designed to provide for the intended use, buffer areas around sporting fields and passive open space - Sufficient to incorporate two football/cricket ovals - Appropriate for the intended use in terms of quality and orientation	

	- Located on flat land (which can be cost effectively graded) - Located with access to, or making provision for, a recycled or sustainable water supply - Adjoin schools and other community facilities where practical - Designed to achieve sharing of space between sports.	
Quality	Ensure open space is designed to accommodate people of all abilities, ages and cultures.	VPP 11.03-1 – Open space planning objectives and strategies
Quality	The provision of public open space should be suitable for the intended use.	Standard C13 – VPP – 56.05-2 Public Open Space Provision Objectives
	In residential areas, approximately 10 per cent of the net developable area is to be provided as total public open space, of which 6 per cent of the net developable area is to be provided for active open space. In addition, residential precincts should contain active indoor recreation facilities that are co-located and/or share space with schools and integrated community facilities. This should result in an active indoor sports provision of approximately 5 hectares per 60,000 residents. In major employment areas, approximately 2 per cent of net developable area is to be provided as public open space, usually with a passive recreation function.	VPA Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines (2019)
Distribution	Linear parks and trails along waterways, vegetation corridors and road reserves within 1 kilometre of 95 per cent of all dwellings.	Standard C13 – VPP - 56.05-2 Public Open Space Provision Objectives

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information.

This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (PPN4) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By/ Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Metropolitan Open Space Network: Provision and Distribution	Victorian Planning Authority (2017)	Summary of metropolitan open -space network definitions, planning principles, open space provision and distribution (access (walkable 400m)) findings of analysis across Melbourne. Includes open space classification and hierarchy information.	https://vpa.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Open-Space-Network-Provision-and-Distribution-Reduced-Size.pdf
Guidelines for Community Infrastructure	PLA Western Australia (2012)	Guidance for planning, designing and delivering community infrastructure in Western Australia – including definitions (e.g. community hubs, multi-functional facilities), population--based provision standards, and principles for designing shared recreational/sporting/open -s pace facilities.	https://parksleisure.com.au/wp-content/uploads/parcel-library/397-0-Guidelines%20for%20Community%20Infastructure.pdf
Guidelines for Community Infrastructure	PLA Western Australia (2020)	Guidance and definitions for various community infrastructure, including open space, with information for rural and urban areas.	https://parksleisure.com.au/wp-content/uploads/parcel-library/1065-0-PLAWA%20Guidelines%20for%20Community%20Infastructure%202020%20P2.pdf
Community Infrastructure Planning	Victorian Planning Authority (2008/2009)	Website provides links to various research and guidance for community infrastructure planning, including open space, including for greenfield, established and rural areas.	https://vpa.vic.gov.au/strategy-guidelines/infrastructure/community-infrastructure-planning/

Network of public spaces – an idea handbook (Ideas, Strategies, Examples)	Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, Norway (2019)	Outlines principles and strategies for creating and managing interconnected, accessible urban public spaces (streets, parks, squares, paths and green/blue infrastructure) that support community life, social sustainability, mobility and environmental quality.	https://www.regjering.no/contentassets/c6fc38d76d374e77ae5b1d8dcdbbd92a/km_d_public-spaces_innmat_eng_org.pdf
Best Practice Guide for Open Space	Tauranga City Council, New Zealand (n.d.)	Practical best-practice approaches and criteria for planning, designing, developing and managing a high-quality, consistent open space network that delivers community benefits.	https://www.tauranga.govt.nz/Portals/0/data/council/policies/files/best-practice-open-space.pdf
Greener Places	NSW Government Architect (2020)	A vision, framework and set of principles for delivering green infrastructure in cities.	https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/greener-places.pdf
Urban Green Infrastructure for resilient communities	Parks and Leisure Australia (2025)	Urban Green Infrastructure (UGI) is the living infrastructure component of our cities, critical for mitigating natural hazards like fire, flood, heat, and drought. It nurtures biodiversity, enables recreation, improves public health and wellbeing, leading to greater resilience and thriving nature-positive cities. However, despite its immense value, UGI is often an afterthought, with no clear accountability for its creation, management, or protection.	https://parksleisure.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/UGI_Position_Statement_2025.pdf



PARKS & LEISURE
AUSTRALIA
(VIC / TAS)



VicHealth



DESIGN PUBLIC OPEN SPACE



DEVELOPMENT + DESIGN GUIDES

DDG1 – LAND SUITABILITY

Public Open Space Handbook – Development and Design Guides

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

This module provides an overview of land suitability considerations for planning and design.

The module covers:

- General open space land suitability requirements
- Definitions of unencumbered and encumbered land
- Options for encumbered land use for open space

Why is this important?

Land suitability analysis assesses existing open space land supply and its suitability to provide for the various needs and functions now and in future.

Analysing the suitability of a site or municipal area for open space development is a key part of the open space planning process, and ensures that planning provision requirements are met.

Victorian context

Suitability criteria could include the quality of the open space site, size, ability to meet its function and location.

Several of these criteria are included within council plans and strategies, precinct structure plans and the Victoria Planning Provisions through standards and objectives.

LAND SUITABILITY

Clause 56.05-2 (public open space objectives) of the Victorian Planning Provisions provides some guidance about the type of land that should be provided as open space. The following is an extract that follows the Standards of the clause:

Public open space should:

- Be provided along foreshores, streams and permanent water bodies.
- Be linked to existing or proposed future public open spaces where appropriate.
- Be integrated with floodways and encumbered land that is accessible for public recreation.
- Be suitable for the intended use.
- Be of an area and dimensions to allow easy adaptation to different uses in response to changing community active and passive recreational preferences.
- Maximise passive surveillance.
- Be integrated with urban water management systems, waterways and other water bodies.
- Incorporate natural and cultural features where appropriate.

When considering land for suitability as open space it is important to consider whether the land is fit for purpose for the intended open space use. Careful consideration will need to be given to what the intended public open space would be used for both now and in the future. The defined

categories of open space will be useful in helping to identify the likely uses of an open space site. By way of example, active open space generally requires land that is unencumbered, that is land that is suitable for development.

It is reasonable and common practice for councils to require that unencumbered land that is suitable for open space development be provided in addition to encumbered land (that may also be handed over for local government ownership and management).

The provision of suitable land for the establishment of open space is an important issue that many councils regularly face in the assessment of planning applications. Historically many open space areas have been developed on sites that are not suitable for residential or other productive development – it is often the land ‘leftover’ that a developer will hand over to local government – this land is known as encumbered land.

Generally, planning should always prioritise protecting, optimising and growing the network of freely accessible, unencumbered open space.

Table 9: Unencumbered land vs encumbered land

Unencumbered Land	Encumbered Land
Land that is suitable for development purposes and does not have constraints to development through overlays, utilities or infrastructure.	Land that is constrained for development purposes. It includes easements for powerlines, sewer, gas, waterways/drainage, retarding basins/wetlands, landfill, conservation and heritage areas. This land may be used for a range of activities (e.g. walking trails, sports fields). This is not provided as a credit against public open space requirements. However, regard is taken to the availability of encumbered land when determining the open space requirement.

Types and use of encumbered land

There are many types and forms of encumbered land sites, for example:

- Easement/location of transformer/control boxes for utilities
- Drainage
- Flood/inundation land
- Land subject to overlays within the local planning scheme (e.g. heritage, cultural, wildfire, LSIO)
- Powerlines, transmission lines
- Conservation/biodiversity

- Retarding function
- Slope/escarpment, gullies
- Land that is unsuitable for building on
- Road reserves
- Waterways

In considering the use of encumbered land, it is important to identify appropriate primary and secondary functions for the site, while also pursuing unconstrained sites elsewhere for a broader range of functions.

In this sense, encumbered land should be seen as an adjunct to unencumbered open space and it should be planned and designed to be integrated with it.

While conservation and environment land may be considered encumbered land as it may restrict recreational use and access, it is important to recognise the significant value of the land in protecting factors such as biodiversity, conservation, vegetation, habitat as well as cultural and historic values. Unencumbered land, or land that is suitable for development, will be required for some open space types.

The table below outlines examples of how land may be assessed for open space provision when encumbrances exist.

Table 10: Types of encumbrances

Type of Encumbrance	Open space uses that might be suitable
Flood prone land (LSIO - Land Subject to Inundation Overlay)	• Could be a pathway as part of a linear reserve. • Could be informal active recreation and/or sport training ground.
Drainage basin	• Depending on flooding rating (frequency), could be informal active recreation and/or sport training ground. • Often not suitable for children's play.
Road reserve	• May provide short-term additional green spaces and/or for the purpose of linkages and pathways.
Easements	• Where infrastructure exists (e.g. transformers, control boxes) – NOT suitable for open space. • Where open spaces are under transmission lines or over underground pipes, suitability may be approved for linear corridors or pathways.
Waterways	• Water component NOT suitable as open space.

LAND SUITABILITY CRITERIA

The assessment of land suitability can consider a wide range of factors and can vary depending on various regional and local strategic and operational plans.

The list below provides examples of criteria that can be used in a land suitability assessment.

Purpose

As discussed earlier, when considering land for suitability as open space it is important to consider whether the land is ‘fit for purpose’ for the intended open space use.

The other criteria, such as size of the land, become more relevant as the purpose becomes known.

Being clear about the intended use of the land allows early connection between relevant design elements and land suitability.

For example, the key principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and Gender Impact Assessments can be considered in land suitability if the intended use is already known.

Open spaces are multi-functional by nature, and therefore choosing a primary and secondary purpose is often a useful lens. For more information on open space categories, read POS Handbook module.

Size

The size of any given parcel of open space will directly determine its capability to function for its intended use. Generally the larger a piece of open space the greater the capacity for a wider diversity of functions, and adaptation to other functions as leisure preferences change over time.

Standards for the preferred sizes of different types of open spaces and the facilities within them are identified within a range of documents listed in this guide. The Victorian Planning Provisions provide guidance on the required size of local and neighbourhood parks and active open spaces. It should be noted, however, that:

- some councils may have prepared or adapted their own sizes based upon the recommended sizes in existing legislation and their local circumstances; and
- regional open spaces may be treated differently across councils.

Irrespective of any existing standards affecting size (e.g. policies, sports field standards), open space planners should assess the existing provision of open space in the given area to best determine what the open space needs are of the local area and community and how these can be best delivered.

At times this may mean accepting smaller sizes of open spaces than desired, or developing encumbered open space for recreational purposes, where this is possible given the primary function of the open space.

With respect to active open space, it is important that the standards for sport and recreation are considered and the intended users are consulted when determining the spatial requirements for any given sporting activity and any supporting facilities that may be required.

Shape

The shape of new open space will generally be determined by a range of factors including topography, hydrology, existing vegetation, the intended function of the open space, the road network and the plan of subdivision.

For maintenance and community safety purposes, boundaries of open space sites should generally be continuous, either straight or gently curving, to avoid jagged changes in alignment that provide hidden corners that are difficult to maintain and provide poor passive surveillance.

Furthermore, irregularly shaped active open spaces are generally less flexible in terms of the range and long-term viability of opportunities that may be offered.

Accessibility and topography

The existing slope of an area will determine the suitability of the site to provide for the intended functions, and determines how accessible the open space will be.

Land that is steeply sloping or has natural water flowing through it may be perfectly suitable for conservation land, habitat areas or as part of a linear corridor; however, it will be very difficult and costly to develop for other functions. Likewise, land that is virtually flat may also be unsuitable for some recreational purposes without significant expenditure on drainage infrastructure.

In all cases, topography poses several challenges in terms of open space design including access and passive surveillance, development costs, public safety and maintenance.

Where other criteria are equal, flatter sites are generally preferred as being more accommodating when complying with the Disability Discrimination Act, more suitable for car parking areas and active open spaces, and reducing construction costs.

Existing services

When assessing a site, the existing and connecting infrastructure services should be considered. This includes utilities, roads, 3 waters infrastructure, public transport infrastructure, and more.

Consider that some infrastructure and utilities may be underground. If the open space will be directly impacted or the infrastructure already exists on the land, investigate if the condition of these services is known, whether the asset is in use, how recent the last condition assessment was completed, and who owns and maintains the assets.

This may require support from other departments, teams, external consultants or external organisations.

Orientation

Understanding the aspect, or solar orientation, of a given piece of open space will assist in ensuring that the open space and any developments and features within it are utilised to their full potential and community benefit. Shade is an important part of outdoor play and provides heat relief for users.

It will also ensure that landscape features, such as trees, do not create future shade issues with reserve users, tenants or nearby residents.

In Australia, the sun arcs in the northern sky, rising in the east and setting in the west. The summer sun arc is higher in the sky with significantly higher levels of UV radiation than the winter sun. With this in mind, providing shade or orientating outdoor built elements, during summer and between the hours of approximately 11.00 am and 4.00 pm is the major design consideration relative to aspect.

Each site, however, needs to be assessed to determine what existing features provide shade, what the shade impacts of new developments will be, and how new features can be orientated to maximise their use and user comfort.

Adjoining land use

This criterion considers the influence of adjoining land use on the recreational, ecological, social and cultural value of the open space. There may be benefits to being adjoined or co-located with other land uses such as co-locating with community hubs.

Adjoining land use is included for open space for some planning provisions (e.g. adjoining open space and schools).

Condition

The condition of the land may have inherent issues that cannot be solved, or are unable to be solved without significant financial investment.

For example, the land may have issues with contamination. This may be known or unknown, and may require additional investigations into the viability of the land being used for the intended purpose.

Ecological

The ability of the site to maintain or enhance biodiversity values through its own existing biodiversity characteristics and through linking to other spaces.

Areas of environmental and biodiversity value such as wetlands and bushland should also be identified and accommodated within, or adjacent to, larger, multi-purpose open space where possible.

Consider the ability of the land to contribute to climate resilience. This can include land that is beneficial and able to be used for flooding, heatwaves or drought.

Equity

Open spaces should be available for all. This criterion considers equitable access. This includes the perspectives, requirements and needs for all community members.

There are several assessments that can be undertaken by internal staff and external experts (e.g. Gender Impact Assessments).

Financial

The land will have capital, improvement and operational costs. This criterion considers the financial implications of open space land.

Policy and plan alignment

Open space land should be planned, designed and managed according to regional and local policies and plans.

Linkages

The land should contribute to the wider open space network including forming open space corridor links.

Landscape character

This criterion considers the character and attractiveness of the neighbourhood.

Heritage character

Indigenous and non-Indigenous values that could be enhanced and protected in the open space.

Maintenance and management

When analysing land suitability, maintenance and management of the land in the short and long term should be considered.

If the land is not currently developed for open space, or not currently being used for its future purpose, checks should be done for utilities and services that will be required. For example, sports fields may require irrigation systems or lighting.

This criterion should not be undervalued.

VPP – RELEVANT STANDARDS

Table 11: VPP relevant standards

Relevant Standards	Reference
Active open space of at least 8 hectares in area	Standard C13 – VPP 56.05-02 Public open space provision objectives
[Active space should be] suitably dimensioned and designed to provide for the intended use, buffer areas around sporting fields and passive open space	Standard C13 – VPP 56.05-02 Public open space provision objectives
[Active space should be] sufficient to incorporate two football/cricket ovals	Standard C13 – VPP 56.05-02 Public open space provision objectives

[Active space should be] appropriate for the intended use in terms of quality and orientation	Standard C13 – VPP 56.05-02 Public open space provision objectives
[Active space should be] located on flat land (which can be cost effectively graded)	Standard C13 – VPP 56.05-02 Public open space provision objectives
[Active space should be] located with access to, or making provision for, a recycled or sustainable water supply	Standard C13 – VPP 56.05-02 Public open space provision objectives
[Active space should be] designed to achieve sharing of space between sports.	Standard C13 – VPP 56.05-02 Public open space provision objectives
Where not designed to include active open space, local parks should be generally 1 hectare in area and suitably dimensioned and designed to provide for their intended use and to allow easy adaptation in response to changing community preferences.	Standard C13 – VPP 56.05-02 Public open space provision objectives
An application for subdivision that creates public open space should be accompanied by landscape designs that: Create attractive landscapes that visually emphasise streets and public open space. Respond to the site and context description for the site and surrounding area.	Standard C12 – VPPs – 56.05-1 Integrated urban landscape objectives

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information.

This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (DDG1) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Victoria Planning Provisions	Victoria Department of Transport and Planning	Links to Victoria Planning Provisions web search.	https://planning-schemes.app.planning.vic.gov.au/Victoria%20Planning%20Provisions/ordinance
Public Parkland Planning and Design WA	Western Australia Department of Sport and Recreation (2014)	Section one includes land use considerations for different open space types.	https://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/docs/default-source/sport-and-recreation/public-parkland-planning-and-design-guide-(wa).pdf?sfvrsn=9584b7c0_1v
Planning Guidelines for Conversion of Golf Course Land to Other Purposes	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2020)	Provides useful process and considerations for land use changes, including to public open space.	https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/636000/Planning-Guidelines_for_Conversion_of_Golf_Course_Land_to_Other_Purposes.pdf

DDG2 – DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Public Open Space Handbook – Development and Design Guides

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

This module provides an overview of several general principles for designing open space.

There are 6 modules within the development and design guides that focus on specific types of open space:

- DDG3 – Outdoor fitness equipment
- DDG4 – Splash parks
- DDG5 – Play spaces
- DDG6 – Synthetic turf
- DDG7 – Dog parks
- DDG8 – Skate and BMX

It should be noted that every open space has its own unique characteristics, and principles should be considered as they relate to the specific site.

Appropriately qualified and experienced professionals should be engaged within the design process.

Why is this important?

Open spaces begin with visionary strategic planning, careful provision investigation and regulatory considerations.

These factors can create a promising open space network. However, without good design, well-planned open spaces can fall short of the original planned vision and intention.

Good design brings to life provision for communities, ensures regulations are followed and responds to individual community needs.

Design significantly impacts both planning and management. Design implements planning and sets requirements for management and operational teams.

Victorian context

State legislation and the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP) provide the statewide strategic land-use planning, development and protection policies.

Guidance on the distribution, quality and design of a range of open spaces is provided throughout the VPP and associated guidelines, such as the Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines.

Local government undertakes strategic land-use planning processes, which are reflected in Precinct Structure Plans, Outline Development Plans, Design and Development Overlays and other planning documents referenced or incorporated within local planning schemes.

OPEN SPACE DESIGN

A well-planned open space network integrates and impacts all spaces within city and municipal boundaries. Open spaces integrate with:

- Transport infrastructure,
- Environment infrastructure (natural and built),
- Water infrastructure,

- Recreation infrastructure,
- Community infrastructure,
- Housing,
- Businesses, and
- Many more.

The significant integration and impact of open space on these areas requires carefully considered design which is anchored to planning and sets up management and operations teams for successful outcomes.

OVERVIEW OF DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The open space design principles are grouped into 6 core principles to be used as a framework. These principles are intended to provide guidance in open space provision to ensure that resulting open space outcomes are sustainable and responsive to community needs.

Table 12: Core design principles and considerations

Core Design Principle	Considerations
Healthy, active and connected communities	• Health and wellbeing • Engaging with community • Engaging with Traditional Owners • Attractive, vibrant and diverse spaces • Connected spaces
Designed for everyone	• Accessible • Inclusive • Equitable • Safe
Whole-of-life	• Whole-of-life costs • Maintenance and operations • Activation
Resilient and sustainable	• Climate change adaptation • Sustainability • Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD)
Multi-use	• Multi-use, co-located and shared
Integrated and aligned	• Landscape and geographic features • Sun and shade • Power/Electricity • Stormwater • Irrigation • Roads, cycleways and transport infrastructure • Plans, policies and regulations • Technical specifications

It is important to note that the considerations listed are general and flexible rather than definitive. They recognise that each setting, site and community will require an individual design response.

These design principles strongly connect with other planning and management modules within the POS Handbook. Detailed information on these areas is provided in other modules.

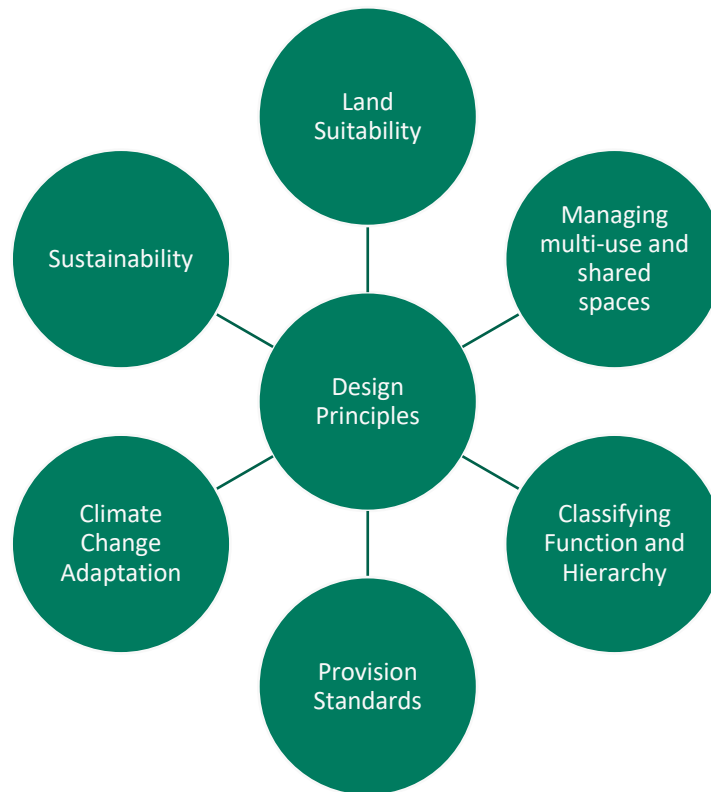


Figure 2: Key POSH modules related to design principles

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 1: HEALTHY, ACTIVE AND CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Health and wellbeing

Open spaces contribute significantly to the health and wellbeing of all communities. Open space design should consider how these spaces can create an environment that improves the physical health, mental health and social connections of open space users.

The physical and mental health of the community is positively impacted by the existence and design of open spaces, for example:

- Well-designed shade protects users from harmful UV rays,
- Open space designed to encourage communities to socialise either incidentally or through cultural, community and sporting events has a positive effect on mental health and preventing loneliness,

- Access to well-connected and attractive open space influences the community use in terms of frequency and extent, feelings of safety and overall enjoyment,
- Open space that reflects the unique character of the community encourages ownership and pride of place.

POS Handbook PPN1 – Benefits of Public Open Space provides further commentary on open space contribution to public health and wellbeing.

Engaging with community

Developing partnerships and community engagement and participation in the design of local open spaces is a critical success factor in responding to the community's aspirations.

Community participation throughout the planning process may, where practicable, lead to involvement with the ongoing management and/or maintenance of the open space.

To ensure that design is successful, it is important to understand and address the diverse needs and interests of the various internal and external stakeholders.

Stakeholder engagement should be planned in any organisation in accordance with the community engagement/community consultation framework that has been approved for use across all departments.

Engaging with Traditional Owners

All Victorians – including government departments, agencies, councils, land and resource managers, developers and tourism operators – should be aware that Traditional Owners have legal rights and interests across their Country. It is important that consideration is given to Traditional Owner rights and interests at the earliest stages of all new projects and activities.

First Peoples – State Relations Group provides brief guidance on engaging with Traditional Owners:

- Prepare and know your obligations,
- Make contact and invite engagement, and
- Make it happen, together.

Further resources and guidance documents can be found in the Relevant Documents table at the end of this module.

There is a planned future module to be added to the POS Handbook, Working with Traditional Owners, which will cover specific guidance for the open space industry.

Attractive, vibrant and diverse open spaces

Liveable communities are not only connected but have a sense of place, maintain unique characteristics and provide a network of diverse open spaces.

The following considerations may assist in designing for diverse opportunities and settings:

- Flexible areas that can be adapted with trends or communities over time;

- A variety of sizes and types of open spaces;
- Connections across different settings and/or other places of interest;
- Use of landscaping, art and facility design to define specific areas;
- Use of open space corridors, trails and paths to connect to different settings; and
- Diversity of opportunities and settings across the open space network to meet community needs.

Connected spaces

An open location and how it is connected to the wider open space network, including linkages and pedestrian paths, often influences its usability. The success of parks is not just a question of scale or quantity, but where the park is located and how it is arranged.

The edges of an open space are an important factor in utilisation and access. People tend to gravitate to, and occupy, the edges of places because they provide good vantage points to view activities within the space as well as to the surrounding area.

Relevant Urban Design Guidelines principles

3.16: Support a strong sense of place and local character

- Select planting and landscape elements that support the existing character or preferred future character of the area.
- Select planting and landscape elements that engage the senses.
- Integrate locally relevant urban art.
- Tip: urban art that people can interact with is popular and can draw people to a space.

3.1.2: Achieve attractive and vibrant public spaces

- Include a diversity of activities in public spaces that extend the hours of use.
 - Tip: aim for a public space to be attractive to a diversity of users and at different times of the day. A café, play facilities or community uses can assist in activating public spaces.
- Locate features towards the centre of the public space to draw people into and through the space.
 - Tip: features could be a large shade tree, fountain or water feature, sculpture, play or performance space. They provide a focus that invites people into the space.
- Locate spaces for vendor stalls beside the main pedestrian through-paths.

3.4.1: Ensure communal open space is accessible and functional

- Provide communal open space of a size that accommodates a wide range of activities and uses appropriate for the building occupants.

3.1.5: Ensure comfortable and enjoyable public spaces

- In larger public spaces, install signs with maps to show connections and destinations, location of public facilities, and estimated walking times and distances.

3.1.3: Establish and support activity at the edges of public spaces

- Arrange doors and windows of buildings to overlook adjacent public spaces.
 - Tip: public spaces feel safer and are used more when there are opportunities for informal surveillance of the space.
- Arrange the public space to allow direct, clear sightlines from surrounding areas into and through public spaces.
 - Tip: an area's topography will affect the sightlines and ease of movement to and through a public space.
- Use the edge of a public space for informal seating.
 - Tip: low walls help define a space and provide informal seating to activate the edge.
- Define the boundary or transition between public space and private space without the need for high fences or barriers.
 - Tip: a slight change in ground level can provide a boundary definition between public and private space.

3.3.1: Ensure convenient and safe access to and through local parks

- Locate park entrances on pedestrian desire-lines.
- Provide at least 2 main pedestrian through-paths across a local park, linked directly to the surrounding pedestrian network.
- Where a principal bicycle route passes through a park, provide separated pedestrian and bicycle paths.
- Locate bicycle paths away from children's play areas.
- Provide a pedestrian path around the park perimeter for walkers and joggers.

3.4.3: Ensure the communal open space protects the amenity for adjacent sensitive uses

- Locate facilities such as driveways, foyers and barbecue areas to minimise noise, fumes and lighting impacts into sensitive uses in adjacent properties.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 2: DESIGNED FOR EVERYONE

Open spaces are an opportunity to provide unique spaces that can cater for a wide range of users, and consideration of the entire community in design is important.

To encourage high use and respond to community needs, public open space should aim to be:

- Accessible for people who are physically or intellectually disabled or neurodiverse,
- Inclusive for all genders, demographics and ages,
- Equitable for the entire community, and
- Safe for all.

Accessible

Accessibility features within an open space enable use by everyone. Access to sport and recreation settings as a right for everyone is recognised through the following legislation, building codes and other standards that apply to the planning, design and development of buildings:

- Disability Discrimination Act 1992;
- Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010;

- Building Code of Australia;
- Victoria Planning Ordinances; and
- Australian Standards.

Accessibility features to enable use by all (e.g. clear signage; clear sightlines; path widths, grades and finishes; and access points).

Universal Design Principles offer an alternative approach that encourages the creation of environments that are usable by everyone, including people with vision or hearing impairments; families with prams and young children; people with injuries; the elderly; and people with mobility impairments.

The Universal Design Principles and philosophy encourage design and development beyond what is required by the Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards.

Relevant Urban Design Guidelines principles

3.1.1: Ensure all users have convenient and safe access to and through public spaces

- Connect the public space to the surrounding pedestrian network.
- Locate entry paths with clear views to other exits from the public space.
- Continue pedestrian paths through the public space with direct, logical routes.

3.4.1: Ensure communal open space is accessible and functional

- Locate communal open space to be convenient and accessible to building occupants.

Inclusive

Open space design should consider all people, and particularly groups who may have more difficulty than others accessing spaces safely or for those who the facilities simply do not cater (e.g. communal shower area in sport clubrooms).

When designing for women in parks, CPTED and a focus on safety are key areas. [Safer Parks \(2025\)](#) provides a design guideline that covers safety in parks for women and covers 3 main principles:

- **‘Eyes on the park’:** reflects that the presence of others makes women and girls feel safer.
 - Includes busyness and activation, staffing and authority figures
- **Awareness:** addresses design issues that can help women and girls feel more secure.
 - Includes visibility and openness, ability to escape, lighting, wayfinding and layout
- **Inclusion:** considers the importance of bringing a diverse cross-section of women and girls into our parks and designing spaces with their input.
 - Includes belonging and familiarity, image, access and location, co-production and engagement

Equitable

Open spaces encourage healthy, active and connected communities. Equitable distribution of local open space is a key factor contributing to liveability. Connectivity between open spaces and activity hubs facilitates access and encourages greater community use and participation.

The following factors are critical considerations when developing a siting and design response for a new site being added to an existing open space network, or when designing a newly planned open space network for a large new residential development:

- the equitable distribution of open space sites and connections that offer a diversity of experiences and opportunities close to where people live and work;
- the ease, safety and flexibility of access to open space using any given route, by walking or cycling, with prams, wheelchairs, cars and public transport;
- perceptions of safety when accessing the site, or different areas within the site;
- a general lack of obstruction or barriers such as busy roads without safe crossings, rail lines, high fences, overgrown vegetation, steep changes in grade, deep drains etc.;
- connections to the other forms of open space offered within and adjoining the neighbourhood, and/or other places of interest and/or activity hubs;
- linkages to the road network and existing off-road paths, shared paths, trails and cycle lanes and footpaths in roads;
- path construction details such as widths, grades, crossovers and material finishes; and
- passive surveillance and open space frontage to roads and surrounding residents.

Safe

Providing a minimum level of road and residential frontages to open space is a major way of improving passive surveillance and of ensuring that a minimum industry benchmark is achieved in the design or layout of that open space. There are, however, other methods of improving passive surveillance which can also be applied at this stage, although they are generally less measurable or certain of providing effective passive surveillance of open space in the longer term. Some of these measures include:

- Increasing the density of housing fronting onto open space as this will increase human and street activity opposite the open space. This has the added advantage of allowing a developer to seek higher returns for land opposite open space to offset the road construction costs.
- Providing road frontage car parking but only where it does not obscure views from the residential frontages.
- Providing transparent fencing to residential allotments adjoining the open space to increase views into the open space. This is currently common practice where housing lots back onto linear open space. Transparent fencing can come in various built forms; however, tubular steel fencing currently provides one of the most cost-effective options as it provides a safe and secure method of retaining children and pets within the adjoining property.
- Orientating medium-high density residential housing immediately adjoining the open space to face or front onto the open space and in addition utilise low fencing or transparent fencing at ground level.

Relevant Urban Design Guidelines principles

3.3.3: Ensure amenity and safety for local park users

- Surround local parks, on at least 3 sides, with streets and buildings with active frontages to overlook the park.
 - Tip: a park bounded by blank rear or side fences limits the opportunity for informal surveillance and reduces security for both park users and properties bordering the park.

- Provide seats at the entry points of local parks.
 - Tip: seating at a park entrance sends a welcoming message, provides a place to meet and lets people feel they can be in the park yet connected to the street outside.
- Locate the paths, facilities and children's play areas in local parks where they can be seen from surrounding properties, paths and streets.
- Position trees and planting to maintain sightlines between paths within a park and surrounding streets and properties.
- Provide lighting along main paths and in areas intended for night-time use, lit to the same level as surrounding streets.
 - Tip: using the same lighting levels for park paths as the surrounding areas indicates they are intended as safe routes.

3.4.1: Ensure communal open space is accessible and functional

- Communal open spaces need to be of an adequate size and in an accessible location to enable building occupants to use them. Remote, small or uncomfortable spaces are rarely used, and may become neglected or unsafe.
- Lay out communal open space to create informal surveillance opportunities within the space and from adjacent buildings.
 - Tip: dwellings that have an outlook toward communal open space provide opportunities for informal surveillance of the space. This arrangement should, however, maintain the privacy and security of residents in their homes.

3.4.2: Support a safe and enjoyable communal open space for its intended users

- Include a place where adults and children can gather and socialise.
 - Tip: in higher density residential buildings, simple solutions can attract greater use. Arranging tables and seating can encourage informal gatherings while people watch their children play.
- Provide seats and tables to cater for large gatherings of people.
 - Tip: a large table can accommodate resident gatherings and support social engagement.
- Provide lighting in communal open space to support safe movement and evening use.
 - Tip: avoid light spill to adjacent sensitive uses.
- Provide landscape areas with sufficient space and soil volume for trees to grow.
- Incorporate containers for trees and shrubs where free ground with sufficient soil volume is not available.
 - Tip: opportunities for planting may be limited on balconies and roof gardens and over underground structures such as car parks.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 3: WHOLE-OF-LIFE

Open spaces are typically planned with the vision that they will be available to the communities and natural systems they service forever. At minimum, open space designs should consider the future of the site for the next 50 to 100 years. All designs should consider the long-term costs, maintenance and operations of the open space design and its built features.

Whole-of-life cost

Designs should consider the whole-of-life cost of the landscape and facility features.

Capital funding may allow for more intricate designs which are vastly more expensive to maintain by the end of life, or are expensive to dispose of.

Whole-of-life cost estimates and analysis can be a part of the asset management planning process, and collaborating with the asset management team and operations team can avoid costly events in future.

Maintenance and operations

Ensure maintenance requirements are considered and integrated into the initial design process through early consultation with the eventual asset manager. Infrastructure and any additional open space assets should be long-lasting, require limited maintenance and incorporate sustainability principles.

Open space maintenance and operational teams will inherit the benefits of a well-designed open space, or the consequences of poor design.

It is key to consider and collaborate with operational teams who will continue to care for the open space features long after the project is complete. Design elements or installations are at risk of being removed if the maintenance burden cannot be sustained.

Relevant Urban Design Guidelines principles

3.1.7: Ensure public spaces are well used and maintained

- Establish a maintenance program for public spaces prioritising prompt identification, removal and repair of any signs of damage and misuse.
- Provide permeable ground surfaces, where possible, for absorption of rainwater and reduction of stormwater run-off.

3.3.5: Ensure local parks are well maintained

- When designing parks, take account of the management agency's capacity to resource ongoing maintenance and management.
 - Tip: facilitate the formation of local community 'Friends of the Park' associations to participate in ongoing planning and decisions.
- Regularly maintain hard and soft landscape elements to ensure that parks are inviting, comfortable and safe.
- Close access to or do not light park areas intended for daytime uses only.

3.4.4: Ensure communal open spaces are well maintained

- Establish a regular maintenance program for communal open space.

3.1.7: Ensure public spaces are well used and maintained

- A number of agencies are responsible for managing public spaces. Any one public space may have multiple agencies and organisations with different responsibilities, leading to complexity in coordination of development and management.
- In large, complex public spaces, establish a committee of management with responsibility to coordinate all aspects of the public space management.
- Establish a program of ongoing events and activities for a wide range of users.

- Tip: events and activities can include markets, performances, displays or community services.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 4: RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE

Climate change adaptation

Open space design can contribute to climate change adaptation initiatives and implement strategies and plans. Examples include:

- Adding to urban forests,
- Designs focusing on reducing urban heat,
- Plant selection for changing environments,
- Designs that consider fire, flood and other natural disaster mitigation.

For further climate change adaptation information, see module MM3 – Climate Change.

Sustainability

The design should be informed by the natural features, ecology and natural climatic responses.

Consider using local resources and materials. This could include robust, recycled and recyclable products, and those that have lower embodied energy and water in their manufacture. The reuse of local materials and adoption of local building styles is encouraged as these can contribute to sense of place and feelings of authenticity within the parkland.⁶⁵

The module MM5 – Sustainability is planned to be developed and will provide further detail.

Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD)

There is a wide range of guidance on ESD available. The information below is an overview of the ESD principles as per Sport and Recreation Victoria.⁶⁶

The main objectives of sustainable design are to reduce, or completely avoid, depletion of critical resources like energy, water, land and raw materials; prevent environmental degradation caused by facilities and infrastructure throughout their lifecycle; and create built environments that are liveable, comfortable, safe and productive.

Six fundamental ESD principles:

1. Optimise site potential
2. Enhance indoor environmental quality
3. Optimise energy use
4. Protect and conserve water
5. Optimise building space and material use
6. Optimise operational and maintenance practices

⁶⁵ Public Parkland Planning and Design Guide, Sport and Recreation Western Australia (2014)

⁶⁶ Environmentally Sustainable Design Fact Sheet, Sport and Recreation Victoria

Other Environmentally Sustainable Design considerations are:

- Sustainable water uses and stormwater harvesting;
- Use of vegetation swales and depressions to reduce run-off;
- Use of renewable energy sources (wind, solar, hydro, geothermal);
- Use of landscaping, vegetation and grading to control/prevent erosion;
- Use of trees and other vegetation to shade areas;
- Use of native vegetation and turf species that are suited to the local conditions and the intended use; and
- Enhancements and protection of biodiversity and natural systems.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 5: MULTI-USE AND CO-LOCATED

Open spaces should be designed to incorporate multi-uses such as recreation, nature, multi-sport or play opportunities in one location. Design and planning should also prioritise co-locating open spaces with other complementary spaces and services.

The terms ‘multi-use’, ‘co-location’ and ‘shared’ are not interchangeable and should be considered distinct terms with distinct definitions.

For further information on multi-use, co-located and shared facilities, see MM2 – Managing Multi-use and Shared Spaces.

Multi-functional open space or sites co-located with community/activity hubs have the potential to increase public awareness of the opportunities and experiences offered and thereby attract and enable greater use by the broader community and people of all ages.

In addition, accommodating compatible multiple uses on the one site enables efficient use of land, minimises duplication and has the potential to achieve significant capital and operational savings through shared infrastructure such as car parking, toilets and other built facilities.

When designing for multi-functionality consider:

- both the physical and operational requirements of each function or activity and ensure that the design response accommodates these;
- any potential impacts that may arise (such as noise, increased traffic and crowds) and ensure that the design response minimises any impacts (e.g. through landscaping, access points and buffering);
- including spaces of an area and dimension that may be adapted to respond to the community’s changing leisure preferences over time;
- the topography and the cultural and heritage features of a planned site when determining compatibility with potential secondary uses;
- passive surveillance of the open space through layout of the site relative to surrounding streets and dwellings. Areas that have limited operating hours (such as industrial or warehouse sites) may not be suitable co-location sites due to seclusion and potential to encourage anti-social behaviour;
- location of shared ancillary infrastructure; and
- flexible use of landscaping and other suitable materials to designate activity areas, and which may be reconfigured to adapt to other uses over time.

Relevant Urban Design Guidelines principles

3.3.2: Encourage use of local parks at different times of day by a wide range of users

- Provide areas and facilities suitable for active pursuits.
 - Tip: circuit training, ball games, skateboarding or kite flying may need designated areas.
- Provide areas and comfortable seating for quiet pursuits.
 - Tip: seating areas are important for encouraging people, particularly the elderly, to use and enjoy local parks and open spaces.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 6: INTEGRATED INFRASTRUCTURE

Open spaces should be integrated with existing infrastructure, natural features and unique characteristics of the selected land and community.

Open spaces have historically provided opportunities for underground infrastructure, or infrastructure which requires large open spaces with limited development. All planners and designers should collaborate and communicate on intentions to use open space for locating infrastructure.

Design of open space should consider current and potential future infrastructure (e.g. underground services) and seek to integrate wherever possible.

In some cases, the open space land may limit the ability for certain types of use, or the ability to integrate the open space well. For example, the existing slope of an area may determine the site is not suitable to provide for the intended functions.

The planning processes for developing an open space network should address these factors early. For detailed guidance on land suitability, see DDG1 – Land Suitability.

Landscape and geographic features

Open space should be sited and designed to integrate with the surrounding natural and urban landscape, including with open space from neighbouring areas. Existing geographic and other features can be important local places and contribute to community development through interest, identity and a sense of pride and ownership.

The design of an open space site should respect the local natural landscape through:

- Use of indigenous plants and natural materials, where appropriate;
- Use of local materials and resources, where appropriate;
- Ensuring that co-located activities do not impact on the natural, environmental, cultural or heritage values;
- Preserving landforms, hills and ridges;
- Preserving surface water flows and wetlands; and
- Use of appropriate buffers from adjacent activities and buildings.

The activity areas and ancillary facilities within open spaces should be oriented to:

- Take advantage of views to landmarks and features beyond the site;

- Take advantage of northern orientation, where desirable, for solar access;
- Take advantage of occasional shade/dappled light from existing mature vegetation; and
- Be protected from prevailing winds.

Relevant Urban Design Guidelines principles

3.3.4: Emphasise a sense of place and character in local parks

- Select planting and landscape elements that support the existing character or preferred future character of the park.
- Establish large trees and other plants to enhance the local habitat and microclimate.
- Protect natural features in or nearby to the park that contribute to a sense of place.

Sun and shade

Designs should consider solar orientation in the design, particularly for recreation activities where sun strike can affect game play. It will also ensure that landscape features, such as trees, do not create future shade issues with reserve users, tenants or nearby residents.

Each site, however, needs to be assessed to determine what existing features provide shade, what the shade impacts of new developments will be, and how new features can be orientated to maximise their use and user comfort.

When utilising trees or other shade plantings, consider the impact of leaves and seasonal changes that may clutter footpaths, create health and safety issues or impact on accessibility.

While it is generally recommended that playing areas are orientated approximately in a north-south direction to minimise the effect of a setting sun on players, there is no unified preferred solar orientation for sports fields and outdoor sports. This is due to the differences in field size, type and game play.

The most common orientation is 15 degrees east of north.

Limits of orientation where a uniform direction for all facilities can be arranged:

- athletics, basketball, bowls, croquet, handball, lacrosse, netball, tennis – between 20° west of north and 35° east of north;
- football: soccer, five-a-side, Australian rules, Gaelic, rugby league, rugby union – between 20° west of north and 45° east of north;
- hockey, polo, polocrosse – between 45° west of north and 45° east of north; and
- baseball, cricket, softball – between 45° west of north and 35° east of north.

The preferred orientation of some other common open space elements:

- Play spaces – slightly to the north of the centre of the play equipment
- Slides – sloping to the south or south-east
- Basketball half courts – aligned north-south with the backboard to the south
- Skate ramps – aligned east-west
- Picnic tables – aligned north-south

Relevant Urban Design Guidelines principles

3.1.5: Ensure comfortable and enjoyable public spaces

- Arrange paths, seating and main areas to catch the sun during winter and be shaded during summer.
 - Tip: position trees to provide summer shade and shelter.
- Protect public spaces from the strong winds.
 - Tip: when planting windbreaks or shade trees, avoid creating concealment opportunities.
- Locate seating to provide users with an interesting outlook and views of the space and opportunity to watch passers-by.
 - Tip: increase the number of seats in areas that are popular with people. Popular areas are often those with good sightlines of the whole space and its entry points.

3.4.1: Ensure communal open space is accessible and functional

- Design communal open space to be usable in a range of weather conditions and at all times of the year.
 - Tip: when designing communal open space, take into account orientation of the space for optimum winter solar access and summer shading, shelter from wind and rain and providing all-weather ground surface materials.

Power/electricity

Inclusion and placement of infrastructure to support community events and event management such as emergency access, location of public facilities and access to power and water should be considered in the early stages of design.

Stormwater

Ensure stormwater management infrastructure and other utility areas are well-placed to minimise impact on parkland functionality or recreational value. Well-designed swales, living streams, biofilters and open watercourses can be attractive and functional.

Irrigation

Integration with irrigation from the early stages of design ensures optimal efficiency and effectiveness. The Public Parkland Planning and Design Guide (2014) notes that ideally this occurs through collaboration with irrigation specialists, park landscape designers, horticulturalists or landscape architects.

Factors to consider include:

- establishing water budgets and tracking irrigation function and water use;
- hydrozoning (also known as ecozoning), xeriscaping and science-based horticultural practices;
- distributing water efficiently, ideally controlled through sensor-based irrigation scheduling with independent control of all hydrozones; and
- continually improving water management through benchmarking, research and innovation.

Roads, cycleways and transport infrastructure

Integration of open space with transport infrastructure has become an important part of open space and recreation. Open space and recreation connect with transport infrastructure through:

- Improved public health through creation of active transportation routes;
- Linear parks and linkages for pedestrians and cyclists;
- Opportunities to contribute to urban forests and green infrastructure;
- Play and green space opportunities within road easements; and
- Connected network of public open spaces increasing connectivity throughout urban environments.

Plans, policies and regulations

All open space designs should be aligned to the plans, policies and regulations as appropriate. This may include investigating national, state and municipal sources to ensure best practice and requirements are followed.

Further detail on planning and legislative context for Victoria is available within the Planning Practice Notes of the POS Handbook.

Technical specifications

There are numerous technical specifications across all types of design features. It is important that designs consider technical specifications from relevant industry bodies and suppliers.

Specific technical specifications, including size, dimensions and orientation requirements of playing fields, should be obtained from relevant sports associations prior to considering the appropriateness or size of land for active open space.

VPP PROVISION – RELEVANT CLAUSES

Table 13: VPP provision relevant clauses and design considerations

Design consideration	Relevant Standards	Reference
Safe	An application for subdivision that creates public open spaces should be accompanied by a landscape design that supports surveillance and provides shade in streets, parks and public open space.	Standard C12 - VPP 56.05-1 - Integrated urban landscape objectives
Safe	The provision of public open space should maximise passive surveillance.	Standard C13 – VPP – 56.05-2 – Public Open Space Provision Objectives
Safe	Subdivision should increase visibility and surveillance by: - Ensuring streets and houses look onto public open space and avoiding sides and rears of lots along public open space boundaries; - Providing roads and streets along public open space boundaries.	Standard C10 - VPP – 56.04-4 – Street orientation objectives
	To provide attractive and continuous landscaping in streets and public open space that contributes to the character and identity of new neighbourhoods and urban places or to existing or preferred neighbourhood character in existing urban areas.	VPPs – 56.05-1 Integrated urban landscape objectives
	To incorporate natural and cultural features in the design of streets and public open space where appropriate.	VPPs – 56.05-1 Integrated urban landscape objectives
	An application for subdivision that creates public open space should be accompanied by landscape designs that:	Standard C12 - VPPs – 56.05-1 Integrated urban landscape objectives

	- Create attractive landscapes that visually emphasise streets and public open space. - Respond to the site and context description for the site and surrounding area.	
Integrated and aligned	Incorporate, where possible, links between major parks and activity areas, along waterways and natural drainage corridors, connecting places of natural and cultural interest, as well as maintaining public accessibility on public land immediately adjoining waterways and coasts.	VPP 11.03-1 – Open space planning objectives and strategies
Integrated and aligned	Ensure that land is set aside and developed in residential areas for local recreational use and to create pedestrian and bicycle links to commercial and community facilities.	VPP 11.03-1 – Open space planning objectives and strategies
Multi-use and co-located, Community	Ensure exclusive occupation of parkland by community organisations is restricted to activities consistent with management objectives of the park to maximise broad community access to open space.	VPP – 11.03-2 – Open space management objectives and strategies
Multi-use and co-located	The provision of active open space should be designed to achieve sharing of space between sports.	Standard C13 of VPP-56.05-2 – Public open space provision objectives
Community	The provision of public open space should be of an area and dimensions to allow easy adaptation to different uses in response to changing community active and passive recreational preferences.	Standard C13 of VPP-56.05-2 – Public Open space provision objectives
Multi-use and co-located	The provision of public open space should adjoin schools and other community facilities where practical.	Standard C13 of VPP-56.05-2 Public open space provision objectives

Integrated and aligned	The provision of public open space should: - Be integrated with floodways and encumbered land that is accessible for public recreation. - Be integrated with urban water management systems, waterways and other water bodies. - Incorporate natural and cultural features where appropriate.	Standard C13 - VPP – 56.05-2 – Public open space provision objectives
Integrated and aligned	Active open space of at least 8 hectares in area within 1 kilometre of 95 per cent of all dwellings that is: - Suitably dimensioned and designed to provide for the intended use, buffer areas around sporting fields and passive open space.	Standard C13 - VPP-56.05-2 Public Open Space Provision Objectives
Integrated and aligned	An application for subdivision that creates public open space should be accompanied by a landscape design that: - Provide appropriate pathways, signage, fencing, public lighting and street furniture; and - Develop appropriate landscapes for the intended use of public open space including areas for passive and active recreation, the exercising of pets, playgrounds and shaded areas.	Standard C12 – VPP – 56.05-1 Integrated Urban Landscape Objectives
Open space for everyone	To provide a network of public open space that caters for a broad range of users.	VPP – 56.05-2 – Public open space provision objectives
Multi-use and co-located	To provide a network of quality, well-distributed, multi-functional and cost-effective public open space that	VPP – 56.05-2 – Public open space provision objectives

	includes local parks, active open space, linear parks and trails, and links to regional open space.	
Integrated and aligned	To assist creation of a diverse and integrated network of public open space commensurate with the needs of the community.	VPP 11.03-1 – Open space planning objectives and strategies
Integrated and aligned	Ensure that urban open space provides for nature conservation, recreation and play, formal and informal sport, social interaction and peace and solitude. Community sports facilities should be accommodated in a way that is not detrimental to other park activities.	VPP 11.03-1 – Open space planning objectives and strategies

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information.

This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (DDG2) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Urban Design Guidelines for Victoria - Public Spaces Guide (Online Resource)	Victoria Government (n.d.)	Principles and ideas for designing parks, plazas, and street spaces to ensure they are accessible, vibrant, and safe for everyone.	https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/guides/urban-design-guidelines-for-victoria/public-spaces/public-spaces-principles
Healthy Parks by Design Tasmania	Heart Foundation of Australia (2009)	A useful wide range of planning considerations, including a detailed checklist on page 66.	https://irp.cdn-website.com/541aa469/files/uploaded/Healthy-by-Design-Tasmania.pdf
Safer Parks: Improving access for women and girls	Safer Parks Consortium (2023)	Provides principles of Gender-Inclusive Urban Design: Eyes on the Park, Awareness, Inclusion.	https://www.makespaceforgirls.co.uk/resources/safer-parks-for-women-and-girls-guidance
Universal Design Australia	Centre for Universal Design Australia (2023)	7 Principles of Universal Design: Equitable use, Flexible, Simple and Intuitive, Perceptible Info (legibility), Tolerance for error, Low Physical effort, Size and Space for approach and use.	https://universaldesignaustralia.net.au/category/sport-and-recreation/parks-open-space-play-spaces/

Recreational Spaces: How Best to Design and Cater for Older People's Safe Engagement in Physical Activity	Levinger, P., Mcconaghy, R., Dreher, B. et al. Recreational Spaces: How Best to Design and Cater for Older People's Safe Engagement in Physical Activity. <i>Population Ageing</i> 18 , 525–552 (2025).	Provides design considerations and advice for designing for older adults and physical activity.	https://vuir.vu.edu.au/49880/1/s12062-024-09472-7.pdf https://doi.org/10.1007/s12062-024-09472-7
Everyone Can Play - A Guideline to Create Inclusive Playspaces	NSW Government, AECOM (2023)	Helpful toolbox with checklist, including how to get to the playground, what to consider for engaging experience, safety and other special considerations.	https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/everyone-can-play-a-guideline-to-inclusive-playspaces.pdf
YourGround Victoria Report	XYX Lab and CrowdSpot (2021)	Perceptions of Safety: Women and gender-diverse individuals experience different levels of safety in public spaces depending on the environment, activity, and demographic factors. Gender inequality, violence, and harassment significantly impact their ability to use open spaces.	https://www.yourground.org/yourground-vic
Her City	UN Habitat (2021)	Handbook for implementing co-design processes with girls in relation to planning and design at different scales, including 10 steps and specific digital tools to	https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/03/02032021_her_city_publication_low.pdf

		let them design and present their ideas.	
Cities for Girls, Cities for All. Report from the Vinnova Innovation for Gender Equality Project	UN Habitat (2022)	Actions 5, 6 and 7 summarise neighbourhood-scale principles, tools, and recommendations for gender responsive planning and design	https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/10/her_city_final_report_20221019.pdf
Shade: A resource for local government	Municipal Association of Victoria (n.d.)	Provides shade case studies and approaches for local government from the Municipal Association of Victoria.	https://www.mav.asn.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/7324/Shade-A-resource-for-local-government.pdf
Guidance on Engaging with Traditional Owners	First Peoples – State Relations Group, Department of Premier and Cabinet (2024)	Provides brief and clear guidance on engaging with Traditional Owners. Also provides links to other helpful resources.	https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/Guidance-on-Engaging-Traditional-Owners-updated-Feb-2024.pdf
Traditional Owner formal recognition in Victoria (webpage)	First Peoples – State Relations Group, Department of Premier and Cabinet (2019)	Detailed information on the process, requirements, and consideration for formal recognition in Victoria.	https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/traditional-owner-formal-recognition-victoria
20-minute neighbourhoods checklist tool	Victoria Department of Transport and Planning (2023)	Helpful 20-minute neighbour design checklist on page 8	https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/strategies-and-initiatives/20-minute-neighbourhoods/20-minute-neighbourhoods-checklist-tool
Inclusive Victoria: State Disability Plan 2022-2026	Inclusive Victoria (2022)	Victoria’s key document for making	https://www.vic.gov.au/state-disability-plan

		things fairer for people with disabilities.	
Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy	Department Land Water and Planning Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations Parks Victoria (2023)	A detailed strategy that considers how Traditional Owners The focus is for state land and legislation with Parks Victoria and DLWP, but the principles are excellent and the information on co-governance is useful for local government.	https://fvtoc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/1258_FVTOC_CulturalStrategy._web.pdf

DDG3 – OUTDOOR FITNESS EQUIPMENT

Public Open Space Handbook – Development and Design Guides

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

Outdoor Fitness Equipment has become a popular part of publically provided recreation infrastructure. This module provides an overview of the strategic planning of outdoor fitness equipment and provides links to key guidance, industry documents and other helpful information.

Detailed guidance is available within the linked documents or by contacting the authors of each report.

Why is this important?

Communities and developers are proposing outdoor fitness equipment more frequently.

However, research and guidelines for the planning, design, procurement, maintenance and end of life for outdoor fitness facilities are limited.

This module collates available information for industry use.

Local context

Parks and Leisure Australia (Vic/Tas) developed a guideline for outdoor fitness equipment in 2018.

The guide noted that in 2016, Victorian local government areas (LGAs) were surveyed about the outdoor fitness equipment available in their area. At the time, 90% of LGAs had at least one OFE installation. In Victoria, an estimated 37% of adults are active in free community facilities.⁶⁷

WHAT IS OUTDOOR FITNESS EQUIPMENT?

Outdoor fitness equipment is exercise equipment that is permanently installed in public open spaces. It is usually owned by local councils and is free for community use. It can be grouped together (as an outdoor gym or fitness station) or spread out along a walking/cycling trail. Equipment types include static and dynamic equipment, seniors or rehabilitation equipment and ninja warrior or obstacle courses.

Outdoor fitness equipment⁶⁸:

- Is fixed or anchored in place and intended for long-term installation,
- Is freely accessible to the public without supervision,
- Is designed for use primarily by persons aged 14 years and over,
- Does not require connection to utilities (e.g. electricity or water) for operation,
- Is installed and maintained in accordance with applicable Australian Standards, including AS 16630:2021.

⁶⁷ AusPlay Victoria Survey
Results July 2024 – June 2025

⁶⁸ Guidelines for the planning,
installation and activation of
outdoor fitness

Outdoor fitness equipment does not include children's playground equipment, temporary exercise apparatus or equipment installed solely for commercial or supervised training purposes.

TYPES OF OUTDOOR FITNESS EQUIPMENT

OFE can take many forms. It can:

- Be static (no moving parts),
- Be dynamic (moving equipment),
- Resemble gym equipment,
- Be colourful and bright,
- Be neutral with wood and grey,
- Create a planned workout along a path,
- Provide high-intensity interval training or calisthenic training for fitness enthusiasts,
- Be located at a beach with a view,
- Be semi-private in an area of grassed open space,
- Incorporate equipment in a space with multiple other activities.

WHO USES OUTDOOR FITNESS EQUIPMENT?

There has been a perception by some that OFE is only used by or provided for older adults and seniors. While OFE has been used by seniors, it is used by all ages, and not all installations have been successful. OFE has many forms and types. As with any installed recreation infrastructure, the type or form of OFE chosen can attract and provide recreation for a wide range of users.

OFE can be used for seniors and older adults; however, it is commonly suitable for able-bodied adults without consideration for the physical needs of older people. Age-friendly outdoor design principles should be included in these installations.⁶⁹

OFE is noted as being typically designed for ages 14 and above. However, OFE is freely available equipment, primarily provided within public open spaces. Therefore, it can and does have use from those under 14 years old, even if it is not being used as intended. Ideally, the design and engagement should be intergenerational.

An Australian survey noted that males are more likely than females to use outdoor sports facilities and outdoor exercise equipment.⁷⁰

OFE can be used by all members of a community. This includes:

- Young parents,
- Empty nesters,
- Seniors (65+), and
- Youth and young people.

⁶⁹ Levinger et al. (2019) *Guidance about age-friendly outdoor exercise equipment and associated strategies to maximise usability for older people*.

⁷⁰ National Heart Foundation of Australia. (2025). *What Australia wants: Neighbourhood design*.

The following table provides examples of equipment that may attract certain community members or uses. These are examples only. Community engagement on what to provide and who the target users are is critical to ensuring OFE is well used.

Table 14: Types of outdoor fitness equipment

Type of OFE	Type of equipment	Use of equipment	Types of users
Cluster of static equipment near sports fields and clubrooms	Pull-up bars, dip bars, box jumps	High-intensity interval training, Calisthenics, unintended play space	• Athletes • Fitness enthusiasts • Experienced gym users • Personal trainers • Children (use for play)
Cluster of both static and dynamic equipment near a playground	Elliptical trainer, shoulder press, step-up boxes	Outdoor gym workout, informal exercise opportunity for parents.	• Parents • Less experienced gym users • Likely to discourage some users who may feel self-conscious or unwelcome at a playground
Static equipment alongside a walking path	Balance beams, signposted stations with exercise options	Planned workout as a part of a walk or run. Ad-hoc use by those walking by.	• Adults (including young and older) • Youth

These examples demonstrate that OFE installations, like any recreation facility, require thorough planning and community engagement. There are many considerations such as location, type of user, user level of fitness experience, including QR codes for use instructions, and more.

Encouraging physical activity with outdoor fitness equipment

Get Active Victoria conducted research with inactive women⁷¹ to understand what the barriers are to using outdoor fitness equipment, and what their preferences are.

The preferences of this survey group were:

- Dynamic equipment,
- A single location,
- Private location, but safe,
- Gym-like but accessible aesthetic,
- Rubberised floor material.

PLANNING, DESIGNING AND MANAGING OFE

The Sport and Recreation Victoria [Guidelines for planning, installing and activating OFE](#) provide clear advice on the planning, design and management of OFE. The guidelines cover:

- Planning and determining need,
- Design considerations,
- Activation and programming,
- Maintenance, and
- Evaluation.

Outdoor fitness equipment project lifecycle

OFE planning, design and management require a thorough approach to ensure that the outcome is appropriate for users, supported by engagement, and is well-utilised by the community.

There are 8 stages within an⁷² OFE lifecycle; these are:

1. Strategy
2. Need
3. Funding
4. Design and location
5. Product procurement
6. Activation
7. Maintenance
8. Evaluation

Detailed guidance, case studies and tips are provided within the current Sport and Recreation Victoria guidelines.

⁷¹ Inactive women aged between 35-44 and 55-64. From Designing active recreation infrastructure for inactive Victorians (2023).

⁷² Guidelines for planning, installing and activating outdoor fitness equipment

Available OFE planning and delivery checklists

There are a number of checklists available for considering the planning, design and delivery of outdoor fitness equipment. The table below is not exhaustive. A full list of references is in the Relevant Documents section of this module.

Table 15: Outdoor fitness planning and delivery checklists

Checklist Document	Checklist Type	Author	Date
Guidelines for Planning, Installing and Activating Outdoor Fitness Equipment	Outdoor Fitness Equipment Routine Maintenance Checklist	Sport Victoria, Department Health and Human Services	2018
Guidelines for Planning, Installing and Activating Outdoor Fitness Equipment	Outdoor Fitness Equipment Site Evaluation Checklist	Sport Victoria, Department Health and Human Services	2018

RELEVANT AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS

There is currently an Australian Standard for OFE which is noted below. For links and further guidance please see Relevant Documents at the end of this section.

Table 16: Relevant Australian Standards for outdoor fitness equipment

Reference	Type	Comment
AS 16630	Permanently Installed Outdoor Fitness Equipment – Safety requirements and test methods	Includes general safety requirements for design, manufacture, installation, inspection and maintenance of outdoor fitness equipment that is permanently installed and freely accessible. Some cross-reference with playground standards, e.g. surfacing.

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information.

This table can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (DDG3) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Guidelines for planning, installing and activating outdoor fitness equipment	Sport and Recreation Victoria, Parks and Leisure Australia (Victoria Tasman) (2018)	The guidelines focus on five key areas: • planning and determining need • design considerations • activation and programming • maintenance • evaluation.	https://sport.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/2259999/guidelines-for-planning-installing-and-activating-outdoor-fitness-equipment.pdf
Outdoor Gyms Fact Sheet	Kidsafe South Australia (2022)	Overview of outdoor fitness equipment types and considerations for installation.	https://kidsafesa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Kidsafe-SA-Outdoor-Gyms-Info-Sheet-2022.pdf
Designing active recreation infrastructure for inactive Victorians	Get Active Victoria	Overview of focus group research with inactive adult women on outdoor fitness equipment and outdoor walking paths.	https://www.getactive.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/SECNewgate_Research-presentation_final.pdf
Kompan	How to Design Inclusive Public Outdoor Fitness Sites (n.d.)	General overview of inclusive outdoor fitness equipment options for all fitness levels, abilities and backgrounds.	https://www.kompan.com/en/int/planning/how-to-design-inclusive-public-outdoor-fitness-sites

Academic research

Cranney L., Phongsavan P., Kariuki M., Stride V., Scott A., Hua M., Bauman A. A Scott Impact of an outdoor gym on park users' physical activity: A natural experiment. *Health Place*. 2016;37:26–34. doi: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2015.11.002. [DOI] [PubMed] [Google Scholar]

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1353829215001495>

Leavy, J. E., Jancey, J., & Crawford, G. (2022). Build and they will come: A follow-up evaluation of outdoor exercise equipment in Western Australia. *Health promotion journal of Australia: official journal of Australian Association of Health Promotion Professionals*, 33 Suppl 1(Suppl 1), 334–339.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.588>

Levinger P, Panisset M, Parker H, Batchelor F, Tye M, Hill KD. Guidance about age-friendly outdoor exercise equipment and associated strategies to maximise usability for older people. *Health Promot J Austral*.2021;32:475–482. 10.1002/hpja.367

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8359243/#hpja367-sec-0011>

Sibson R., Scherrer P., Ryan M.M. 'I think it adds value, but I don't use it': Use, perceptions and attitudes of outdoor exercise equipment in an urban public park. *Ann. Leis. Res*. 2017:1–16. doi: 10.1080/11745398.2017.1290535. [DOI] [Google Scholar] (Australian based, paywall)

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/11745398.2017.1290535>

Levinger, P. Dunn, J. Panisset, M. Haines, T, Down B. Batchelor, F. Biddle, S. Duque, G. Hill, K. (2021). The ENJOY Project: Usage and Factors to Support Adherence and Physical Activity Participation. *Translational Journal of the American College of Sports Medicine*.

DDG4 – SPLASH PARKS

Public Open Space Handbook – Development and Design Guides

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

Splash parks are a popular water play opportunity for many children across Australia. They offer a more cost-effective way to provide access to recreational water play than traditional swimming pools.

This module provides guidance on the planning, design and management considerations relevant to the provision of splash parks within the open space networks of Victoria and Australia.

Why is this important?

Splash parks provide accessible, inclusive and safe water-based recreation that caters to a wide range of ages and abilities and provides relief from the summer heat.

As communities across Victoria face increasing temperatures, growing populations and evolving expectations for public open space, splash parks present a cost-effective and versatile option for enhancing the quality and diversity of recreational offerings.

Victorian context

There are no specific splash parks industry guidelines available for the planning and design of splash parks in Victoria and Australia.

Public health is a critical component of any water recreation facility. Victoria Health provides guidance on risk management for splash parks (water quality guidelines).

There is guidance available from suppliers who design, procure or deliver splash parks for local government.

Other useful guidance includes parts of relevant Australian Standards for playgrounds and inclusive design principles.

WHAT ARE SPLASH PARKS?

Splash parks are purpose-built outdoor recreational spaces designed for active, zero-depth water play. They can also be referred to as interactive water features, splash pads, spray parks or water play areas.

Splash parks provide water play through a variety of in-ground and above-ground features such as spray jets, fountains, misters, water cannons, arches, tipping buckets and cascading water curtains.

Many of these features are user-activated, allowing users to control the flow and direction of water through push buttons, flow valves or motion sensors to encourage interactive and exploratory play.

Splash parks may range in scale from small neighbourhood-level installations with a handful of in-ground spray nozzles through to large regional or destination-scale facilities featuring themed above-ground play structures, multiple age-appropriate zones and sophisticated automated control systems.

WATER MANAGEMENT

Water used in splash parks is managed through one of 2 primary systems: recirculating systems, which collect, treat, filter and reuse water in a closed loop; or flow-through (drain-away) systems, where fresh water passes through the features and is discharged to stormwater or irrigation. The choice of water management system has significant implications for capital cost, ongoing operational expenditure, water conservation and public health compliance.

Regardless of scale, all splash parks require careful consideration of water quality, surface drainage, accessibility, inclusive design, supporting amenities and ongoing maintenance.

PLANNING FOR SPLASH PARKS

Many councils tie splash park decisions into broader play space strategies, active recreation strategies or open space plans. This is also the case for guidance. Splash parks guidance on planning, design and management is often provided within general open space, play and recreation guidelines.

There are several key areas to consider when planning or designing a splash park.

Strategy and policy

Review alignment with open space, play, aquatic, active recreation, climate adaptation, environmental, tourism strategies, long-term plans and community outcomes.

Needs assessment and demand analysis

Needs assessment should include:

- Investigating population growth forecasts and demographics.
- Determining existing aquatic and water play provision.
- Considering fit within play space hierarchy.
- Completing and considering community engagement outcomes.
- Determining the outcome sought (e.g. heat relief, tourism, family recreation).

Site selection

Site selection should include considering:

- Proximity to toilets and change facilities
- Proximity to shade (existing or ability to provide)
- Proximity to parking and public transport
- Potential activation uses such as nearby café or playground
- Access to utilities including water supply and pressure, sewer, electrical capacity, stormwater discharge
- Site constraints such as inundation, contamination, protected trees, land tenure, cultural heritage considerations and zoning
- Community impacts – noise, traffic and parking overflow, antisocial behaviour, equity of access, tourism vs neighbourhood amenity tension

Design and accessibility

Working with a landscape architect, consider:

- A range of zones for different users (sensory, low spray, high spray),
- Slip-resistant surfacing,
- Adequate gradients for drainage,
- CPTED assessments,
- Inclusive play guidelines.

Water system choice

Consider the water system that will be used on site including:

- Recirculating vs flow-through,
- Filtration and disinfection plant requirements,
- Water conservation and sustainability,
- Backflow prevention,
- Plant room size and location requirements, and
- Parks operations and maintenance team impacts.

Public health and risk management

A review of the public health regulatory requirements should be completed. Other considerations are:

- Water quality monitoring and response protocols
- Risk management plan (including incident response procedures)
- Slips, trips and falls mitigation through surface selection and gradients
- Entrapment hazards
- Electrical safety

Environmental sustainability

Sustainability considerations for a new splash park could consider:

- Water usage tracking,
- Smart activation systems,
- Solar for pumps/UV systems.

Capital and whole-of-life costing

Costs to consider for lifetime of the splash park:

- Capital cost,
- Costs of water (where applicable),
- Chemicals,
- Electrical upgrades,
- Plant and filtration infrastructure,
- Inspections,
- Vandalism,
- Cleaning,
- Staffing costs, and
- Compliance burden.

RELEVANT AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS

Relevant Australian standards include playground standards, accessibility, plumbing and drainage.

For links and further guidance please see Relevant Documents at the end of this section.

Table 17: Relevant Australian Standards for interactive water play

Reference	Type
HB 241-2002	Water management for public swimming pools and spas
AS 1668.2-2012	The use of ventilation and airconditioning in buildings
AS 1926.1-2012	Swimming pool safety – safety barriers for swimming pools
AS 1926.2-2007 (R2016)	Swimming pool safety – location of safety barriers for swimming pools
AS 1926.3-2010 (R2016)	Swimming pool safety – water recirculation systems
AS 2560.2.5-2007	Sports lighting – specific applications – swimming pools
AS 2610.1-2007 (R2016)	Public spas
AS 2865-2009	Confined spaces
AS 3136-2001	Approval and test specification – Electrical equipment for spa and swimming pools
AS 3636-1989 (R2013)	Solar heating systems for swimming pools
AS 3780-2008	The storage and handling of corrosive substances
AS 3979-2006	Hydrotherapy pools
AS/NZS 2416.1:2010	Water safety signs and beach safety flags: Specifications for water safety signs used in workplaces and public areas (ISO 20712-1:2008, MOD)

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information on splash parks.

This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (DDG4) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Managing Health Risks Associated with Interactive Water Features	South Australia Health (2024)	Overview of health risks associated with splash parks.	https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/c4782a00422915a6a601bfa14cf899eb/FACTSHEET+Interactive+water+features+2024.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE-c4782a00422915a6a601bfa14cf899eb-p6dnNXa
Water Quality Guidelines for Public Aquatic Facilities – Managing Public Health Risks Version 2.0	Department of Health Victoria (2020)	Guideline for all public aquatic facilities, with a focus on pools. See Appendix 1: Interactive water features	https://www.health.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/files/collections/policies-and-guidelines/w/water-quality-guidelines-for-public-aquatic-facilities--managing-public-health-risks---2020.pdf
The Good Play Space Guide “I can play too”	Sport and Recreation Victoria (2011)	Contains advice and commentary on water play	https://sport.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/2259100/good-play-space-guide_2011_0.pdf
Design and Engineering Considerations for Splash Pads	Oasis Water Playgrounds (2024)	Commentary on key considerations when designing splash parks	https://oasiswaterplaygrounds.com/design-and-engineering-considerations-for-splash-pads/
Choosing the Best Location for a Playground and Splash Pad: A Comprehensive	Aqua Tile (n.d.)	Safety focused guidance on choosing a splash park location	https://aquatile.com/choosing-the-best-location-for-a-playground-and-splash-pad/

Safety and Design Guide		focused on US requirements.	
Design-Build Splash Parks: What to Consider and How to Plan for Success	Water Splash (n.d.)	General suggestions for strategic planning for splash parks	https://watersplashnet.com/design-build-splash-parks-what-to-consider-and-how-to-plan-for-success/
Water Spray Park Safety Guidelines	Colorado Intergovernmental Risk Sharing Agency (CIRSA, 2004)	Older guidelines, provides general overview of safety considerations.	https://www.cirsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/WaterSprayParkHbook.pdf

DDG5 – PLAY SPACES

Public Open Space Handbook – Development and Design Guides

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

This section provides a concise overview for play space guidance and focuses on gathering relevant and useful documents, links and information to support the design and development of play spaces.

Detailed advice is contained within the relevant linked information and documents.

Why is this important?

The provision of play spaces in Australia is changing. ‘Play’ captures a wide array of activities, and the spaces where play is specifically designed for extend far wider than the traditional playground.

The planning, design and delivery of play spaces is a fast-evolving area of open space and recreation.

Victorian context

The ‘Good Play Space Guide: I can play too’ is a key document for the development of play spaces, written by Sport and Recreation Victoria.

Playgrounds are typically noted as provided in ‘local parks’ within urban design guidelines in Victoria.

THE BENEFITS OF PLAY

Play is essential to healthy childhood development. Unstructured play is important for brain development and optimal physical and emotional functioning. Children are smarter, more cooperative, happier and healthier when they have frequent and varied opportunities for unstructured play in the outdoors.

Children are more physically active outdoors. There is a connection between learning lifelong habits of physical activity for health and wellbeing and positive outdoor childhood experiences. Yet children today are spending less time outdoors in unstructured play than in any other time in history.

It is important when planning neighbourhoods that opportunities for outdoor unstructured play have a focus. Children need to have access to places to play outdoors – and places that are not solely dependent on a parent driving them to these places as they get older. Consideration of proximity of spaces to where children live and safe routes of travel for independent mobility are all key ingredients to building neighbourhoods where children can play.

As play is integral to growth and learning for human development, providing for play (including play spaces) is an important service for children and families. Children will benefit from access to a wide range of play opportunities. Children need more experiences than they can get in the home.

Providing play spaces is an opportunity to extend their experiences.

We know that:

- Children play wherever they are,
- As children grow they benefit from a graduated range of challenges and experiences,
- Children play on more than play equipment; they play in all sorts of ways,
- Unstructured free play near the home is an important part of childhood, and this could take place in the street, in laneways, up a tree, near the local shops, as well as in a local park.

We also know children need a variety of experiences and settings for play in a public setting. They include:

- Choices in the types of activities that interest children of a range of ages and developmental stages;
- Graduated challenges;
- Balance of challenge and risk;
- Access to nature;
- Opportunities to manipulate the environment;
- Opportunities for people to meet and play together;
- Sensory qualities which provide interest to children;
- A comfortable physical environment (shade, shelter, winter sun);
- Places where more than one child can be supervised;
- Places that children can access independently as they grow older;
- Accessible environments which support participation and inclusion; and
- Amenities which are easy and comfortable to use.

WHAT IS A PLAY SPACE?

Playing is a natural human activity which transcends cultures, languages and countries. The provision of spaces for play is a core part of government community services and is closely intertwined with acquiring open spaces for other purposes such as conservation or biodiversity.

For many years, play provision focused on the specific infrastructure of developing ‘playgrounds’ which were largely built structures and playground equipment.

The definition of what constitutes a playground has expanded and the common term used is ‘play spaces’. There is a changing perception on what a playground or play space includes. Play can happen anywhere, and therefore the spaces for play are not limited to playgrounds.

‘A play space is an area that gives people the ability to play and provides an opportunity to participate in diverse structured and unstructured forms of play. A play space may include, but extends beyond, the playground to include the whole environment that is available for play – including the natural features, built environment and landscape, and amenities.’
(from ACT Play Spaces Strategy)

This expanded view of play and play spaces could be applied to nearly all open spaces and recreation facilities. There are several play-focused strategies which can provide relevant definitions and visions for the widest definition of play and play spaces within communities across Australia.

Spaces with a primary purpose of play

For the purposes of this module, a 'play space' is play-specific infrastructure and spaces which are planned, designed, built and maintained with the **primary purpose** of playing.

This includes (but is not limited to) the following terms: playgrounds, play spaces, nature play, accessible playgrounds, adventure playgrounds.

This play space definition does not include informal recreation activities such as skateboarding, basketball, parkour, outdoor fitness and pump tracks. These activities are covered in DDG8 – Skate and BMX and DDG3 – Outdoor Fitness Equipment.

Traditional playgrounds

Traditional playgrounds can be small with 2–3 pieces of equipment, or one or 2 large structures. Some playgrounds may focus on providing for only one age group. Traditional playgrounds are those that:

- Focus on a few large structures
- Activities are concentrated in one area
- Emphasise physical play

Modern play space

Modern play space design includes built structures but is less likely to focus on one or 2 large playground structures.

The planning and design of play spaces carefully considers the intended users and type of play desired. Types of play considered could include:

- | | | |
|------------|-----------------|--------------|
| • Climbing | • Swinging | • Creative |
| • Running | • Water play | • Musical |
| • Jumping | • Interactive | • Social |
| • Sliding | • Collaborative | • Theatrical |
| | • Quiet | |

The modern play space typically has a range of areas and play items that may be more spread out than traditional playgrounds.

TRENDS IN MODERN PLAY SPACES

There are several trends within modern planning, design and delivery of play spaces in Australia. A few of these are highlighted below:

- Nature Play
- Adventure Play
- Inclusive Play
- Digital Play

- Indigenous Play
- Sustainability for Play Materials and Infrastructure
- Sensory Play
- Water Play

Nature play considerations

The use of reclaimed timber steppers can be problematic due to maintenance requirements.

Consider incorporating a balanced mix of materials, utilising timber where appropriate for its aesthetic appeal and warmth while minimising its use to avoid excessive maintenance. Investigate low maintenance alternatives, such as concrete steppers or large rocks.

Play everywhere

Creating spaces to play can be a part of any project. This includes roads, trails, new buildings, trees, benches, cemeteries, beaches, laneways, linear parks and more.

Many organisations are incorporating play into other projects outside of typical play spaces, into a Neighbourhood Play System, rather than play only being planned for in playgrounds.

DECISION MAKING

Similar to deciding on a type of open space, a wide range of considerations is required for deciding on play provision. There is no ‘perfect’ play space. Play spaces can look and feel completely different depending on factors such as the users they are designed for, the budget available and the gradient of the land.

Play space design and planning checklists

There are several checklists available for considering the planning, design and delivery of play spaces. The table below is not exhaustive. A full list of references is in the Relevant Documents section of this module.

Table 18: Play space design and planning checklists

Checklist Document	Checklist Type	Author	Date
Play Space Design Guidelines and Checklist	All play spaces	City of Palmerston, NT	2021
Everyone Can Play	1. Play space Evaluation Checklist 2. Design Principles Checklist	NSW Department of Planning and Environment	2023
Inclusive Play Guidelines	1. Connect with Place Checklist 2. Connect with Each Other Checklist	Inclusive South Australia, SA	n.d.

	3. Connect with Self Checklist		
Nature Play Guidelines	4. Checklist for Design of Accessible and Inclusive Play Space	Gisborne District Council, New Zealand	2025
Parks Accessibility and Inclusivity Checklist	5. Checklist could be used for audits or to guide design	Auckland Council, New Zealand	2023

Safety and standards⁷³

The Australian Standards for Playground Equipment and Surfacing are an advisory set of guidelines that are not regulatory on their own.

There is no requirement for the public to comply with the Standards. However, State and Commonwealth Governments often refer to Australian Standards (AS) or joint Australian/New Zealand Standards (AS/NZS) in their legislation.

When this happens, these Standards can become mandatory. In addition, Australian Standards are sometimes incorporated into legal documents and considered as a ‘benchmark of acceptability’.

The owner of a playground or play space has a duty of care to all users and visitors and a reasonable standard of care should be applied to the playground to prevent injury or loss.

It is important for all those providing play spaces to ensure they are abiding by mandatory standards.

It is recommended that voluntary standards are followed or carefully considered. Voluntary standards may still be referred to if court action is taken.

RELEVANT AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS

The following table is a summary of the types of relevant playground and play space standards at the time of writing. It is recommended to seek advice from a certified playground inspector as a part of your planning and design process.

Table 19: Relevant Australian Standards for play spaces

Reference	Type
AS 4685.0	Playground Equipment and Surfacing – Part 0: Development, installation, inspection, maintenance and operation

⁷³ Playground Inspectors Australia, <https://www.psia.net.au/>

AS 4685.1	Playground Equipment and Surfacing – Part 1: General safety requirements and test methods
AS 4685.2	Playground Equipment and Surfacing – Part 2: Additional safety requirements and test methods for swings
AS 4685.3	Playground Equipment and Surfacing – Part 3: Additional safety requirements and test methods for slides
AS 4685.4	Playground Equipment and Surfacing – Part 4: Additional safety requirements and test methods for cableways
AS 4685.5	Playground Equipment and Surfacing – Part 5: Additional safety requirements and test methods for carousels
AS 4685.6	Playground Equipment and Surfacing – Part 6: Additional safety requirements and test methods for rocking equipment
AS 4685.11	Playground Equipment and Surfacing – Part 11: Additional safety requirements and test methods for spatial network
AS 4422	Playground Surfacing (Interim) – Specifications, requirements and test method
AS 16630	Permanently Installed Outdoor Fitness Equipment – Safety requirements and test methods
AS EN 14974	Skateparks – Safety requirements and test methods
AS EN 16899	Sports and Recreational Equipment – Parkour equipment – Safety requirements and test methods
AS/NZS 2890.6-2009	Off-street parking for people with disabilities
AS 1428 (Parts 1–5)	Design for access and mobility – General requirements for access

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information. This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (DDG5) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
State of Play 2025	Play Australia (2025)	A large research report on children's play in Australia.	https://www.playaustralia.org.au/sites/default/files/State%20of%20Play_final.pdf
Space for active play: Developing child-inspired play space for older children	National Heart Foundation of Australia Victorian Division (2013)	Engagement with children resulted in design and location recommendations. Provides definitions for play types including nature play.	https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/541aa469/files/uploaded/Space-for-active-play_Final_report.pdf
Everyone Can Play – A Guideline to Create Inclusive Spaces	Department of Planning and Environment, NSW (2023)	A comprehensive guideline informed by industry professionals, including a Design Principles Checklist	https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/everyone-can-play-a-guideline-to-inclusive-playspaces.pdf
Everyone Can Play – Case Studies Web Page	Department of Planning and Environment, NSW (n.d.)	Provides numerous case studies outlining approaches to designing and building inclusive play spaces	https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/open-space/everyone-can-play/case-studies
Good Play Space Guide: 'I can play too'	Department for Victorian Communities (2007)	An overview of planning, legislation, upgrading, and design of playspaces. Includes consideration of the role parents and carers in inclusive play.	https://sport.vic.gov.au/resources/good-play-space-guide
Inclusive Play: Guidelines for Accessible Playspaces	Inclusive South Australia	Overview of providing inclusive play spaces. Document includes a number of design checklists and best	https://inclusive.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/95461/Incl

		practice playspace examples.	usive-Play-GuidelinesV2.pdf
Learning Outdoors: Benefits Risks	Department for Education and Child Development, South Australia (2023)	Provides a considered view on the benefits of risky play in the context of schools and childcare centres. The document has a large set of detailed case studies and references.	https://natureplaysa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/NPSA-Learning-Outdoors-Benefits-Risks-opt.pdf

DDG6 – SYNTHETIC TURF

Public Open Space Handbook – Development and Design Guides

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

Synthetic turf is a popular choice for specific sports and has risen in popularity to increase the playing hour capacity of a sports field.

It is a combination of artificial fibres stitched into a carpet that is laid on an engineered constructed base including a ‘hard’ base layer and shock pad.

Synthetic fields usually have infill materials which help keep the fibres upright and functioning properly.⁷⁴

Why is this important?

Increasing population density in urban environments is leading to constraints across all types of open space, including sports fields. The installation of synthetic turf is one of the mitigations to respond to sports fields which are near or already at capacity.

While synthetic turf can handle more frequent use, there are also disadvantages such as water pollution that remain a concern for communities.

Local context

The Artificial Grass for Sport Guide by Sport and Recreation Victoria provides in-depth guidance on synthetic turf, including advantages and disadvantages.

The Sustainable and Climate Resilient Facilities policy by the Victoria Department of Education strongly encourages schools to prioritise using natural grass instead of synthetic turf.

Most guidance documents agree that synthetic turfs require careful consideration before approval.

SYNTHETIC TURF DEFINITIONS

Understanding the terminology used in sports surface technology is essential for informed decision-making. The following definitions cover the main surface types that open space managers will encounter when considering sports field upgrades or new installations.

Natural turf is a grass plant field surface that requires soil, sun, water and nutrients for growth. It ranges from basic untreated soil-based grass fields to highly engineered sand-based surfaces used in elite sports settings. Capacity and durability depend on turf species, soil amendments, construction quality, drainage, irrigation and maintenance regime.

⁷⁴ NSW report - Synthetic turf study in public open space report 2021

Natural turf includes engineered sand-based surfaces with profile reinforcement. These are usually used for elite fields and are generally not suitable for community fields as they have higher capital and operational costs.

Synthetic turf is a surface made using 100% man-made turf fibres, typically polyethylene or polypropylene, stitched into a carpet laid on an engineered base that usually includes a hard base layer and shock pad. Some synthetic fields include infill materials to keep the fibres upright and maintain playing performance. Common categories include⁷⁵:

- **Woven synthetic turf:** Often used for lawn sports like lawn bowls.
- **Short pile non-fill synthetic turf:** A short pile turf usually less than 13mm high with no ballast infill. It is commonly used for cricket and ‘wet’ hockey fields.
- **Second Generation:** Short, dense pile (13–24mm) with sand-dressed or sand-filled infill. Used for tennis, hockey, multi-use courts and some cricket pitches.
- **Third Generation:** Long pile (35–70mm) with sand and crumb infill to meet performance requirements. Used for football (soccer), AFL and rugby. Crumb infill alternatives such as cork and coconut fibre are now available.
- **Fourth Generation:** Long pile (35–70mm) without performance crumb infill, using different yarn blends. These are in early development and have not yet been recognised by sport governing bodies.

Hybrid turf combines natural and synthetic materials in a single product.

This includes hybrid profile systems where synthetic backing reinforces natural turf, and reinforcement profile systems where natural turf grows within a base of synthetic matting that does not extend above the growing medium. These are an emerging option, used infrequently in Australia to date.

Combination turf fields use synthetic or hybrid turf patches in high-wear areas of a predominantly natural turf field, such as goal mouths. These are typically used for cricket pitches which are synthetic, but the rest of the playing surface is natural turf.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The decision to install synthetic turf should be grounded in strategic planning rather than responding to ad hoc requests. A network-level approach ensures that different surface types are targeted to the most suitable locations and use demands across a local government area. Investment in any sporting facility must provide for the community over the long term.

Decision-making for sports field surfaces should be informed by:

- An open space strategy that establishes supply and demand across the network, identifies deficiencies and guides priorities for investment and improvement.
- A recreation strategy that identifies current and future recreation uses and demand and plans to balance infrastructure provision across a range of recreation types and sports.

⁷⁵ Adapted from Synthetic Turf Sports Fields in Public Open Spaces (2025)

- A sports field strategy that provides a framework and action plan for how council delivers well-built and maintained fields and facilities, considering both the regional and LGA-wide network.
- Verifiable needs and condition assessment audits to validate whether existing surfaces can support future requirements before committing to a surface change.

DECISION MAKING FOR SYNTHETIC TURF

Synthetic turfs have a number of advantages and disadvantages. The decision to install a synthetic turf should consider a number of factors, respond to clear provision requirements and include an understanding of the attitudes and potential future use by the local community.

Table 20: Considerations for synthetic turf decision making

Consideration	Advantages	Disadvantages
Capacity	The capacity of synthetic fields to accommodate increased sporting use is commonly cited as the key advantage.	Synthetic fields generally do provide more hours of play. However, they still require maintenance and lack of lighting may restrict the hours of use, reducing the maximising effect of synthetic turf.
Reliable	Synthetic turf can handle wet weather events and high utilisation, resulting in a reliable facility for community sport.	The impact of heat on synthetic turf can result in fewer hours of play than intended due to high temperatures.
Maintenance	Regular maintenance is still required.	Synthetic turf is not 'set and forget'. Routine maintenance is required such as regular grooming, treatments for algae and maintenance of stormwater capture and filtration systems.
Heat mitigation	There is not an advantage to synthetic surfaces for heat mitigation. There are design options that can help with synthetic turf heat including alternative infill materials (cork, coconut fibre) and tree planting.	It was found that synthetic surfaces reached average surface temperatures of 70–75°C on very hot summer days, compared with 37°C for irrigated natural grass (NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer, 2022).

Stormwater management	When well-planned and designed, synthetic turf can handle wet weather events better than natural turf.	Synthetic turf fields can result in water contamination from rubber infill, turf fibre particles and chemical leachates. A stormwater management system should be designed by an experienced engineer with expertise in pollution management.
Environmental impact	Synthetic turf does not currently have a beneficial or neutral impact on the environment.	Synthetic turf sports fields should not be located in bushfire-prone areas, areas with a higher likelihood of flooding, or in proximity to sensitive ecosystems and waterways without independent assessment.
Human health	Increased access to informal and formal sport activities can have a positive impact on physical and mental health.	Synthetic turf creates a slightly greater risk of abrasiveness on skin and a higher injury rate due to reduced shock absorption. Artificial turf shock pads are helpful in reducing injury, as well as maintaining infill surfaces.
Climate resilience	Synthetic turf does not currently provide improvements to climate change adaptation.	Unlike synthetic turf, natural grass can improve resilience to extreme weather events, such as bushfires, floods and heatwaves, by improving air quality and reducing temperatures and flood risk in urban areas, while sequestering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Health and safety

Synthetic turf sports fields in public open spaces: guidelines for decision makers (NSW DPHI, 2025) provides a helpful overview of health and safety risks and mitigations.

Table 21: Synthetic turf health and safety summary

Topic	Health and Safety Considerations
Heat stress	Synthetic turf absorbs, radiates and reflects heat, impacting users' thermal comfort. Sports Medicine Australia's Extreme Heat Policy provides guidance for protecting users from the potential ill effects of extreme heat in the summer. Peak sporting bodies also provide advice on maximum levels and protocols to follow at various temperatures. Mitigations • Investigate how the heat impacts of synthetic turf fields can be reduced. Consider alternative materials and design layouts. As well, when developing larger or multiple facilities in one location, mitigate the cumulative heat island effects of increased reflection and hard stand areas. • Consider evaluating local weather data to determine whether any microclimates in the LGA would provide a location with lower summer temperatures or cooling winds. • Manage the impacts of heat with infrastructure such as shaded spectator and player areas, water refill and drink fountains, and appropriate shade tree planting for respite.
Materials contact	Synthetic turf with loose infill material may pose a risk through ingestion, lodgement, inhalation and skin contact. Develop procedures to limit these risks and provide first aid kits and information. Mitigations • Understand the materials specified in the synthetic turf proposal, and limit potentially harmful chemicals in the turf components wherever possible to reduce unforeseen health consequences.
Injury	Synthetic turf can have higher impact injuries than natural turf depending on design and maintenance standards. Mitigations • Establish that shock pads are designed for the proposed sports codes the field is planned for and consider differences such as tackling rather than trip impacts. • Good field maintenance regimes for shock pads, infill and turf surface will be required to provide player safety over the field's lifetime.
Air and aerosols	Odorous and noxious gases can significantly impact the use and amenity of public open spaces.

	Mitigations • Understand the materials specified in the synthetic turf proposal, their potential to contain volatile or odorous chemicals or compounds and whether these will impact nearby residents, players and open space users. Investigate opportunities to use alternative materials that reduce the chemicals or compounds. <i>The National Environment Protection Measure for Ambient Air (Air NEPM) sets national standards for the 6 key air pollutants to which most Australians are exposed: carbon monoxide, ozone, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, lead and particles.</i>
--	---

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY FOR SYNTHETIC TURFS

Environmental impacts represent one of the most significant areas of concern for communities and decision-makers when considering synthetic turf. These must be carefully assessed and mitigated through design, construction and ongoing management. Several areas of concern are outlined below.

Microplastics and soil and water health

Plastic migration from synthetic turf fields into waterways and bushland is a key environmental concern. Evidence shows that both rubber infill and turf fibre blades from synthetic fields are found in waterways.

A synthetic turf field without structures to reduce infill loss may wash tens to hundreds of kilograms of infill per year into stormwater systems. The amount of turf fibres lost is likely to be in the hundreds of kilograms per year, increasing for fields near end-of-life or those that are poorly maintained (NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer 2022, pp. 51–52).

There are mitigation measures that can be used, both in design and materials used. Design can include shoe cleaning devices such as brushes or foot wells connected to a filtered drainage system to prevent loose material going offsite. Amenities showers may also need microplastic filtration systems.

Consider contacting a specialist to advise on the project and assess the potential impact of the field on soil and water, and if any mitigations are necessary.

Urban heat island effect

Synthetic turf can have significantly higher surface temperatures than surrounding air temperatures, even in moderately hot weather, contributing to the urban heat island effect.

Alternative infill materials can improve surface heat temperatures, and perimeter tree planting can provide shade and reduce heat impacts. Consider seeking advice from an arborist, and whether other forms of shade are required.

Impacts to biodiversity and soil health

While natural turf sports fields have reduced biodiversity compared with other green spaces, they do provide some habitat and food for local flora, fauna, insects and organisms, and maintain soil systems, water infiltration and oxygen exchange.

Synthetic turf installation removes all biodiversity value within the field site due to soil neutralisation and removal of plant life. Consider identifying appropriate management measures to reduce impacts such as strategic planting of vegetation around synthetic turf sites and replacement of removed trees.

Short lifespan

Synthetic turf has a typical lifespan of 8–10 years. There are significant environmental challenges for disposal, with no recycling facilities currently available in most Australian states. The material is designed to not break down quickly and can remain in landfill for a significant period after disposal, with potential for chemical leachate into soils and waterways. Victoria has recently provided funding for Australia's first synthetic turf recycling hub, which has the prospect for up to 98% recovery of raw material for repurposing.

Carbon footprint

Natural turf areas provide carbon sink opportunities through natural plant CO₂ absorption, while their maintenance processes will generate some emissions.

The installation, materials and maintenance of sports fields all contribute to carbon emissions. Synthetic sports fields contribute to CO₂ emissions through the manufacture of materials and the removal of carbon absorption capacity within the site. Consider options for materials, construction, lifespan and maintenance equipment that can reduce the carbon impact of the project.

Bushfire risks

Polymers used in synthetic turf fibres are classified as easily flammable and can be ignited in bushfire settings. They may also cause additional risks due to toxic gases and noxious emissions being released once ignited.

There are currently no ignition or fire testing standards for outdoor synthetic turf experiencing bushfire wind and temperature conditions. Synthetic turf, especially those consisting of rubber crumb infill, should not be considered in bushfire-prone areas.

Different synthetic turf materials and designs will have different risk profiles. Discuss these details with your supplier or specialist to determine the best solution for your site.

RELEVANT AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS

Table 22: Relevant Australian Standards for synthetic turf

Reference	Type
AS technical report SA TR CEN 17519:2021	Surfaces for sports areas – synthetic turf sports facilities – Guidance on how to minimize infill dispersion into the environment

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information. This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (DDG6) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Synthetic turf sports fields in public open space: Guideline for decision-makers	NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (2025)	As described by the document: “this guide is designed to assist those considering synthetic turf as an alternative to natural grass for non-elite sports fields and support the delivery of the best outcome for their community”	https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-05/synthetic-turf-sports-fields-in-public-open-space-guideline-for-decision-makers.pdf
Guidelines for Division 5.1 assessments: Addendum for synthetic sports fields	NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (2025)	While this document has a particular focus on planning of synthetic sports fields within NSW requirements, there are relevant definitions and advice that is valuable for any synthetic sports field development.	https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-05/guidelines-for-division-5.1-assessments-addendum-for-synthetic-turf-sports-fields.pdf
Synthetic Turf Study in Public Open Space	Published by: NSW Department of Planning, Industry, and Environment (2021) Written by: Ethos Urban, Otium Planning Group	This study considered a large range of synthetic turf issues, benefits, mitigations and solutions for design, management and maintenance. It provides insights, recommendations, definitions, decision making consideration list, and a long list of references.	https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/synthetic-turf-study-in-public-open-space-report.pdf

Artificial Grass for Sport Guide	Sport and Recreation Victoria (2011)	This document is an extensive guide (156 pages) and covers all synthetic turf including tennis courts. There are case studies, definitions, practical checklists and a long list of references. The whole of life costs are out of date but give an understanding of what is included in whole of life costing for synthetic turf.	https://sport.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/2259988/Artificial-Grass-For-Sport-Guide.pdf
Natural Grass vs Synthetic Turf Decision Making Guide	Western Australia Creative Industries, Tourism and Sport (published 2011, reviewed 2025)	As described by the author “this guide provides an outline of the considerations that need to be taken” See full report linked below.	https://www.cits.wa.gov.au/sport-and-recreation/facility-management/natural-grass-vs-synthetic-turf-decision-making-guide
Natural Grass vs Synthetic Turf Study Report	Western Australia Creative Industries, Tourism and Sport (published 2011, reviewed 2025)	This study provides guidance on the following areas as they relate to synthetic turf: environmental, social, health, financial, safety, sport specific requirements, and quality. It specifically focuses on comparing natural grass and synthetic for the benefit of decision makers.	https://www.cits.wa.gov.au/department/publications/publication/natural-grass-vs-synthetic-turf-study-report
Independent review into the design, use and impacts of	NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer (2022)	The review was completed with the ‘Synthetic Turf Study	https://www.chiefscientist.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/1543/CSE-Synthetic-Turf-

synthetic turf in public open spaces		in Public Open Space' (2021) report in mind. The review covered information on synthetic turf materials, trends, initiatives, health impacts, environmental impacts, and ecological impacts specifically considering how these relate to NSW.	Review-Final-Report.pdf
Guideline document for Sports Field Development	Sport New Zealand (2019) Currently being updated	This guidance document considers all sport field types. It provide maintenance, design and whole of life costings for both hybrid and synthetic turf types.	https://sportnz.org.nz/media/1409/sports-field-development-guide-final-2020-1-22.pdf
Smart Guide to Synthetic Sports Surfaces	Smart Connection Consultancy (2025)	This is a comprehensive guide specifically focused on synthetic sport surface across multiple sports and facility types. It covers decision making, environmental sustainability, quality standards, and safety. It covers the breadth of turf development from planning, design, procurement, maintenance and end of life for the asset.	https://www.smg-gmbh.de/uploads/attachment/translation/download/2092/Smart_Guide_To_Synthetic_Sports_Surfaces_Oct_2025_Final.pdf
Synthetic Fields: A guide to synthetic surfaces for football	Football Victoria (2023)	A useful guide with football specific recommendations and overview of FIFA standards.	https://footballvictoria.com.au/sites/ffv/files/2023-03/SC-FV-SYNTHETIC-HYBRID-FIELDS8.pdf

DDG7 – OFF-LEASH DOG AREAS

Public Open Space Handbook – Development and Design Guides

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

Off-leash dog areas (dog parks) are popular requests from communities around Victoria.

There are several documents that outline planning, design and management of open spaces specifically for off-leash areas.

This module provides a general overview of dog parks, and a list of helpful guidance documents.

Why is this important?

Dogs are important companions. They can contribute to physical activity and combat loneliness.⁷⁶ Off-leash areas provide free areas for dogs and have the added bonus of improving social connection in communities.

Off-leash areas for dogs have several specific design requirements and considerations that can ensure a successful community asset.

Local context

The Victoria Pet Census (2023) found that 41% of Victorians own a dog, an average of 1.4 dogs per owner. Dogs are the most popular pet in Victoria, with an estimate of over 1.3 million dogs owned as pets.

Under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 Part 5A Section 68A, councils must prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAM).

WHAT ARE OFF-LEASH DOG AREAS?

‘Dog parks’ is a general term given to open spaces that are primarily designed for recreational activities that include dogs.

However, planning for spaces that include dogs extends further than the term ‘dog parks’, and clear definitions are useful for determining how open spaces interact with dogs. Further, open spaces can provide opportunities for dogs that are not exclusively planned for dogs.

Why dog parks?

Dogs are important companions for older people and people living alone as they provide company and give people a reason to socialise with other people, which contributes to the health and wellbeing of these groups in the community.

Formalised dog off-leash areas enable people to take their dogs to a place where dogs can legally run free, exert energy and socialise with other dogs. Off-leash areas also provide people with a meeting place and an opportunity to connect with others in the community.

⁷⁶ Baum F and Palmer C: Opportunity structures: urban

landscape, social capital and health promotion in Australia.

Health Promotion International.17: 351-61, 2002.

Table 23: Off-leash dog area sub-types summary

Type	Sub-types
Off-leash area (OLA)	• Public open spaces with off-leash dog policies • Beaches with off-leash policies (full-time or seasonal)
Fenced off-leash area (FOLA)	• Fenced dog parks • Part fenced open spaces to allow for off-leash areas (e.g. protected from roads) • Puppies and small dog spaces • Dog agility courses and clubs
On-leash area	• Sports fields (typically) • Natural environments • Public open spaces with on-leash dog policies
Dog prohibited areas	• Open spaces with policies that do not allow dogs anywhere on site • Nature spaces with high biodiversity or ecological features that could be significantly impacted by dogs

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR DOG PARKS

Strategic planning for dog parks across a municipality includes several of the same processes as other strategies, including research, provision assessments, community engagement and setting key strategic principles.

Key strategic principles should always be set according to the individual needs of local communities and as a part of the engagement process. The below list provides examples of principles that can be adapted for strategic planning if appropriate.

Diverse

- A range of experiences will be provided for our dog community through our network of diverse public spaces.

Impact and suitability

- Dog off-leash areas should be at sites which are suitable for expected use and should consider dog needs, potential benefits and potential impacts to the site, other users and surrounds.

Safe

- The safety of people and dogs will be prioritised when planning and designing dog off-leash areas.

Environment and heritage

- Dog off-leash areas should not impact on areas of historical value and environmental significance.

Quality

- Dog off-leash areas will consider all users of the space, providing spaces for dogs which are well designed and fit for purpose and ensuring grounds with other primary uses are not impacted by dog usage.

Shared responsibility

- Education communication programs and enforcement will be used to promote accountability and respect between all users of dog off-leash areas.

Well managed

- Dog off-leash areas will be well managed and will enhance usage.

Community awareness and education

- Community awareness and education will be undertaken to encourage positive dog behaviour and increase dog owners' sense of responsibility.

NEW OFF-LEASH AREA PROJECT

When assessing and developing a new off-leash area, the following steps are recommended.

Stage 1: Demand analysis

Determine what the existing use and demand is for dog off-leash areas within the neighbourhood and the wider area. If an off-leash or dog park strategy or plan exists, align the demand analysis as appropriate.

Consider:

- availability of public open space;
- availability of existing OLAs (including seasonal use such as beaches);
- current and forecast resident and dog population growth;
- future development including new services or new housing;
- potential impacts of a new OLA; and
- potential benefits of a new OLA.

Stage 2: Site analysis

The investigation and analysis of sites should include a site suitability criterion. An example of site suitability is provided below⁷⁷.

Table 24: Site analysis focus areas and criteria

Focus	Criteria
Profile and access	The site should be central to the population, accessible to vehicles and pedestrians and be easily seen and known by the community. However, dogs off leash may not be appropriate at high-profile sites (due to potential impacts on the site character or other users).
Size	The area available for dogs off leash should consider other uses, support infrastructure and landscaping.
Character suitability	The site must be public open space with an open reserve or park character. The site must not be a sportsground or a natural area.
Impacts on people	Potential impacts on residents and other reserve users must be minimal, including no risk to children and adults playing sport, walking and cycling, using a play space or pursuing other recreation activities.
Entry/exit points	Consideration to ease of access, conflicting uses, safety, connections to pathways and 'airlocks' (for fenced parks).
Facilities and assets	Consider the types and placement of infrastructure (seating, dog bowls, fencing, access to water, bins).

Stage 3: Design

There are many design elements specific to off-leash dog areas, both fenced and unfenced. The below table provides design elements to consider when planning and designing a new off-leash area.

⁷⁷ Adapted from Dogs in Open Space Plan, City of Newcastle

Table 25: Design criteria for new off-leash areas

Focus	Criteria
Entry/exit points	Consideration to ease of access, conflicting uses, safety, connections to pathways and 'airlocks' (for fenced parks).
Facilities and assets	Consider the types and placement of infrastructure (seating, dog bowls, fencing, access to water, bins).
Lighting	Consider any current lighting infrastructure and appropriate lighting for site.
Connections	Easy access with good connections to existing pedestrian paths, public transportation, cycle paths and car parking (if appropriate).
Visibility and passive surveillance	Good visibility from surrounding public areas. Consideration of CPTED.
Shade	Vegetation, trees or other facilities to provide sufficient shade.
Spaces for dog activities	Room for dogs to run and/or areas of interest for dog activity, ensuring the safety of dogs.
Residential buffer	Buffers from residential properties, exclusion zones or high-risk areas.
Environment	Consider flora and fauna habitats, and whether access to areas of the site may need to be fenced off and restricted for dogs.
Shared infrastructure	The ability to share infrastructure such as drinking fountains, seating, lighting and public toilets.

A useful and detailed design guidance document is the [Technical Manual 'Planning, Design and Management of Dog Off-leash Areas'](#), Lesley Humphreys (2021).

A detailed list of amenities and design options is available in the [Fenced Dog Park Guidelines](#), Latrobe City (2021).

Stage 4: Management

Once the off-leash areas are established, the space requires maintenance and ongoing management.

A few considerations when planning the maintenance and management are:

- Communication plans to ensure residents comply with dog control regulations such as preventing dogs making unwanted approaches to other dogs and people, and collection of dog litter;
- Engagement programs with both owners and non-owners, including online information;
- Clear signage and wayfinding, including contact information for issues or conflicts on site;
- Enforcement approach for non-compliance with dog regulations;
- If the FOLA has been established with a community group, set clear governance or committee expectations; and
- Set levels of service for FOLA maintenance and a management plan.

A detailed list of amenities and design options, as well as construction cost estimates and maintenance is available in the [Fenced Dog Park Guidelines, Latrobe City \(2021\)](#).

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information on dog parks and off-leash areas.

This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (DDG7) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Extracts from Planning, Design, and Management of Off-Leash Areas Technical Manual	LMH Consulting/ Paws4Play	This document provides definitions related to off-leash and on-leash areas for dogs, design, service levels, and a list of references and research.	https://hdp-au-prod-app-mon-shape-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/8716/7029/1028/Off-Leash_Technical_Manual.pdf
Dog park design, planning and management	Holderness-Roddam, B. (2020). Australian Planner 56(1):48-57	An academic paper about off-leash dog park design, planning, management, advantages and disadvantages.	https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344612899_Dog_park_design_planning_and_management
Dogs in Open Space Plan	City of New Castle (n.d.)	A plan that outlines current off-leash provision, community feedback, principles for development and actions.	https://newcastle.nsw.gov.au/getmedia/9f2fe16e-7e21-435e-9222-d0e53787166e/3371-Dogs-in-Open-Space-Plan_WEB.pdf
Fenced Dog Park Guidelines	Latrobe City (2021)	This practical guide provides a number of checklists and particularly useful construction, cost estimate, and management guidelines.	https://www.latrobe.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-07/Fenced%20Dog%20Park%20Guidelines.pdf
Dog Off-leash Area Policy and Management Plan	City of Whittlesea (2016)	Provides practical provision metrics and a useful design	https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/documents/things-to-see-

		considerations table (pg. 17)	and-do/parks-trails-and-playgrounds/dog-off-leash-area-policy-and-mgt-plan-version-1.pdf
Domestic Animal Management Plan 2026-2029	City of Moonee Valley (2026)	An example of an domestic animal management plan that includes commentary on off-leash dog parks and security.	https://mvcc.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Corporate-Documents/ACTIVE-Domestic-Animal-Management-Plan-2026-29.pdf
Dog Friendly Spaces Policy	City of Casey (2017)	A policy on dogs within all open spaces. Sets provision standards and has definitions for 'dog friendly spaces.	https://www.casey.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-09/Dog-Friendly-Spaces-Policy.pdf

DDG8 – SKATE AND BMX

Public Open Space Handbook – Development and Design Guides

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

This module provides guidance for councils on the planning, delivery and management of skate and BMX facilities within public open space.

The guidance will help open space planners and managers make informed decisions about skate and BMX facilities that are safe, well-designed, inclusive and responsive to the needs of their communities.

Why is this important?

The provision of quality skate and BMX infrastructure is increasingly recognised as a core component of contemporary open space planning, sitting alongside playgrounds, sports fields and aquatic facilities as essential community recreation assets.

‘Skate’ has moved beyond providing for only skateboarding youth. There is growing participation and demand for purpose-built ‘wheeled’ and ‘roll’ facilities across all age groups and demographics.

Local context

In Victoria, the provision of skate and BMX facilities is supported by a well-established network of state sporting organisations, guidance documents and council-led strategies.

Skate and BMX facility types vary across Victoria, reflecting differences in land constraints and population densities across the state.

WHAT IS ‘SKATING’ AND ‘BMX’?

‘Skate activity’ or ‘skating’ refers to any activity that uses a small, wheeled device (such as skateboards, scooters and inline skates) to grind, slide or ride on different surfaces and elements. BMX activities, especially BMX Freestyle, can occur in a skate park, but there are also specialised BMX facilities. BMX racing facilities and purpose-built freestyle parks have specific requirements.

Table 26: Types of skate covered in POSH

Types of skate activity included in this module
BMX Freestyle
Skateboarding
Scootering
Inline skating and quad skating (roller skates)

This module focuses on the provision of skate and BMX facilities outdoors. Indoor wheeled sport and active recreation activities including roller derby or roller hockey are not covered here.

WHO ARE SKATERS AND RIDERS?

Skate and BMX facilities have moved on from being called youth facilities.

While skateboarding is a relatively new sport, many participants who began skateboarding in the 1980s and 1990s are now parents and working professionals. The perception of skate has shifted, and young children are skating, biking and scootering at skate parks, pump tracks and bike facilities.

A key part of planning any skate and BMX facility is understanding the user groups. The focus user group may not be youth, and engagement with the community is crucial.

The focus skaters or riders could be:

- Families with young children
- Intermediate ages (9–13)
- Amateur or professional competitors
- Youth and teenagers
- Intergenerational (children, youth and adults skating together)
- A particular ability level (beginners, advanced)
- Young adults

WHAT ARE SKATE AND BMX FACILITIES?

The term ‘skate and BMX facilities’ is used in this module to describe a wide range of wheeled sport and recreation activities.

Skate and BMX facilities are purpose-built spaces designed to accommodate a range of wheeled recreational activities, including skateboarding, scootering, BMX riding, roller skating and inline skating, within the public open space network.

These facilities have evolved significantly from simple prefabricated ramp installations into sophisticated, sculpted concrete environments that serve as both sporting venues and important community gathering places.

Skate facility types

Skate facilities are diverse, with thousands of designs and use options. Therefore, they are difficult to fit into standard facility typologies (local, neighbourhood, etc.).

The tables below set out the range of considerations when planning a skate facility. This list is not exhaustive. Connecting with the community and local skate organisations will help you understand their needs and the options available.

Table 27: Skate facilities descriptions

Facility type	Also known as	Size	Typical features	Number of users	Approximate cost
Skate Park extra small	Single element Skate dot	50–250m ²	1–2 elements	1–2	\$10,000–\$50,000
Skate Park small	Local Skate spot	250–750m ²	Co-located with other local play or recreation	2–15	\$100,000–\$500,000
Skate Park medium	Neighbourhood	50–1500m ²	Multi-use, facility for 1–2 skill levels	8–30	\$1,000,000+
Skate Park large	District Region Municipal Destination	1500–3500m ²	Dedicated facility with elements that provide options for several skate types (street, scooters, BMX), can accommodate large events, includes elements for advanced skills. High level of amenity services on site (toilets, water fountains, etc.).	30+	\$2,000,000+
Skate Park extra large	State National Destination	3500+m ²	Dedicated facility that can host international, national and state events, provides intergenerational, diverse set of challenges, enhanced accessibility features and unique design features. Dedicated amenity services and considered transport options to the site. May be co-located with other facilities in a large recreation reserve.	50+	\$2,000,000+

Skate and BMX styles

Table 28: Skate and BMX style summary

Facility type	Description
Street	Skate facility that is fully integrated into the urban environment and takes urban infrastructure elements into its design. It typically provides skate elements that include large flat areas with banks or quarter pipes at either end. Riders can move back and forth through the park, skating on obstacles as they go. Elements could include rails, stairs, kerbs or walls. All skating and BMX have a street style.
Park	Outdoor area integrated into a park-like setting. Typically provides hard surface area with elements and surfaces for skateboarding as well as scooters, BMX, inline skating and quad skating. Elements could include mini and deep bowls, quarter pipes, transitional and hang-out areas. All skating and BMX have a park style.
Transitional	Transitional is curved terrain with round walls that can be quarter, half or full pipes. It also includes bowls, jumps and vert walls. All skating and BMX have a transitional style.
BMX Freestyle	BMX Freestyle can be park, street, bowl, dirt or flatland. Generally, these parks include features like quarter pipes, box jumps, hips and spine ramps. BMX Freestyle parks can be integrated into skate park design if considered in the design process. The design needs to consider the skate elements as well as layout.
Pump tracks	A facility typically focused on active recreation with a closed circuit of rollers and berms. The experience allows the user to maintain speed with less effort. Pump tracks are typically smooth surfaces so they can be used by any wheeled activity. In some cases, they are built with a gravel surface which limits use to bikes. Pump tracks can also be built with 2 mirrored loops that allow 2 riders to race.

Facility focus

Skate facilities are flexible spaces. They can focus on providing formal sport opportunities, physical activity or a space for social connection for different communities.

An important part of planning, designing and managing skate spaces is considering their intended primary and secondary purpose.

Table 29: Skate facility focus descriptions

Facility type	Description
Social	These facilities focus on creating social connection and a safe place to be. The social element of skate parks has historically focused on providing youth spaces. However, skate facilities have participation from a wide range of users. The focus of the social skate park could be for families, youth, intergenerational connections, competitors and more.
Physical	These facilities focus on the physical activity elements of skating. They may focus on skate elements that build technical skills or challenges. The social spaces may be de-prioritised in favour of providing more skate elements.
Competition	Competition facilities require consideration of event hosting, including car parking, public transport routes, amenities, noise restrictions and safe viewing areas.

Location type

Table 30: Skate location types and typical features

Location type	Typical features
Urban/city plaza	Skate park provided within the urban landscape with dedicated facilities and clear skate opportunity.
Active city space	Skate elements that are integrated into the cityscape rather than providing several elements in one plaza or area. It may not be immediately obvious that the infrastructure is skateable as it blends into the aesthetic of the space.
Park	Integrated with a sport reserve or other park setting. It may be co-located with other recreation facilities. It can lean

	towards park or street style skating depending on the park character.
Skate path	Skate elements that follow a single pathway with elements along the way.
Reused sport court	Flat space from previous sport court use with skate elements installed. Skate elements are likely ground fixed such as rails.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Skate park planning includes typical open space planning considerations such as alignment to municipal strategies, policies and plans, and conducting community engagement.

Skate parks should be planned like other sports facilities, including a needs assessment, community consultation and engagement, feasibility that considers design, capital and operational budgets, activation programs, and governance and management of the space.



For skate parks, some investigations are critical to a facility's success. These are covered below.

In-depth research

In-depth research should cover the potential users, style of skate, demographics, level of facility required and multi-use options. Skate park design is flexible and takes thousands of forms. A full investigation should therefore be completed during planning and design.

Areas to consider are:

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Designing and maintaining skate parks with CPTED in mind is crucial to success.

Location and nearby businesses/facilities

Location should consider the relationship to nearby businesses and facilities.

Maintenance and operational costs

Budget for the higher-than-usual maintenance costs that skate parks can incur.

Post-install activation

Skate parks should be activated through events, programs and community involvement.

Non-skaters

Provide multi-purpose spaces with activities for non-skaters to create a diverse setting.

Check for any updated laws or regulations

Skateboarding, scootering and BMX (cycling and bike riding) laws and regulations are continually evolving. Planning and transportation rules can have a large impact on what is possible for skaters.

Ensure you have reviewed and checked for any changes in law, policy or regulation that may impact the facility or its users. This could include road rules or municipal policy, and it may include particular areas or hours only.

For links and further guidance please see Relevant Documents at the end of this section.

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information. This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (DDG8) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
The Safety Grind: Guidelines for Safer Skate Parks	City of Casey, The Y, Victoria State Government (2019)	The guideline's purpose is to help local governments create and strengthen their overall city-wide skate strategy. Issues covered include needs assessment, design, operation and management for local government.	https://skatepark.ymca.org.au/safety-grind
Adventurous Spaces: A best practice guide for bringing roll and ride activities into public open space	NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (2024)	A comprehensive guide that covers a range of wheeled activities including mountain biking and BMX on trails, pump tracks, and skills parks, skateboarding and scooting.	https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-07/adventurous-spaces-guideline.pdf
AusCycling Facility Guide	AusCycling	A comprehensive guide that provides design advice for a wide range of cycling activities including BMX and pump tracks.	https://admin.platform.auscycling.org.au/uploads/ac-facility-guide.pdf
Public Skatepark Development Guide	Tony Hawk Foundation (2026)	This website covers a large number of topics. Some topics are US-centric; however, there is still useful information, and it is kept up to date by The Skatepark Project (skatepark.org).	https://publicskateparkguide.org/

Skatepark Best Practices Guide 4.0	Produced by: The Skatepark Project (2022) Written by: Alec Beck	The guide is a comprehensive 95-page document covering design and delivery, as well as funding, advocacy and community activation.	https://static1.square-space.com/static/5ebecf15da3f1d1078d5a551/t/682ab0e9105975117c944530/1747628280449/Best-Practices-Guide-4.0.pdf
Skateboarding: Design and Development Guidance for Skateboarding	Skateboard Great Britain (2024)	This guide describes a large number of positive features of skateboarding. It also provides explanations of skate park types, case studies, and references.	https://skateboardgb.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/skateboard_design_and_development_guidance_toolkit_april_2021_ne.pdf
Skate Guidelines for Local Government	Sport New Zealand (2024)	The guidelines cover definitions of 'skate', planning, design considerations, and a number of useful case studies.	https://sportnz.org.nz/media/vnog0ng2/snz0010_sports-new-zealand-skate-provision-guidelines.pdf

Strategy examples

City of Casey Skate Strategy 2007

[Skate Strategy \(Version 1.1\).pdf](#)

City of Onkaparinga – Skate Facilities Management Plan 2016-2021

https://www.onkaparingacity.com/files/assets/public/publications/skate_facility_management_plan_20162021.pdf

MidCoast Council – Midcoast Skatepark Strategy 2023-2035

https://hdp-au-prod-app-midcst-haveyoursay-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/9317/0251/5312/MidCoast_Skatepark_Strategy_2023_-_2035.pdf

Macedon Ranges Shire - Skate and BMX Strategy 2023

<https://www.mrsc.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/strategies-amp-plans/skate-and-bmx-strategy-final-adopted-report-2023-11-22.pdf>

Moreton Bay Regional Council – *Skate and BMX Strategy 2010*

<https://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/services/publications/skate-bmx-strategy-2010-2020.pdf>

Cardinia Shire Council - Skate and BMX Strategy 2016

[https://parksleisure.com.au/wp-content/uploads/parc-library/809-0-Skate_and_BMX_Strategy_July_2016_Cardinia_Shire_Council%20\(4\)%20\(1\).pdf](https://parksleisure.com.au/wp-content/uploads/parc-library/809-0-Skate_and_BMX_Strategy_July_2016_Cardinia_Shire_Council%20(4)%20(1).pdf)

City of Melbourne – Skate Melbourne Plan 2017-2027

https://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/download_file/6700/649

Baw Baw Shire – Skate and BMX Strategy 2012-2030

<https://www.bawbawshire.vic.gov.au/files/sharedassets/public/recreation/documents/accessable-final-report-skate-and-bmx-strategy-accessible-v-2015.pdf>

City of Bayswater - Skate and BMX Strategy 2024

<https://engage.bayswater.wa.gov.au/84971/widgets/402631/documents/283257>

Bass Coast – Mountain Bike, BMX and Pump Track Strategy 2024

<https://engage.basscoast.vic.gov.au/bikestrategy>

Case studies

BMX/Pump/Youth Facilities – PLA Award 2026 nominations

<https://parksleisure.com.au/view/awards-of-excellence-nominations-2026/entry/3771/>

<https://parksleisure.com.au/view/awards-of-excellence-nominations-2026/entry/3862/?pagenum=3>

<https://parksleisure.com.au/view/awards-of-excellence-nominations-2026/entry/3938/?pagenum=5>

<https://parksleisure.com.au/view/awards-of-excellence-nominations-2026/entry/3963/?pagenum=6>

<https://parksleisure.com.au/view/awards-of-excellence-nominations-2026/entry/3975/?pagenum=6>



PARKS & LEISURE
AUSTRALIA
(VIC/1AS)



VicHealth



MANAGE PUBLIC OPEN SPACE



MANAGEMENT MANUALS

MM1 – MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS

Public Open Space Handbook – Management Manuals

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

While it can be unintentionally sidelined in the planning and design phases, maintenance is one of the key enablers of all public open space benefits.

This module covers:

- Open space maintenance activities
- Overview of levels of service
- Contract types, options, advantages and disadvantages

Why is this important?

Often, the approach to open space management can be primarily short-term cycles of budgeting, with all asset operations, maintenance and renewals being funded from the operations budget.

Services can be delivered based on an evolving practice, based on historic practices. Assessing, reviewing and documenting service delivery reduces risk and allows open space managers to clearly demonstrate successes and highlight funding requirements.

Local context

[IPWEA](#) provides an in-depth and useful parks management suite of documents, including practice notes for:

- Levels of Service
- Service Delivery
- Asset Management

Maintenance levels of service and standards are set by individual councils.

OPEN SPACE MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES

Open spaces provide services to a broad range of people, professions, infrastructure, plants, nature and animals. The maintenance and operations of open spaces deliver on the provision during planning stages, and the intention of design.

Open space maintenance tasks include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Routine surveys and ongoing inspections
- Maintenance of turf
- Maintenance of garden beds including annuals
- Maintenance and cleaning of all park furniture, structures and landscape features
- Maintenance of internal paths, roads and car parks
- Maintenance of park drainage, irrigation and council lighting systems
- Removal of graffiti
- Litter control
- Management, power line and service clearance and pruning of street trees
- Management of park trees
- Management of plantings in road reserves
- Management of weeds
- Inspection, maintenance and repairs to playgrounds
- Maintenance of sports fields, including turf management
- Carrying out defined works within bushlands
- Management of water features
- Reporting of activities, programs and works

- Reporting of inquiries, requests, complaints, etc.
- Reporting of problems with assets/services that
- are not part of these Standards, both Council and non-Council
- On-site meetings
- Regular review, consultative and planning meetings

LEVELS OF SERVICE

In order to deliver quality open spaces that are appropriately maintained for their location and type, establishing a levels of service framework is crucial.

Establishing levels of service is considered a key early task to be undertaken in the asset management process. Ideally this is completed before asset condition information is collected. It establishes expectations for the maintenance, renewal schedule and function of open spaces.

It should define what is being delivered to customers or communities, such as:

- How many and what type of parks are provided;
- What standard of park or facility is provided;
- What service can be expected;
- What it will cost; and
- A way of measuring ‘are we delivering?’

There are several guidelines available for preparing your levels of service.

For in-depth information, examples and case studies on developing levels of service, see [HYPERLINK "https://www.ipwea.org/aotearoa/ipweacommunities/parksandfacilities"](https://www.ipwea.org/aotearoa/ipweacommunities/parksandfacilities) **Parks Management: Levels of Service (Practice Note 10.3, IPWEA)**

CONTRACT TYPES

There are several contract types. It is important to understand the differences between contract models, and how these interact with your levels of service. There are 5 main types of contracts:

1. Outcome Based
2. Frequency Based
3. Cost Based
4. Measure and Value
5. Time and Material

CONTRACT OPTIONS

Table 31: Contract options, advantages and disadvantages

Outcome Based fixed price	Advantages	Disadvantages
Lump sum items with Schedule of rates (SOR) for reactive and dayworks	Advantages include: • fixed price, known annual budgets agreed • financial risk sits with contractor • contractor resources are quantifiable • delivery is measurable for quality • high due diligence required by the contractor requires a high level of detail of asset quantities and service levels • SOR rates allow budget flexibility for reactive, renovations or seasonal work • technology required for proof of service • contractor can invest in capital plant and equipment to the benefit of the contract, certainty of income	Disadvantages include: • contractor can take shortcuts to maximise profit • high contractor margins to manage risk • contractor can focus on SOR work that generally has higher margins • may result in variations due to any changes made to contract • limited scope to adjust the contract delivery without large cost increases to rates • limited scope to be flexible to community demands on service levels • the relationship can become very contractual • high level of tags and clarifications

Frequency based contract	Advantages	Disadvantages
Pricing based on how often each maintenance task is performed and set intervals are agreed for different tasks. Can still forecast an annual spend based on the cost of visit and frequencies	Advantages include: • no financial risk for contractor or client • one price for delivery • staffing levels measurable • known dates on delivery • ease of monitoring and compliance through completed schedules and timesheets • technology required for proof of service	Disadvantages include: • no flexibility for seasonality • potential to over or under deliver on maintenance service levels • more prescriptive • contract relationship can become negative due to lack of flexibility on frequencies • can become very contractual and a financial burden if changes are made • contract type is for scheduled maintenance

ideally for facilities or monitoring assets

- an activity-based contract, not quality focused

Measure and value contract	Advantages	Disadvantages
Contract payment is on the basis of actual quantities of work completed rather than fixed frequencies or outcomes. Work is simply carried out when required and not at predetermined intervals	Advantages include: • client has control over what is delivered when • client can adjust service levels • allows flexibility if contract delivery changes • allows for early start to contracts • requires a high level of detail of asset quantities and service levels • like-for-like comparison can be benchmarked • technology required for proof of service	Disadvantages include: • high financial risk sits with client • low budget control for the client • high administration costs for both contractor and client • potential for financial blowouts through increased servicing • time-consuming for park managers to monitor delivery • high auditing required to quantify proof of service • best suited for civil engineering projects • uncertainty around plant investment for the contractor due to uncertain revenue • rates can be high or low to maximise profit

Mixed model – fixed price	Advantages	Disadvantages
Outcome based contract with indicative seasonal frequencies, budgeted for high seasonal growth Scheduled asset maintenance	Advantages include: • joint contract risk and financial pricing model • low risk margins added to the contract by the contractor • contract focus on productivity and quality outcomes, performance-based • known financial budgets	Disadvantages include: • medium level of administration for both contractor and client • high level of asset data and technology required to identify proof of service • medium contractor engagement

frequencies with SORs	• flexibility in the contract for seasonal impacts • fixed frequencies for inspections, monitoring and planned maintenance works (gate servicing, playground inspections, etc.) • requires a high level of detail of asset quantities and service levels • contractor can resource, workload is known quantity • budgets go further • flexibility to adjust service levels without administrative impacts to the contract • medium level of auditing on proof of services
------------------------------	--

Cost based/cost-plus contract	Advantages	Disadvantages
In a cost-plus contract, the contractor is reimbursed for the actual costs incurred during the maintenance work, as well as an additional percentage markup. This type of contract is often used when the scope of work is well-defined, but the costs of materials and labour are subject to change.	Advantages include: • a joint risk model, agreed pricing structures • open book, contractors can be more open with pricing • contractor resources are quantifiable between client and contractor • delivery is measurable for quality based on agreed costs • flexibility in the contract, service levels agreed by both parties • requires a high level of detail of asset quantities and service levels • budgets go further	Disadvantages include: • high administration costs for both contractor and client • long contractor engagement process, time-consuming • low margins for the contractor • pressure on delivery to make profitability for the contractor, shortcuts taken

Time and material contracts	Advantages	Disadvantages
Contract where payments are based on actual time spent and materials used to complete maintenance tasks	Advantages include: • contract involves paying for the actual time and materials used for the maintenance work, rather than a fixed lump sum amount • often used when the scope of work is unclear, or when there is a high degree of uncertainty about the amount of work required	Disadvantages include: • high administration requirement including multiple planning or programming reports • high level of asset data and technology required to identify proof of service • potentially low margins for the contractor • pressure on delivery to make profitability for the contractor, shortcuts taken • time-consuming for park managers to monitor delivery • high auditing required to quantify proof of service

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information.

This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (MM1) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Parks Management: Levels of Service (Practice Note 10.3)	IPWEA (2017)	A 50-page detailed guidance document on developing open space levels of service across a broad range of open space assets.	https://www.ipwea.org/aotearoa/ipweacomunities/parksandfacilities
Parks Management: Service Delivery (Practice Note 10.4)	IPWEA (2017)		https://www.ipwea.org/resourcesnew/bookshop/pn10-4
Landscape Guidelines: Landscape processes for developers	Hume City Council	Useful summary of requirements for handover, including maintenance periods.	https://www.hume.vic.gov.au/files/sharedassets/public/v/2/building-and-planning/subdivisions/landscape-subdivisions/landscape-processes-for-developers.pdf
Handover Inspection Checklist	Wyndham City Council (2020)	An easy to navigate checklist for handovers.	https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-01/Wyndham%20City%20-%20Asset%20Handover%20-%20Handover%20Inspection%20Checklist%20-%20Nov%202024.docx
Landscape Development Levels of Service – PART A	Wyndham City Council	Full document discussing the context and planning.	https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/about-council/your-council/plans-

			<u>policies-</u> <u>strategies/plans-</u> <u>policies-and-</u> <u>strategies/WLDLS</u>
Landscape Development Levels of Service - APPENDICES	Wyndham City Council (2019)	A useful example of clearly communicated levels of service.	https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Landscape%20Creation%20-%20WCC%20-%20Development%20Levels%20of%20Service%20-%20Document%20-%20PART%20B%20-%20Appendix%20-%2020190805%20%28A2187203%29.pdf

MM2 – MANAGING MULTI-USE AND SHARED SPACES

Public Open Space Handbook – Management Manuals

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

In local government, there is pressure on open space managers, planners and operations teams to maximise use of open space and deliver high-value outcomes with limited budgets.

Councils have to respond to the increasing and changing needs of their communities. Recreation activities are more diverse than ever, and open spaces are required to deliver many opportunities in one space.

This module provides advice for managing spaces that are:

- Multi-use
- Co-located
- Shared

Why is this important?

Land and funding for open space is never guaranteed.

Funding streams can be constrained, and many councils are faced with limited opportunities to acquire additional land.

In some cases, the only way to respond to community needs is to plan and design for multi-use, shared and co-located facilities.

Planning and design may create the infrastructure to enable multi-use and shared facilities, but activating these spaces to ensure shared use can be difficult. If the spaces are not used for the multi-use or shared intentions, the community needs remain unmet, and the result is open space being underutilised.

Local context

Open space and recreation strategies often include a priority for spaces to be multi-use. While this trend is not new, it has become a necessity for municipalities with high population growth and constrained land.

For example, plans that include prioritising multi-use are:

- Recreation Infrastructure Plan, City of Ballarat
- Recreation Facilities Provision Framework, City of Melbourne

Precinct planning also encourages co-location and multi-use, such as the provision that public open space should adjoin schools and other community facilities where practical.

WHY PRIORITISE MULTI-USE, CO-LOCATED OR SHARED OPEN SPACES?

There are a number of benefits to shared facilities, including:

- Flexibility and multi-use – encouraging participation;
- Diversity of opportunities, settings and experiences – balanced and complementary;
- Integration of public open space across various landowners and managers;
- Providing for (preserving) state level and regional through to local level needs;

- Responsive/adaptable to population and demographic change;
- Minimising risk, conflict and competing interests.

What can be shared, co-located or multi-use with open spaces?

These benefits are realised across many types of shared facilities and open space, including:

- Trails, pathways and linkages,
- Public or private schools and tertiary education,
- Recreation centres and hubs,
- Sports fields and other outdoor sports facilities,
- Community facilities,
- Sports clubs and amenities,
- Encumbered land or water management land that is suitable for the intended function.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER PROVIDERS OF OPEN SPACE

Providers or owners of open space can play multiple roles in shared, co-located or multi-use spaces. Local government could play many of these roles simultaneously or only one. They can be:

- **Developer** of multi-use open space,
- **Planner** of strategically placed or designed open spaces,
- **Owner** of open space that allows use from several organisations,
- **Coordinator** of partnerships, shared use agreements and bookings,
- **Supporter** of community hubs through advocacy,
- **Liaison** with other infrastructure departments,
- **Participant** on governance groups or committees,
- **Partner or user** of school facilities or other landowners.

Prioritising multiple uses of an open space or shared facility can look different depending on the project. It is important to consider the role of an open space provider in the initial discussion phases.

DISTINCT DEFINITIONS

The terms ‘proximity’, ‘multi-use’, ‘co-located’, ‘shared’ and ‘flexible’ are not interchangeable and should be considered distinct from each other. Definitions for each term are provided below, and an example given.

These terms can exist together (multi-use open space that is shared), but clear intentions are useful in all stages: planning, designing and managing.

Table 32: Multi-use and shared space terms and definitions

Term	Definition	Example
Proximity	Located within easy walking distance of each other. There may be limited sharing of infrastructure or facilities.	An open space is a 3-minute walk from a public school.

Multi-use	The open space can be used for multiple open space, recreation or community outcomes.	Sports field which can accommodate AFL, cricket and football (soccer) on the same field. The sports field is designed for multi-use but is only used by the local AFL club. The sports field is not co-located with other activities or facilities.
Co-located	The open space is located directly next to a complementary open space, recreation or community facility.	An open space is located on the parcel next to a government primary school. The open space has a traditional playground, football (soccer) field and path. It does not have multi-use facilities. The open space is not shared by different groups or formally shared with the school.
Shared	There are multiple primary community user groups who share the open space areas or amenities.	An open space is used by a pickleball club between 9am and 2pm and used by a basketball club for fitness training sessions between 3pm and 6pm. The changing rooms are used by both groups. The open space and changing room are not designed for multi-use but are shared. The open space is not co-located with other complementary activities or facilities.
Flexible	The open space can be re-designed, re-marked or otherwise adapted to provide different activities or outcomes in future.	An open space is designed for walking trails, but has large, flat grassed areas which could be used for higher use including sports fields. The open space is not currently designed or used for multiple activities. The open space is not co-located with other recreation or community facilities. The open space is not a shared space for multiple groups or organisations.

OPTIONS TO ADAPT OPEN SPACES FOR MULTI-USE AND SHARING

There are often limited opportunities to acquire additional land, and there may be increasing community needs. Outside of acquisition, there are options to modify existing open space to accommodate additional or different uses.

Depending on local circumstances, options available may include:

Improving access to existing open spaces

- Removing fences or other barriers around sports or training fields to encourage use by the broader community when the fields are not being used for their primary purpose;
- Improving transport options for those experiencing mobility difficulties; and
- Supporting and encouraging sports associations to explore different models of delivery.

Upgrading facilities to match needs

- Reconfiguring sports fields or supporting infrastructure to accommodate additional activities and/or user groups;
- Incorporating building materials and features that can withstand and/or protect users from extreme weather conditions to reduce downtime; and
- Incorporating design features that support people of all abilities and life stages to participate in the open space opportunities offered.

Using design solutions to increase capacity

- Installing lighting to extend programmable time;
- Installing higher quality playing surfaces to extend capacity;
- With the use of removable goals and multiple line markings to allow different users or skill levels or to accommodate diverse and modified sports options;
- By enhancing informal recreation opportunities;
- With flexible field layouts for junior competition levels;
- Maximising climate change adaptation; and
- Using technology for innovative solutions.

Enabling multiple/shared use of existing open spaces

- Seeking opportunities to work with other authorities, agencies and organisations including other landowners;
- Developing clear policies and standard agreements that outline roles and responsibilities for regular and cyclical maintenance; insurance and risk management; scheduling and fees; and
- Proposing strategies to reduce conflict between competing uses.

WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

Open spaces have several shared values with schools and often provide similar recreation facilities or other infrastructure such as car parking. Co-location with schools is a key planning factor for consideration in planning new open spaces.⁷⁸

Open spaces and schools can provide mutual benefits, including effective use of community resources and infrastructure. Other benefits of sharing and co-locating with schools include:

- access to services to support families and communities;
- enhanced cooperation and goodwill between the school and the community;
- the provision of additional extracurricular learning opportunities;
- opportunities for parents and the broader community to become better informed about and participate in the school's operation and activities;
- more effective use of valuable school facilities;
- opportunities for the community to play a positive part in school security through out-of-hours use of the facilities.

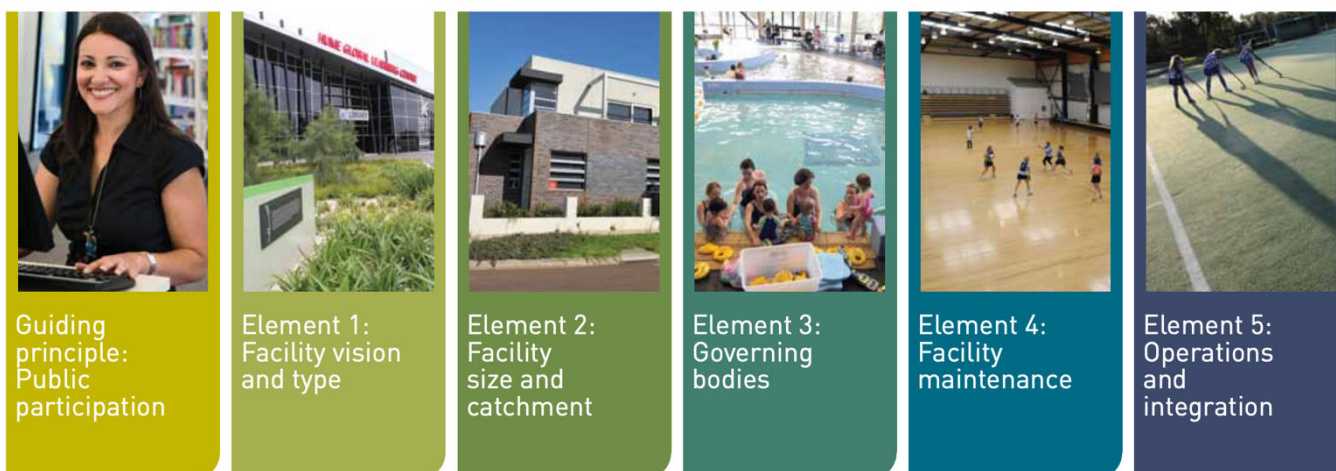
Successful partnerships share several key characteristics, including:

- a clear benefit to both the school and community
- a genuinely collective vision between the partners, the community and other stakeholders that fosters a sense of shared ownership of the facility
- entrepreneurial local leadership and a willingness to make things happen
- strong cooperative relationships between partners
- recognition of the long-term planning required at the school, local council and community levels and alignment with existing or planned service delivery models
- a sound knowledge of the legal and financial responsibilities of developing and maintaining shared facilities
- a clear and shared understanding among all partners of how the facility will be managed and improved throughout its lifecycle
- a detailed legal agreement that documents the roles and responsibilities of all partners and appropriate dispute-resolution processes

The [Guide to Governing Shared Community Facilities \(2010\)](#) outlines a pathway from idea to management and operation. This includes the guiding principle of public participation and 5 elements from ideation to operation.

This guidance is particularly useful for sharing spaces with schools, but also applies to creating shared facilities with a range of different community spaces.

⁷⁸ VPP Standard C13 of VPP-56.05-2 Public open space provision objectives



The document outlines several legal entities to consider for setting up the partnership or shared facility agreements, including the advantages and disadvantages of each option. The legal options outlined are:

- Partnership
- Incorporated Association
- Joint Venture
- Company Limited by Guarantee
- Committee of Management (Crown Land)
- Statutory Body Corporate – Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)
- Special Committee – Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)
- Body Corporate – Government School; Council under the Education Training Reform Act 2006
- Body Corporate or Statutory Body – through a specific act
- Co-operative
- Charitable Trust

SHARED COST MODELS

Equitable contributions to maintenance should be clearly defined.⁷⁹ In shared use arrangements, all parties must agree an appropriate standard and cost of maintenance.

The cost of maintaining sports facilities and playing fields varies significantly and can vary over time. A wide range of factors can change maintenance costs including usage, ground conditions, supporting infrastructure and climate.

In general, it is likely that a full cost recovery model with shared user groups may not be achievable. In such circumstances a local government will be required to establish an effective cost apportionment model. The outcome must provide equitable cost parameters which are transparent, consistent and relevant to:

⁷⁹ A detailed chapter on costs, management and maintenance for shared facilities is available in the Guide to Shared Use Facilities in the Sport and Recreation Community (WA Sport and Recreation).
https://sitefinitypublicblobs.blob.core.windows.net/prod-blob/docs/default-source/sport-and-recreation/guide-to-shared-use-facilities.pdf?sfvrsn=555c6e02_1

- Field/facility quality and maintenance standards (not only size);
- The ability for sports organisations to pay;
- A clear understanding of the costs which can be recovered through fees;
- The need to keep sports affordable for children and youth;
- Utilisation rates and capacity of infrastructure to maintain an agreed level (hours) of use; and
- Maintenance levels required to respond to needs.

CONFLICT AND MISUNDERSTANDING MANAGEMENT

Multi-use, co-located and shared facilities can, and do, create conflict. Organisations with perfectly aligned values and vision in the development stage can find disagreement in the operations and management phases. It is recommended that the conversation between shared users is not ‘if’ we have disagreement, but ‘when’.

Key questions to ask the governance or management group are:

- Are there clearly defined, agreed and well-documented conflict resolution processes in place?
- Are there defined and resourced integration and coordination role/s?
- Are there agreements, position descriptions or delegation statements in place for all operational roles and responsibilities?
- How does the legal structure we have chosen help mitigate conflict?
- What are the parameters we have set around insurance?
- How have we engaged with our community and users to mitigate future conflict?

HELPFUL CHECKLISTS

Table 33: Helpful checklists for multi-use and shared spaces

Title	Details	Link
Governance and operations summary checklist	A checklist for developing the governance and operations of the shared community facility.	https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/165051/Guide-to-Governing-Shared-Community-Facilities.pdf
Shared-facility partnership checklist	A helpful one-page checklist to work through the different stages of developing a shared-facility partnership with a school.	https://vgls.sdp.sirsidynix.net.au/client/search/asset/1292556
Shared Use Facility Guide Checklist	A simple and quick checklist on key items for school partnerships (pg 43) Risk assessment checklist (pg 16)	https://sitefinitypublicblobs.blob.core.windows.net/prod-blob/docs/default-source/sport-and-recreation/guide-to-shared-use-facilities.pdf?sfvrsn=555c6e02_1

VPP PROVISION – RELEVANT CLAUSES

Table 34: VPP provisions relevant to shared spaces

Type of shared space	Relevant Standards	Reference
Multi-use	Ensure that urban open space provides for nature conservation, recreation and play, formal and informal sport, social interaction and peace and solitude. Community sports facilities should be accommodated in a way that is not detrimental to other park activities.	VPP 11.03-1 – Open space planning objectives and strategies
Multi-use and shared	Ensure exclusive occupation of parkland by community organisations is restricted to activities consistent with management objectives of the park to maximise broad community access to open space.	VPP – 11.03-2 – Open space management objectives and strategies
Co-located and proximity	To provide a network of quality, well-distributed, multi-functional and cost-effective public open space that includes local parks, active open space, linear parks and trails, and links to regional open space.	VPP – 56.05-2 – Public open space provision objectives
Shared	The provision of active open space should be designed to achieve sharing of space between sports.	Standard C13 of VPP-56.05-2 – Public open space provision objectives
Multi-use and flexible	The provision of public open space should be of an area and dimensions to allow easy adaptation to different uses in response to changing community active and passive recreational preferences.	Standard C13 of VPP-56.05-2 – Public Open space provision objectives
Co-located	The provision of public open space should adjoin schools and other community facilities where practical.	Standard C13 of VPP-56.05-2 Public open space provision objectives

Shared and co-located	To provide adequate unencumbered land for public open space and integrate any encumbered land with the open space network	Standard C13 - VPP – 56.05-2 – Public open space provision objectives
Shared and co-located	The provision of public open space should: • Be integrated with floodways and encumbered land that is accessible for public recreation • Be integrated with urban water management systems, waterways and other water bodies. • Incorporate natural and cultural features where appropriate.	Standard C13 - VPP – 56.05-2 – Public open space provision objectives

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information. This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (MM2) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Opening the gate	Vic Health	A short 6-page document outlining the benefits of sharing spaces, and practical tips for action.	https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-09/VH_School-case-study_Opening-the-gate_v3%20%281%29.pdf
Getting more from school grounds	Infrastructure Victoria (2024)	Provides an overview of current shared schools in Victoria and actions to support school to share their grounds, through research conducted in 2024. Insights are given on barriers and opportunities.	https://assets.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/assets/Getting-more-from-school-grounds-sharing-places-for-play-and-exercise.pdf
Shared Facility Partnerships: A Guide to Good Governance for Schools and the Community	Department of Education and Development (2007)	While an older document, this is a detailed guide on developing a shared facility with a public school including management and governance.	https://vgls.sdp.sirsidynix.net.au/client/search/asset/1292556
A Guide to Governing Shared Community Facilities	Department of Planning and Development (2010)	A clear shared facility pathway is described, with legal entity types provided at the back of the document to assist with choosing a legal structure (includes pros and cons).	https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0/018/165051/Guide-to-Governing-Shared-Community-Facilities.pdf

Guide to shared use facilities in the sport and recreation community	WA Department of Sport and Recreation (n.d.)	Provides a significant section on managing and maintaining shared use facilities, and advice on cost sharing.	https://sitefinitypublicblobs.blob.core.windows.net/prod-blob/docs/default-source/sport-and-recreation/guide-to-shared-use-facilities.pdf?sfvrsn=555c6e02_1
Co-location and other integration initiatives: Strategic Evaluation	Victoria Department of Education and Training (2015)	This document provides advice on a wider set of services and infrastructure but has useful advice for working with schools.	https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/colocation/Co-location%20Services%20Summary.pdf

MM3 – CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Public Open Space Handbook – Management Manuals

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

This module supports parks and natural area managers in Victoria to understand the role parks play in responding to climate change and outlines a high-level approach to climate change adaptation planning consistent with Victorian Government adaptation frameworks and global good practice.

This module includes:

- Information about the important role parks can play in climate change adaptation and mitigation; and
- High-level processes for planning for climate change adaptation.

Why is this important?

Victoria is already experiencing the impacts of climate change and Victoria's climate is expected to continue to change in the future.

Open spaces play a significant role in adapting to climate change effects for both people and the environment.

In 2025, Parks and Leisure Australia released a position statement with other national organisations calling to prioritise urban green infrastructure for climate resilience across Australia.⁸⁰

Local context

Over this century, Victoria's climate is expected to be characterised by warmer temperatures, changes in rainfall patterns and more intense storms, with rising atmospheric carbon dioxide and sea levels.⁸¹

In response, policies and legislation have been created including the Climate Change Act 2017 and Victoria's Climate Change Strategy 2026-30.

Responding to climate change is a key focus for government in Victoria, with billions of dollars in funding and delivering world-leading, positive results.⁸²

THE ROLE OF OPEN SPACE IN CLIMATE CHANGE

As outlined in the POS Handbook PPN1, open space has many benefits. One of the key benefits that is increasing in importance is the role open spaces can play in the mitigation and adaptation of the impacts of climate change. Benefits include the mitigation of the urban heat island effect and provision of cooling, management of stormwater and flood mitigation and sequestration of carbon.

This module focuses on approaches to climate mitigation that can be taken in open spaces and how adaptive management may be used in preparing open spaces for the impacts of climate change.

⁸⁰ Position statement on Urban Green Infrastructure, Parks and Leisure Australia (2025)

⁸¹ Guidelines for the Adaptive Management of Wastewater Systems, DWELP (2022)

⁸² Victoria's Climate Change Strategy 2026-30

Climate change adaptation for open space involves a range of activities, which are ever-changing as knowledge increases. It involves planning and managing natural and built environments to respond to climate change impacts, enhance resilience and support both ecological and community values.

The adaptation outcomes sought for open spaces in Victoria are⁸³:

- Managing, maintaining and protecting all urban green spaces such as parks and gardens to ensure climate change resilience;
- Water supply, including from alternative water sources, is available to maintain vegetation cover, parks and recreational spaces across Victoria's cities, regional centres and towns to support urban amenity, cooling and wellbeing during periods of drought; and
- At least 30% tree canopy coverage (along with other vegetation) is provided across the urban landscape to support cooling and greening responses using species, design measures and infrastructure to minimise bushfire risks where necessary.

⁸³ Built Environment Climate Change Adaptation Plan, DWELP (2022)

Local Government Roles and Responsibilities

A summary

Local Government Act 2020	Victorian Climate Change Act 2017
The Local Government Act 2020 strengthened the mandate for councils to act on climate change. The role of a Council is to provide good governance for the benefit and wellbeing of their community. <i>"Councils are required to promote the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks."</i> Other relevant overarching principles include: - Councils are required to give priority to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations. - Regional, state, and national plans and policies are to be taken into account during council's strategic planning. - Council must ensure its decisions, actions, and information are transparent. There is now a clear expectation that decision-making is supported by robust and transparent practices, and that the long-term adverse consequences of climate change for future generations are incorporated into council planning, decisions and actions DELWP (2020), Local Government Climate Change Adaptation Roles and Responsibilities under Victorian Legislation: Guidance for local government decision-makers, Victorian Government, Melbourne.	The Climate Change Act 2017 provides Victoria with a world-leading legislative foundation to manage climate change risks, maximise the opportunities that arise from decisive action, and drive Victoria's transition to a net zero emissions, climate resilient community and economy. Six guiding principles for decision making provide criteria for 'assessing the suitability of council decision-making' and a way to demonstrate due process. Informed decision-making: Responses should be based on the best available evidence in the context of uncertainty; and be flexible and iterative, allowing for adjustments as circumstance change and new information is made available. Integrated decision-making: Decision-makers should give priority to responses that are most likely to provide the greatest net social, economic and environmental benefit for Victoria; and consider the cost of climate change, including externalities and long-term costs. Risk Management: Responses should ensure that risks are addressed by those who are best placed to manage them; avoid unintended consequences; not undermine our ability to adapt to climate change over the long-term and consider the trade-offs and understand and recognise the costs of and limits to adaptation. Compatibility: Responses should: build on the experiences of regions sectors, communities and industry; complement existing and planned work; and contribute to and be compatible with efforts to reduce emissions as well as adapt to climate change. Equity: Responses should: be equitable and fair; consider both the present and the short, medium and long-term future; and adhere to principles of intra and intergenerational equity. Community Engagement: Responses should: actively involve the community in setting policy directions and priorities; and value and response the knowledge and perspectives of Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal Victorians
Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans	The Victorian Planning System
The Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 requires councils to prepare a four-year municipal health and wellbeing plan following each council election. According to the Climate Change Act 2017, local governments must consider climate change when preparing their municipal public health and wellbeing plan. They must consider: - the potential impacts of climate change relevant to the decision or action (adaptation) and - the potential contribution to the State's greenhouse gas emissions of the decision or action (mitigation) Local governments must also have regard for the Victorian public health and wellbeing plan, which lists 'tackling climate change and its impact on health' as a priority. The state government has produced guidance for councils on how to tackle climate change through their health and wellbeing plans. The guidance steps through the planning cycle and includes internal and external engagement, implementation and evaluation. Refer to: DHHS (2019), Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2019-2023, Victorian Government, Melbourne. Tackling climate change and its impacts on health through municipal public health and wellbeing planning. Guidance for local government, 2020.	The purpose of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 is for the planning framework to support decisions in the 'long-term interests of all Victorians'. It establishes broad objectives for planning in Victoria that are relevant to climate change responses, including: - sustainable land use and development - the protection of biodiversity and natural resources, and - the maintenance of ecological processes. There are also a range of clauses focused on planning responses to hazards such as bushfire, flood, erosion and heat. Through Local Planning Schemes, councils can incorporate climate change adaptation through their Municipal Strategic Statement, Local Planning Policy and specific planning controls such as a schedule to a zone or an overlay. Planners must take into account: - Climate change impacts (natural hazards, coastal inundation and erosion) - Planning for places (greenfield planning to respond to climate change) - Agriculture (adaptation to climate change). - Energy and resource efficiency - Integrated water management The roles and responsibilities guidance suggests ways to incorporate climate change adaptation decisions into planning, via: - being pre-emptive and precautionary in responding to climate change - communicating climate change adaptation within your community - incorporating climate change adaptation across all aspects of planning. Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Vic) DELWP (2020), Local Government Climate Change Adaptation Roles and Responsibilities under Victorian Legislation: Guidance for local government decision-makers, Victorian Government, Melbourne.

DISCLAIMER: While this summary of *Local Government roles and responsibilities* refers to legislative and other legal frameworks, it is intended as general guidance only and does not constitute legal advice.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION FOR OPEN SPACE

Adaptation to climate change for open space involves the proactive planning and management actions taken to help parks, reserves and natural areas adjust to the impacts of climate change while maintaining ecological, social and cultural values.

Adaptation may involve:

- **Managing ecosystems for resilience:** Restoring and maintaining vegetation, wetlands and waterways to buffer against extreme weather events, drought, floods or fire.
- **Adjusting infrastructure and design:** Ensuring trails, playgrounds, picnic areas and visitor facilities are resilient to heat, storms and flooding.
- **Facilitating species and habitat movement:** Improving connectivity between reserves to allow species to shift their ranges as climate conditions change.
- **Engaging communities and Traditional Owners:** Integrating local and Indigenous knowledge into planning and supporting community participation in restoration and adaptation projects.

The recommended approach to climate change adaptation for open space incorporates principles from adaptive management, an iterative process of collecting and using data, assessing vulnerabilities, identifying management options and implementing those, to respond to changing conditions.



A framework for adaptive planning for responses to climate change and other sources of uncertainty. Steps include what is happening, understanding what matters most, what we can do about it, implementing the adaptive plan, and monitoring how well the plan is working.

Figure 3: Adaptive planning framework, Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water, Planning (2022)

Stage 1: What is happening?

In this phase, the plan seeks to understand the context in which the adaptive plan is placed. What are the implications of climate change across open space? Understand the scope and context of climate change exposures relevant to your park or network by:

- Considering current and projected climate trends (e.g. temperature rises, rainfall changes, more frequent extremes).
- Identifying key ecological, cultural and infrastructure assets that are vulnerable to these changes.
- Understanding local human use patterns and values that interact with climate impacts.
- Engaging with Traditional Owners and key stakeholders such as ranger teams, scientists, community groups and partner agencies during this phase.

Stage 2: What matters most?

Vulnerability combines exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity of systems to climate changes. Parks assessments should help prioritise actions by identifying what is most at risk and why.

Key components:

- Identify assets, services and values that might be affected.
- Analyse which climate risks (e.g. fire, drought, floods) pose the greatest threats.
- Consider the adaptive capacity (ability to cope and adjust) of those assets.
- Set objectives and goals.

For sites with coastal retreat risks, biodiversity risks and other ecological changes, consider using RAD or PMR frameworks⁸⁴.



Stage 3: What can we do about it?

In Stage 3, the task is to develop adaptation strategies and actions based on vulnerability assessments to reduce risk and build resilience. In this stage, we look at short-term, medium-term and long-term actions to maximise resilience of:

- Infrastructure;
- Socio-economic development;
- Cultural heritage; and
- Biodiversity.

⁸⁴ Department of Conservation, [Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2025-2028](#)

There are several types of adaptation actions available, such as:

Ecosystem-based adaptation

Actions that work with natural processes (e.g. wetlands restoration to buffer floods) and support biodiversity health.

Infrastructure adaptation

Climate-informed design and maintenance of trails, visitor facilities, campgrounds and park access to ensure safety under heatwaves, storms, fire and flood.

Community and Traditional Owner partnerships

Engage communities and Traditional Owners in co--design of adaptation responses, knowledge sharing and implementation.

Nature-based solutions

Actions that utilise nature in design and management that are known to contribute to climate change adaptation such as prioritising natural grassed areas and trees within landscape plans and budgets.

A summary of open space actions for climate change adaptation is provided below⁸⁵. This list is not exhaustive, and further opportunities may be found in partnership with others.

Table 35: Open space interventions and their climate change mitigation and adaptation roles

Open space intervention type	Climate change mitigation role	Climate change adaptation role
Green networks	• Improved quality of life in urban areas • Quality green networks offer the potential for more sustainable urban settlement patterns • Opportunities to incorporate all of the interventions outlined below in a connected and integrated network – maximising the synergies between interventions • Offer education possibilities due to scale	• Opportunities to incorporate all of the interventions outlined below in a connected and integrated network – maximising the synergies between interventions. This is especially important in terms of integrated habitat management and integrated water management.
Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS)	• Good, multi-functional design can incorporate carbon capture (woodland and wetlands) and provide functional local green	• Water and flood management • Good design, location and management will deliver cooling, outdoor respite

⁸⁵ Adapted from Greenspace Scotland, Greenspaces Climate Change

	spaces (reducing travel distances for recreation) • Careful location in relation to buildings and prevailing winds can assist with cooling	areas (health benefits) and biodiversity benefits
Woodland creation and management	• Carbon capture • Source of biomass fuels • Source of lower-impact materials • Good, multi-functional design will support active travel routes and can impact on the heating and cooling requirements of nearby buildings	• Air quality improvements • Water and flood management • Good design, location and management will deliver cooling, outdoor respite areas (health benefits) and biodiversity benefits
Greenways/linear green spaces/green corridors	• Provide attractive and safe walking and cycling routes connecting homes, workplaces and facilities	• Good design, location and management will deliver biodiversity and water management benefits
Soil conservation	• Carbon retention • Erosion control techniques may produce functional green spaces offering other mitigation benefits (e.g. reducing travel distances to local green space)	• Erosion control techniques may produce functional green spaces offering adaptation benefits
Floodplain restoration	• Will create wetlands with carbon capture benefits • Can produce functional green spaces offering other mitigation benefits (e.g. reducing travel distances to local green space) • Offer education possibilities due to scale of works and the high profile of flooding risks	• Water/flood management • Good design, location and management will deliver cooling, outdoor respite areas (health benefits) and biodiversity benefits
River restoration schemes	• Can create wetlands with carbon capture benefits • Offer education possibilities due to scale of works and the high profile of flooding risks	• Water and flood management • Good design, location and management will deliver cooling, outdoor respite areas (health benefits) and biodiversity benefits

Restoration of peat bogs and other wetlands	• Carbon capture • Can produce functional green spaces offering other mitigation benefits (e.g. reducing travel distances to local green space)	• Water and flood management • Good design, location and management will deliver cooling, outdoor respite areas (health benefits) and biodiversity benefits
Coastal habitat creation and management	• Can produce functional green spaces offering other mitigation benefits (e.g. reducing travel distances to local green space)	• Water and flood management • Good design, location and management will deliver cooling, outdoor respite areas (health benefits) and biodiversity benefits
Local parks, amenity spaces	• Provide settings for woodland and wetland creation with associated mitigation benefits • Offer education possibilities through proximity to people • Can be used to demonstrate positive management practices for climate change mitigation, raising awareness and challenging preconceptions of what a park should be like	• Opportunity to incorporate water management, woodland areas, biodiversity benefits, physical and mental health benefits (offsetting climate impacts), cooling • Outdoor respite areas
Private gardens	• If well designed and located can reduce heating and cooling demands for buildings	• Outdoor respite areas • Good design and management can support biodiversity • Retaining green and permeable gardens will reduce run-off and contribute to cooling
Growing spaces	• Reduce food miles • If well located can also reduce travel miles for growers • May encourage people to stay in urban areas rather than moving 'to get a garden'	• Water and flood management • Cooling • Good design and management can support biodiversity • Physical and mental health benefits (offsetting climate impacts)

Street trees	• Carbon capture • Reduced need for heating and cooling of nearby buildings • Create more attractive streets and can encourage people to spend more time in their neighbourhoods • Offer education opportunities due to their proximity to people (and the potential for controversy) • Street shading will encourage walking and cycling	• Air quality improvements • Water and flood management • Good design, location and management will deliver cooling, outdoor respite areas (health benefits) and biodiversity benefits
Extensive green roofs	• Reduce heating and cooling demands for buildings • Offer education possibilities through proximity to people • Carbon capture	• Water and flood management • Air pollution • Cooling • Supports biodiversity
Intensive green roofs (= roof gardens)	• May reduce heating and cooling demands for buildings • Offer education possibilities through proximity to people • Carbon capture	• Water and flood management • Air pollution • Cooling • Good design and management can support biodiversity
Living walls	• Reduce heating and cooling demands for buildings • Offer education possibilities through proximity to people	• Water and flood management • Air pollution • Cooling • Supports biodiversity
Ground source heat systems/renewables in urban green space	• Low carbon energy opportunities	

Stage 4: Implement the plan

The implementation of the plan requires support and commitment from all stakeholders, champions and those who enable the plan through their own actions.

Within the implementation, ensure:

- make others aware of challenges and opportunities,
- for teams, communicate what actions are being taken as a team and organisation.

A helpful framework for ensuring adoption of your plan is the Knowledge, Values, Rules (KVR) Framework. The framework is a quick and easy way to ensure all those involved have what they need to take action.

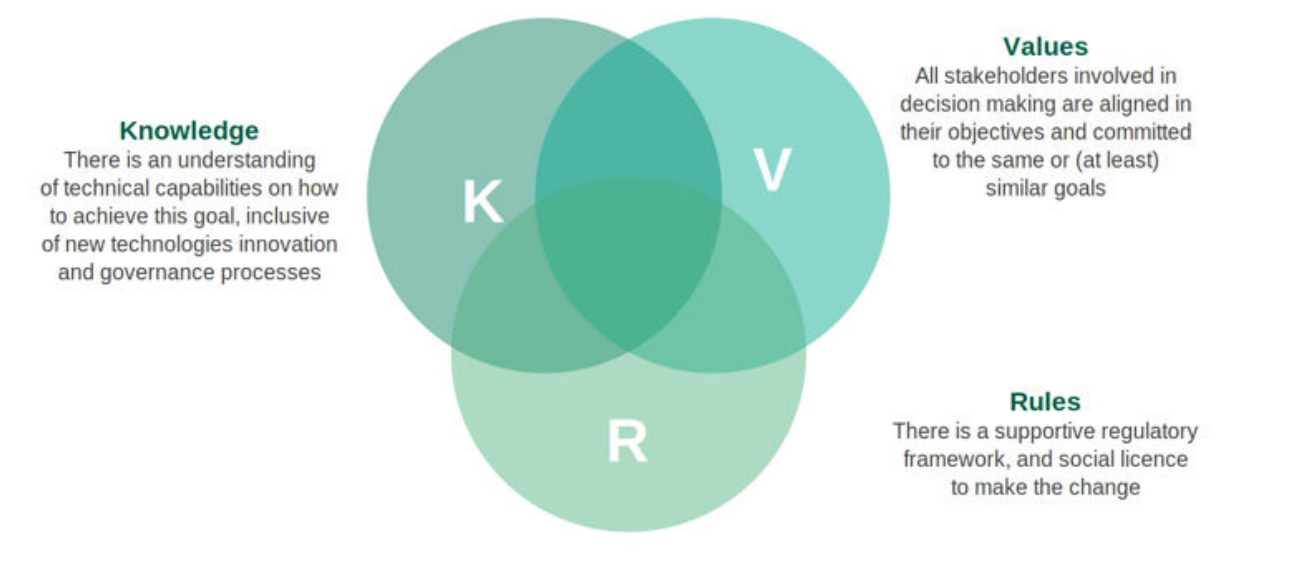


Figure 4: Knowledge, Values, Rules Framework

Stage 5: How well is the plan working?

Monitoring and evaluating the adaptation plan is a key step. Types of monitoring and evaluation tools are covered in MM4 – Monitoring and Evaluation.

A helpful overview of modelling types specifically for climate change adaptation is provided by Engineers Australia.

Actions within this stage include:

- Establishing monitoring to track climate exposures, ecological responses and performance of adaptation actions.
- Using results to adjust strategies – evolving management as understanding improves.
- Embedding learning into regular planning cycles so that future decisions reflect new insights and climate projections.

RELEVANT AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS

The following table is a summary of standards at the time of writing.

Table 36: Relevant Australian Standards for climate change adaptation

Reference	Type
AS 5334-2013	Climate change adaptation for settlements and infrastructure – A risk-based approach.

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information. This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (MM3) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Local Government Climate Change Adaptation Roles and Responsibilities under Victorian legislation: Guidance for local government decision makers	Victoria Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2020)	An in-depth guidance document on roles and responsibilities for local government.	https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0030/490476/Local-Government-Roles-and-Responsibilities-for-Adaptation-under-Victorian-Legislation_Guidance-Brief.pdf
Local Government Roles and Responsibilities Summary	Victoria Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2020)	Provides a helpful 1-page summary for local governments and their relevant climate change roles under the Local Government Act 2020, Climate Change Act 2017, Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, and Planning and Environment Act 1987.	https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/544312/Local-government-roles-and-responsibilities-summary.pdf
Checklist for Local Government Roles and Responsibilities	Victoria Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2020)	Checklist that can support and prompt conversations, particularly for strategic parks planning.	https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/544313/Checklist-local-government-roles-and-responsibilities.pdf
Victoria's Climate Change Strategy	Victoria Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2026)	A cornerstone document for climate change adaptation in Victoria. The strategy is updated every 5 years.	https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/victorias-climate-change-strategy/victorias-climate-change-strategy-2026-30.pdf

Built Environment Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2022-2026	Victoria Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2022)	One of the 7 climate change adaptation plans created by Victorian government. Outlines outcomes and actions for the built environment, which includes sports fields and open space.	https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/strategies-and-initiatives/built-environment-climate-change-adaptation-action-plan
Retrofitting urban parks to deliver climate change actions (2012)	Greenspace Scotland (2012)	Provides open space specific case studies and specific actions that can be taken for: • Buildings and built features • Community gardens • Grassed areas • Lighting • Parking • Paths • Sports fields • Planted beds • Play spaces • Ponds and wetlands • Trees and forests • Rivers and Watercourses • Non-site specific actions	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rWuEtaHSF21rUOxW9hVzAgRVUnq-ZdY7/view
Planning for a Changing Climate Climate-Smart Planning and Management in the National Park Service (2021)	US National Park Service (2021)		https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/662814

Preparing for climate change in South African National Parks (date unknown)	South African National Parks (date unknown)	An in-depth presentation that outlines how open spaces can respond to climate change.	https://www.sanparks.org/wp-content/uploads/scientific-services/ssnm/ssnm2019/thursday/preparing-for-climate-change-in-sanparks.pdf
Climate Change Adaptation in Parks	South African National Parks (2022)	Includes a useful image to consider how vulnerable an open space is to climate change.	https://www.sanparks.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Climate-change-adaptation-in-parks-p21-22.pdf
Natural Environment Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022-2026	Victoria State Government (2022)	Helpful natural lens for park managers who are dealing with multiple ecosystems. Page 28 includes a table of considerations for decision makers.	https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/natural-environment-adaptation-action-plan
Which plant where? website	Which plant where? is a partnership: - Hort Innovation - Macquarie University - Western Sydney - NSW Planning and Environment	A website that includes a plant selection tool for selecting plants for sustainability and climate change adaptation purposes. Website includes helpful research and articles on practical application of plants for issues like drought.	https://www.whichplantwhere.com.au/
Climate Ready Street Tree Trials: a best practice guide	Which plant where?	Overview of setting up a street tree trial for climate change adaptation purposes.	https://cms.whichplantwhere.com.au/app/uploads/2022/02/10.-WPW_Climate-ready-street-tree-trials.pdf

Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan	Department of Conservation (2025)	Overview of adaptation plan including helpful details on the steps to create the plan.	https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/our-work/climate-change/climate-change-adaptation-action-plan-2025-28.pdf
Living Melbourne: Our metropolitan urban forest	Resilient Melbourne, The Nature Conservancy (2019)		https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/australia/2019LivingMelbourne_Strategy_online.pdf

MM4 – MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Public Open Space Handbook – Management Manuals

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

For information on levels of service, targets and other key performance indicator information, see MM5 – Asset Management and MM1 – Maintenance Contracts.

This module covers the benefits of continued monitoring and evaluating open space, and options available.

Why is this important?

Open spaces have the ability to improve health and wellbeing, create resilient cities and positively affect the economy of neighbourhoods, cities and regions.

However, open spaces cannot realise the full extent of these benefits without adequate monitoring against set targets and outcomes.

Local context

There is no specific requirement to monitor and review open spaces. The Local Government Act requires certain monitoring and evaluation activities for councils at an organisation level.

A strong framework for establishing a program-wide monitoring plan is the Monitoring, Evaluation, Report and Improvement (MERI) framework. It is used for climate change adaptation tracking in Victoria, but the logic of the process, number and length of time between reviews is a useful perspective.

BEYOND PLANNING, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

To realise the full benefits of open spaces, they require a large amount of maintenance, renewal and community activation. Open spaces are not ‘set and forget’ devices; they are living spaces with plants, animals, organisms, earth and human-altered materials. Further, they require adapting to community needs and the changing urban environment surrounding them.

Levels of service, targets, key performance indicators and plans provide a systematic structure to ensure open spaces deliver the outcomes they are planned and designed for.

However, these structures are only as beneficial as the extent to which public space owners and managers are willing to monitor and evaluate themselves and their spaces against these targets.

DATA AND SMART TECHNOLOGY

Monitoring and evaluating assets and services has become more cost and effort efficient as new software and technology solutions are developed to reduce human effort and automate processes.

There are a large range of solutions available. The tables in this report list the types of monitoring and evaluation tools that are currently available and in use for open spaces.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OPTIONS

There are a wide variety of monitoring and evaluation types. These can be broadly split into 3 categories:

- On-site
- Off-site
- Automated

On-site

On-site monitoring requires a person or device to collect data, monitor use or evaluate progress or standards. The primary data output from this option is directly from the open space itself.

Off-site

There are several off-site monitoring and evaluation tools. This includes a person or device collecting data who is not on the site, and the data collected is not physically taken from the site.

Automated

These tools do not require human intervention to monitor and evaluate, and automatically provide feedback and data that can be used to respond quickly or review at a later date.

The following table outlines different types and tools for evaluating and monitoring public open spaces.

ON-SITE MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Table 37: On-site monitoring and evaluation options

Research type	What can it monitor?	Technology effort	Human effort
QR code survey	Community feedback and satisfaction of open space	The majority of community survey online tools have a QR code generator, to link users to the survey.	Compared to other on-site options, providing QR codes on site requires only the set-up of the online survey and installing a sign with the QR code on it.

Intercept surveys	In-depth community feedback and satisfaction of open space. Ensures the feedback is from park users rather than non-park users in the community.	Surveys can be conducted with typical survey technology (e.g. Survey Monkey) or specific intercept survey tools (Yardstick survey tool).	High human effort with high quality result. Councils can utilise in-house staff or contractors to conduct surveys.
Stakeholder engagement	In-depth community feedback and satisfaction with specific members of the community such as organisations who regularly use the open space.	Low technology effort.	High human effort. Requires a staff member or consultant to engage with the group, collate findings and prepare a report.
Condition, health and risk assessments	Asset data collection and condition, tree health	Medium technology effort. Employing asset data capture software or other condition report software can significantly increase efficiency for both time and cost.	High human effort. Requires a person with expertise in the subject, and on-site evaluation.
Maintenance audits	Tracking the progress of in-house or contracted-out maintenance services in meeting agreed key performance indicators.	Low technology effort. Using capture and reporting software can significantly increase efficiency	High human effort. High quality audits require on-site assessments and evidence gathering such as notes and photos.

		for both time and cost.	
Maintenance staff checks (in-house or contracted)	Depending on the targets and type of maintenance staff, certain monitoring can occur while they are on site doing another task.	Many maintenance staff have a means for reporting on works completed, quality and issues. If the maintenance staff are already using software or devices to report, adding an evaluation is easier to support and track. Paper trails are likely to be more difficult to report.	Human effort is high and mitigated somewhat by technology support. Any additional task on site takes time. If the monitoring task is disruptive, the quality of the data collection or report may be impacted.
Drone images	Track maintenance or checks in difficult-to-reach environments, people count at a particular time.	High technology effort. Requires owning or hiring a drone, and capability of processing data.	Human effort is high. Drones require a pilot, and depending on the use, the correct permissions.
LiDAR	Number of trees	High technology effort.	Medium human effort. Requires a person to complete the LiDAR work and report on it. Efficiency is created when it is used for bulk monitoring (all street trees).

OFF-SITE MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Table 38: Off-site monitoring and evaluation options

Research type	What can it monitor?	Technology effort	Human effort
Online survey	Community satisfaction, demand and use. Generally, this is a targeted survey to an area or uses a broad community engagement method.	There are a number of online survey tools including free and paid versions.	The human effort is higher than the technology effort, as developing a survey that produces useful insights and has a high response rate takes time.
Telephone survey	Community satisfaction and feedback.	Low technology effort.	Generally, a contracting company is used for telephone surveys.
Mobile phone data* *Mobile data can be unethically gathered and is not always seen as an acceptable solution by communities.	Provides a count of participations and users at open spaces. Can look at location of users on an open space, as well as long time periods (weekly or monthly use).	High technology effort. This option relies on the participant using technology themselves. Data can be provided by an independent company or a large data owner (e.g. Strava). This option does not require open space staff to collect data, but to evaluate and report on it.	Low human effort compared to other options.
Geospatial Informational Systems (GIS) including satellite data (MODIS, Landsat)	Useful to report on items like: • Number of new assets • Oldest assets	High technology effort. It relies on GIS software to deliver the outcome. There	Medium human effort.

	- Assets in the worst condition - Number of hectares of open space owned	are several different providers.	GIS can provide a large amount of data to be used. Requires a capable staff member or consultant to interpret and report on the data, even if dashboards are created.
Benchmarking	As a result of high-quality asset data collection, benchmarking can be undertaken for provision (number of hectares per 1000 people) and services. Benchmarking can be completed and reported on for your organisation only, or against other organisations.	High technology effort. Requires utilising online software or completing benchmarking activity by a staff member through online research.	High human effort. Cost and effort efficiency increases with the use of external software, questionnaires and programs.
National and regional participation reports	Track participation rate changes in regions over time.	Low technology effort. Participation information is typically provided in easy-to-read reports, dashboards or spreadsheets.	Low human effort. National and regional organisations typically undertake the analysis and report it.
Site booking data	Booking data can indicate site supply, demand and community need.	Technology effort depends on the method chosen for booking open spaces.	High human effort that can be supported by booking software or technology.

		Software can be highly sophisticated or can be a well-maintained spreadsheet. Improving site booking data methods with technology can assist with higher quality reports.	
Project management systems	Tracking action progress from open space plans. Tracking budget performance.	Project management software is widely used in municipalities.	High human effort, unless project management is highly coordinated within the organisation, or a staff member is assigned this task specifically.

AUTOMATED MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Table 39: Automated monitoring and evaluation options

Monitoring Types	What can it monitor?	Technology effort	Human effort
Facility sensors	Usage of benches, sports reserves and playgrounds. Status of waste bins.	There are many options for sensors – laser, infrared, video data, Bluetooth.	Automated monitoring, once in place, delivers a large amount of data.
Environment sensors	Measures temperature, humidity, noise, soil moisture, grass, carbon dioxide.		Having data available is only one piece of the puzzle.
Activity sensors	Number of cyclists, trail walkers or pedestrians, car parking counts.		The amount of human effort depends on the reporting functions for the sensors, the amount of data captured and the experience and capability of those reporting on it.

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information. This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (MM4) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
Monitoring, Evaluation Reporting, and Improvement (MERI)	Australian Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (2025)	Provides a general overview of the MERI framework.	https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/land/natural-heritage-trust/monitoring-reporting/meri
Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting & Improvement Framework for Climate Change Adaptation in Victoria	Australian Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (2018)	Provides detail on number of reviews, timeframes, and questions to ask through the process of establishing a MERI framework.	https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0033/328884/MERI-Framework-for-climate-change-adaptation-in-Victoria.pdf
A guide to monitoring and evaluation for your Indigenous Protected Area	Australian Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water	Provides advice on how to use the monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) system in Indigenous Protected Areas.	https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/toolkit-ipa-managers-guide-monitoring-evaluation.pdf
Sensors in the City (web page)	City of Melbourne	Useful example of public communication about use of sensors in public spaces.	https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/sensors-city
Data in Parks	Rethinking Parks, Nesta.	Research project on utilising innovative technology to gather community feedback in parks.	https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Data_in_parks.pdf

WISEParks Project Report	ReThinking Parks, Nesta (2018)	Research project on technology use of sensors for tracking in parks. Provides a useful set of lessons and recommendations.	https://www.horizon.a.c.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/WiseParks-Final-Report.pdf
Urban Greening: Monitoring and Evaluation Factsheet	Clean Air and Urban Landscapes Hub (2019)	Provides useful table with green infrastructure elements and indicators which can be measured.	https://nespurban.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Urban-Greening-Monitoring-and-Evaluation-Factsheet.pdf
The Greenspace Leap Framework	Greenspace Scotland (2005)	While an older document, provides a large number of measures and indicators that can be used in a monitoring and evaluation plan.	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t2TY0FnVRsmSv5vHUZaJLMxvaFDlDOS7/view

MM5 – ASSET MANAGEMENT

Public Open Space Handbook – Management Manuals

Edition 1 – September 2026

Introduction

Asset management plans are a means for documenting the management, financial, engineering and technical practices to ensure that the level of service required by the community is provided at the lowest lifecycle cost.

This module provides a brief overview of open space asset management plan guidance.

Asset management planning is a specialist subject. Consider further research, training or contracted support for developing asset management plans.

Why is this important?

Quality asset management improves reliability and longevity of assets, for the benefits of those who use them. Asset management answers the questions related to cost, risk and performance.

Open space asset management is critical to respond to limited resources, growing populations and changing recreation activities and open space use.

Local Government Victoria noted in their Asset Plan Guidance (2022) that there is current underspending in the majority of open space assets.

Local context

The Local Government Act (2020) Regulations require councils to record their compliance with section 92 of the Act by completing the Governance and Management Checklist.

Victorian local governments own and manage assets valued at over \$1.2 billion⁸⁶, which includes open space and community assets. Parks and footpaths were valued at \$3.8 billion.

The Victorian audit of local government asset management found that councils had low confidence that they had accurate and complete data for parks and recreation assets.⁸⁷

WHAT IS ASSET MANAGEMENT?

Asset management is the systematic approach to managing an organisation's assets, carried out over an asset's whole lifecycle, to realise full value from assets in delivering their service delivery objectives. Realisation of value will normally involve a balance of costs, risks, opportunities and performance benefits.⁸⁸

The typical lifecycle of an asset follows a process of plan, acquire, use and dispose.⁸⁹ A full set of tasks starts with requirements and definitions, and finishes at the disposal of the asset (Figure 5).

⁸⁶ Asset Plan Guidance, Local Government Victoria (2022)

⁸⁷ Local Government Assets, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)

⁸⁸ International Standards Organisation – ISO55000

⁸⁹ Managing Infrastructure Assets for Sustainable

Development, United Nations (2021)



Figure 5: Asset management lifecycle, IPWEA Parks Management Practice Note 10.2 (2017)

OBJECTIVE OF ASSET MANAGEMENT

The objective of asset management is 'To provide the desired level of service in the most cost-effective manner through the management of asset for present and future customers'.

BENEFITS OF HIGH-QUALITY ASSET MANAGEMENT

The benefits of managing assets well include:

- Enhanced financial performance through optimised asset management and reduced costs;
- Improved risk management related to owning and operating assets;
- Increased efficiency and effectiveness in meeting regulatory and statutory requirements;
- and
- Strengthened reputation through consistent and improved services and products.

TYPES OF OPEN SPACE ASSETS

Councils should maintain a comprehensive database of relevant data on open space and recreation facilities. This includes classifications, location (mapped via GIS), condition, replacement costs and more.

There are a wide range of assets included within open space management plans. Open spaces contain a variety of assets and can include several owners and custodians within one space. Assets that often fall within the open space and recreation ownership or management include:

- Land improvements,
- Passive reserves areas,
- Sports grounds,
- Open space,
- Play spaces,
- Paths,
- Utilities,
- Artwork,
- Irrigation,
- Waste bins,
- Lighting,
- Structures,
- Drinking fountains,
- Park furniture including shade and BBQs, and
- Natural areas.

ABOUT ASSET MANAGEMENT PLANS

The purpose of an asset management plan (AMP) is:

- To document your asset knowledge and processes,
- To identify what you don't know,
- To develop an asset management improvement plan,
- To demonstrate sustainable management practices and good stewardship,
- To meet compliance requirements, and
- To provide budget requirements for the long-term financial plan.

The AMP is a 'one-stop shop' document that provides relevant information about your parks and their management. It should collect all information about your services and assets and business practice into one place.

KEY ELEMENTS OF OPEN SPACE ASSET MANAGEMENT PLANS

Knowledge of your assets: a sound knowledge of the land, services managed and assets that deliver these services.

Defined level of service: provide a defined level of service and monitoring performance.

Understand demand: manage the impact of growth through measuring demand to justify infrastructure investment.

Understand asset lifecycle: take a lifecycle approach to developing cost-effective management strategies for the long term that meet the defined level of service.

Risk management: create a risk management plan to identify, assess and appropriately control risks.

Financial planning: have a long-term financial plan which identifies required expenditure and how it will be funded.

Renewal planning: ensure the asset management plan considers adequate renewal of assets.

Monitoring and evaluation: continuously improve asset management practices by documenting and monitoring processes and procedures.

KEY ASSET MANAGEMENT TASKS

Holistic asset management includes many routine tasks, plan writing and asset capture. These include:

- Asset inventories
- Condition assessment
- Performance assessment
- Levels of service
- Service delivery standard
- Asset maintenance plan documentation
- Accurate valuation
- Asset renewal program
- Improvement plan
- Asset management plan
- Asset management improvement plan

ADVANCES IN ASSET MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY

New software, tools, sensors and solutions are becoming available each year. These solutions provide the opportunity to make administrative and operational tasks more efficient for both time and cost. Efficiency can be gained across many forms of technologies, such as solar panels, energy-efficient lighting and remote locking/access control to facilities.

AI is transforming asset data capture by shifting from manual, error-prone data entry to automated, high-fidelity digital workflows. This process uses a combination of computer vision, machine learning and natural language processing to identify, categorise and record physical and digital assets.

The table below outlines several technological changes and their respective impact on service delivery⁹⁰. These are particularly useful for asset management planning discussions.

Table 40: Technological changes and their effect on service delivery

Technological change	Effect on service delivery
Advanced materials	The use of advanced, durable materials in the construction and maintenance of open space and pathway assets can extend asset life, reduce maintenance costs and improve safety. For example, materials with higher resistance to wear, weather and vandalism can lower long-term maintenance costs and enhance the safety and durability of open space and pathway assets. This includes the use of permeable pavements that mitigate stormwater runoff or UV-resistant coatings that prolong the life of signage and playground equipment.
Smart infrastructure	Implementing smart technologies, such as sensors for real-time monitoring, can enhance the management and maintenance of open space and pathway assets by providing data-driven insights. For example, installing sensors in pathways can track usage patterns, detect damages (such as cracks or subsidence) and monitor environmental conditions (e.g. temperature, humidity). This data can be used to optimise maintenance schedules, enhance user safety and improve the overall management of assets. Additionally, bins that are equipped with sensors can notify waste management services when they are full, ensuring timely collection and reducing litter in public spaces. These bins can also optimise waste collection routes, leading to cost savings and reduced environmental impact.
Geospatial information systems (GIS)	GIS technology supports precise asset management by providing detailed visualisations of asset locations, conditions and usage patterns. It enables councils to prioritise maintenance and upgrades based on real-time data, identify high-demand or high-risk areas and plan future expansions. GIS also facilitates better public communication by providing

⁹⁰ Adapted from Open Space Pathway Asset Management Plan, Bass Coast Shire Council (2024)

Technological change	Effect on service delivery
	accessible maps and information about available open space and pathway assets and allows for the integration of various data sets for informed decision-making.
Drones and remote sensing	Drones and remote sensing technologies offer efficient and accurate inspection of open spaces and pathway assets, especially in hard-to-reach areas. Drones equipped with high-resolution cameras can capture detailed imagery and topographical data, enabling early detection of issues such as erosion, vegetation overgrowth or structural damage. This reduces the need for manual inspections, saving time and resources, while minimising safety risks. The data collected supports predictive maintenance and long-term planning.
Automated maintenance systems	Automated maintenance systems, such as robotic lawnmowers or smart irrigation systems, streamline routine maintenance tasks and ensure consistent service levels. These systems can be programmed to operate during off-peak hours, reducing public space disruptions and optimising resource use. Automated systems also allow for precise maintenance, such as adjusting water delivery based on soil moisture levels, improving asset health and longevity.
Sustainable practices	Adopting sustainable construction, Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) and maintenance practices, such as using recycled materials or energy-efficient lighting, can reduce the environmental footprint of asset management activities and promote long-term sustainability.
Expansion of social media and crowd sourcing	Greater opportunities to inform and obtain feedback from the community.
New innovative technology for infrastructure condition and risk assessment	Enhanced transport asset condition and risk assessments, improved information and decision making, streamline defect and repair processes, reduce inspection times and support safer, more efficient network management.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Table 41: Relevant legislation for asset management

Standard Reference	Title
Local Government Act 1999	Sets out role, purpose, responsibilities and powers of local governments including the preparation of a LTFP supported by asset management plans for sustainable service delivery.
Australian Accounting Standards	Standards applied in preparing financial statements, relating to the valuation, revaluation and depreciation of open space assets.
Australian Standards	Assets must be constructed, inspected and perform to meet standards e.g. sportsground lighting lux levels meet standards for training and competition.
Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988	An Act to provide for the protection and preservation of the Aboriginal heritage; to repeal the Aboriginal and Historic Relics Preservation Act 1965 and the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1979; and for other purposes.
Crown Lands Act 1989 and Crown Land Regulation 2006	Development of land must be for multiple uses, services provided by assets are specified.
Disability Discrimination Act 1992	To ensure persons with disabilities have access to the building and facilities.
Environment Protection Act 1993	An Act to provide the protection of the environment; to establish the Environment Protection Authority and define its functions and powers; and for other purposes. Consideration of this act should be undertaken for the provision, development or management of transport assets.
Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979	Enables Councils to levy developers for a contribution towards providing community infrastructure. Defines when a Development Application for asset projects is required and permitted uses of land to protect the environment and amenity.

National Asset Management Framework Legislation 2010	Levels of service must be affordable over the long term. AMPs should demonstrate this sustainability.
Planning Development and Infrastructure Act 2016	An Act that includes the Planning and Design Code that regulates development in the State; to regulate the use and management of land and buildings, and the design and construction of buildings; to make provision for the maintenance and conservation of land and buildings where appropriate; and for other purposes.
Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 No 156	Protection, restoration and enhancement of the quality of the environment. Re-use, recover or recycle materials and prevent pollution.
Work Health & Safety Act 2012	Provide a safe work environment for workers on the site.

AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS

The following standards are relevant to open space and recreation asset management.

Table 42: Australian Standards relevant to open space asset management

Standard Reference	Title
AS/NZS 3000:2018	Electrical installations (Wiring Rules) (includes Amendment 3:2023)
AS/NZS 1158.6:2015	Lighting for roads and public spaces – Luminaires
AS/NZS 4282:2023	Control of the obtrusive effects of outdoor lighting
AS 2560.1:2018	Sports lighting – General principles
AS/NZS 3760:2022	In-service safety inspection and testing of electrical equipment

AS 4685 (Parts 1–6):2021	Playground equipment and surfacing (Supersedes AS 4486 & AS 4685:2004)
AS 4422:2016	Playground surfacing – Specifications, requirements and test method
AS 4373:2007	Pruning of amenity trees
AS 2507:1998	The storage and handling of agricultural and veterinary chemicals
AS/NZS 60335.2.78:2022	Household and similar electrical appliances – Safety – Particular requirements for outdoor barbecues (Supersedes 2019 edition)
AS/NZS 2658:2022	LP Gas – Portable and mobile appliances

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents provide further guidance and useful information. This page can be refreshed to reflect new guidance as required.

Relevant Documents Table (MM5) Publish Date: 25 June 2026

Title	Published By / Journal	Overview / Topic	Link
ISO 55000:2024 Asset management — Vocabulary, overview and principles	International Standards Organisation	Provides key guidance on developing a proactive asset management system in line with the ISO 55000:2024 standard.	https://www.iso.org/standard/83053.html
Parks Management: Renewal planning, Valuation, and Asset Management Plans (Practice Note 10.2)	Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (2017)	Provides in-depth guidance document on asset plans specific to open space and parks assets.	https://www.ipwea.org/resourcesnew/bookshop/pn10-2
Parks Management: Levels of Service, (Practice Note 10.3)	Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (2017)	A 50-page detailed guidance document on developing open space levels of service across a broad range of open space assets.	https://www.ipwea.org/aotearoa/ipweacomunities/parksandfacilities
Local Government Asset Management Best Practice Guide (2015)	Local Government Victoria (2015)	A best practice guide that aligns with IPWEA National Asset Management Strategy (NAMS) and ISO 55000.	https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/165035/Local-Government-Asset-Management-Better-Practice-Guide.pdf
International Infrastructure Management Manual	Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (2020)	An updated manual in 2020 to reflect the updated ISO 55000 standards.	https://www.ipwea.org/resourcesnew/bookshop/iimm
Australian Infrastructure Financial	Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (2015)	This document provides the practical “how to” tools for asset and financial management practitioners	https://www.ipwea.org/resourcesnew/bookshop/aifmm

Management Manual		to report and manage infrastructure assets in a nationally consistent way, complying with Australian Accounting Standards.	
IMM Supplement 2020: Meeting ISO 55001 Requirements for Asset Management	Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (2020)	This guidance is covers what's required and how to get there through three modules on asset management.	https://www.ipwea.org/resourcesnew/bookshop/iimm-supplement-2020
NAMS+ A Toolkit for Asset Management Planning	Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia	This toolkit is an online set of tools and information to help guide the Asset Managing Planning process.	https://www.ipwea.org/resourcesnew/namsplus
Asset Plan Guidance	Local Government Victoria (2022)	The guide provides foundational asset planning information and advice rather than best practice. Provides useful Victoria specific information.	https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0030/183378/Asset-Plan-Guidance-2022-Local-Government-Victoria-Rev1.pdf
Managing Infrastructure Assets for Sustainable Development: A Handbook for Local and National Governments	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021)	Provides practical guidance to local and national governments on managing all infrastructure types. Open space is included under natural infrastructure.	https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021-03_manual_iamh_eng_jun2021.pdf
ISO 55000:2024 Asset management — Vocabulary, overview and principles	International Standards Organisation (2024)	Provides key guidance on developing a proactive asset management system in line with the ISO 55000:2024 standard.	https://www.iso.org/standard/83053.html
Adopting a risk-based approach to AMAF compliance assurance and maturity assessments	Victoria Department of Treasury and Finance	This Guidance Note assists Victorian public sector agencies to implement asset management strategies and undertake assurance activities, which consider the size, criticality	https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/asset-management-accountability-framework

		and service delivery objectives of assets held.	
Open Space and Pathway Asset Management Plan 2024 - 2028	Bass Coast Shire Council (2024)	An example of a Victoria local government asset management plan.	https://hdp-au-prod-app-bass-engage-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/5517/2895/6094/Bass_Coast_Shire_Council_Open_Space_and_Pathway_Asset_Management_Plan_2024-28.pdf
Getting better use from infrastructure: How Victoria can improve its asset management	Infrastructure Victoria (2025)	Provides information on asset management best practice. However, the report does not address local government owned and managed infrastructure.	https://assets.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/assets/Getting-better-use-from-infrastructure.pdf

CONTACT

Camille Redfern

Regional Executive Officer

victas@parksleisure.com.au

www.parksleisure.com.au | [@plavictas](https://twitter.com/plavictas)

