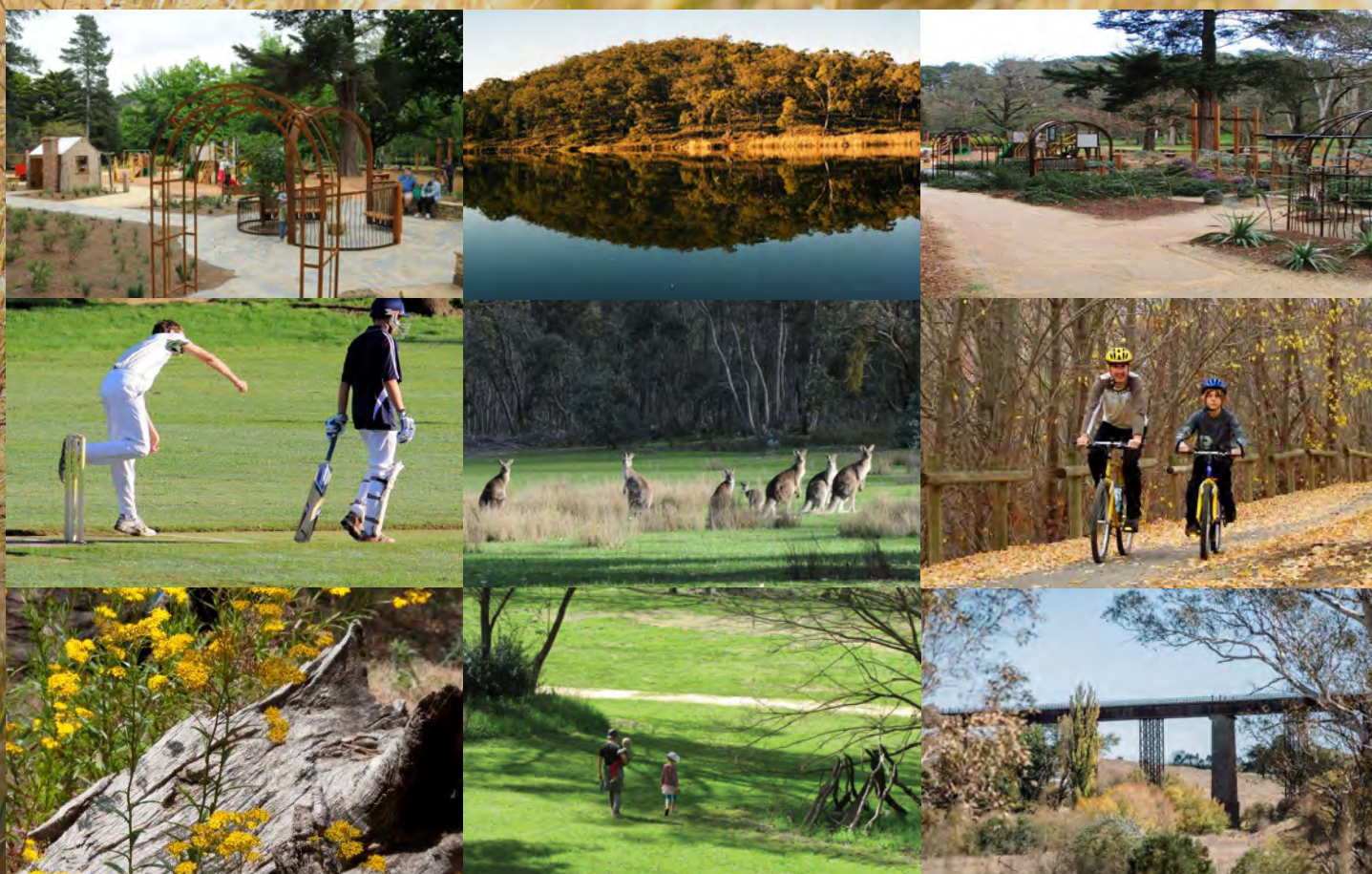




Public Open Space Strategy

Final Report

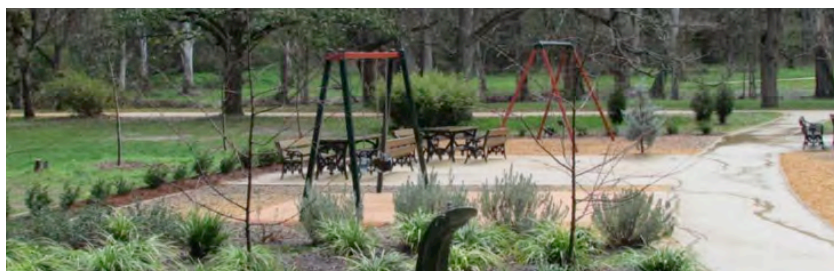


May 2016

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1.0 Introduction



Public open space is of central importance to the wellbeing of towns and their communities. Provision of quality public open space provide environmental, social and economic benefits to the surrounding communities.

Public open space provides for the recreational pursuits of residents, provide destinations for social interaction, adds character to urban areas and can improve the aesthetic value of streetscapes. Public open space can also be used to help protect and preserve biodiversity values, enhance environmental outcomes and provide landscaped areas for shade and relief from heat effects.

Mount Alexander Shire has a number of historic townships that have been developed around a network of regional waterways, creeks and forested areas which provide a significant range of open space and natural areas to accommodate the community's needs.

While this relative abundance of open space provides significant opportunities for a range of formal and informal recreation activities and environmental outcomes, Council lacks an overarching strategic document to guide future management priorities and directions, including open space contributions. It is recognised that Council has a number of site specific plans and strategies, however these generally focus on specific sites or asset types, therefore the aim of the Open Space Strategy is to establish a strategic vision and policy directions to guide the future planning, provision and

management of open space across the entire municipality over the next 15 years (2016-2031).

For the purposes of this strategy open space has been defined as *"publicly accessible land that is set aside for recreation, leisure, sport, conservation and/or associated environmental and urban design functions."*

Whilst the Open Space Strategy primarily relates to Council owned or managed public open space reserves, it is acknowledged that the Shire is well serviced by a range of State Parks. This includes large areas of land set aside for protection of natural, resource use and the conservation of historic features. While this land offers a range of passive and active recreation opportunities and supports a significant trail network, the responsibility for the land is predominantly that of State Government (i.e. the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP) and/or Parks Victoria (PV). These reserves contribute to the overall suite of open space available to the community however their management is not included in the scope of this plan.

1.1 Why is open space important?

Providing quality public open space has many benefits. Open spaces facilitate increased levels of participation in physical activity, social gathering and active recreation, each of which is strongly aligned to health and wellbeing benefits. Open spaces contribute to the character and amenity of townships, increase liveability and support environmental outcomes. These include biodiversity and

natural area protection, enhance ecological corridors and systems, support effective waterway management, contribute to air quality and management of greenhouse gas impacts, provide habitat - as well as supporting economic development opportunities and tourism activity.

Open spaces are highly valued for their contribution to heritage protection and cultural expression throughout the Shire.

These benefits were acknowledged in a recent report by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC)¹ which identified that public open space contributes to:

- Physical health - by providing opportunities for physical activity and children's play in parks, sportsgrounds, playgrounds and along walking and cycling paths.
- Mental health - by providing opportunities to undertake informal activities such as relaxing and being in natural environments.
- Social capital and community connections - by providing opportunities for group gatherings (such as picnics and barbecues), socialising and meeting new people and integrating new community members in parks, playgrounds and sports venues.
- Stimulated and sustainable economies - by providing a venue for a variety of community, tourism and commercial activities, which in turn generate employment.
- Environmentally sustainable urban areas - through the protection of nature values in parks, provision of ecosystem services and reduction in the urban heat island effect.
- Artistic expression and cultural diversity through the provision of venues for community, sporting and cultural events and festivals in city squares and promenades, parks and sportsgrounds, which contribute to the diversity and liveliness of urban areas.

¹Investigation into the provision of public land in metropolitan Melbourne, Final Report August 2011, VEAC.

2.0 Current Situation

2.1 Existing Provision

Mount Alexander Shire has significant provision of open space through existing Council assets and a network of regional parks.

Stakeholder engagement has identified the importance of local parks, walking trails and broader regional bushland assets for the Shire. These assets are strongly aligned to participation trends, particularly walking and mountain bike cycling.

The Shire has approximately 858.42 hectares (ha) of Council owned or managed public open space spread across 233 individual sites², which equates to approximately 46.68 hectares per 1,000 people (based on the Shire population of 18,388 people, 2015). This is a high level of provision which is further enhanced by close access to a number of State and Regional Parks. Direct comparisons with other municipalities are not readily available, however as an example, metropolitan Melbourne Council's average between 5ha - 10ha of public open space per 1,000 people³; Latrobe City Council reported 33.17ha, Warrnambool City Council 32.5ha and East Gippsland Shire 79.52ha per 1,000 people⁴.

There is a good balance of open space sites in all categories and types across the Shire, however there is a relatively high number and proportion of undeveloped open space reserves (i.e. 42 sites or 18% of total sites). These sites account for only 5.5% of the total open space land available. This suggests that the majority are small and have limited public use or appeal. Council is also responsible for a number of former landfill sites and disused gravel reserves..

This points to an opportunity for Council to review these existing land holdings in order to determine priorities for possible enhancement or potential rationalisation if assessed as surplus to requirements.

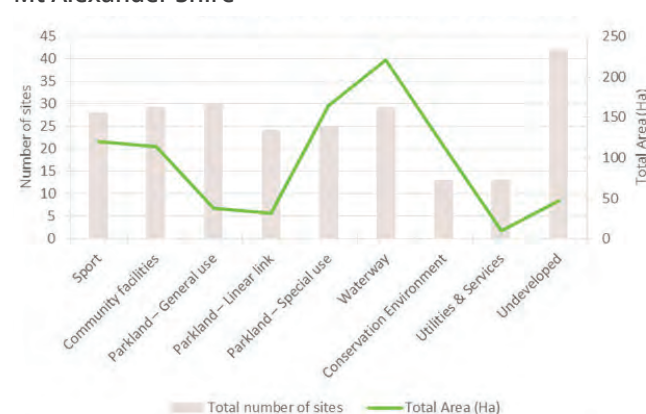
There are 29 waterway open spaces sites. These account for the largest proportion of total hectares (i.e. approximately 25.7% or 220.31 ha). Whilst this reflects the geography of the area, specifically Campbells Creek, Forest Creek and Barkers Creek which wind their way through the townships, it also highlights the scale of the challenge facing Council to sustainably manage these resources.

When combined with conservation & environment open space (13.3% of total open space land area), these two categories account for approximately 39% of all open space land managed by Council. Sport sites account for around 12% of all sites (28 individual sites) and 14% of total land area (120.14 ha).

Council will need to continue to balance demands for investment in formal sport, informal recreation, conservation and environmental outcomes in the management of open space.

These results are reflected visually in Figure 1, which highlights a balance in the total number of sites across all categories, however a dominance in land area by waterway open space categories. Waterway open spaces account for around 12.4% of total open space sites, however these contribute the largest proportion of total hectares (i.e. approximately 25.7% or 220.31 ha). Whilst this reflects the geography of the area, specifically Campbells Creek, Forest Creek and Barkers Creek which wind their way through the townships, it also highlights the scale of the challenge facing Council to sustainably manage these resources.

Figure 1 - Classification by sites numbers and hectares - Mt Alexander Shire



²NB: A further 10 sites remain Unclassified, totalling 5.13ha.

³Investigation into the provision of public land in metropolitan Melbourne, Final Report August 2011, Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC).

⁴Latrobe City Council Open Space Strategy, 2013, Warrnambool City Council Open Space Strategy, 2014, East Gippsland Shire Open Space Strategy (Draft 2015).

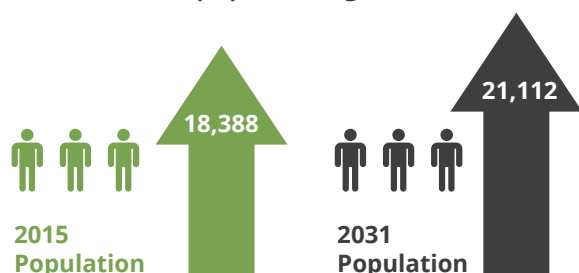


2.2 Population and Participation Changes

The size, scale and rate of population change is one of the key factors influencing the current and future demand for open space in Mount Alexander Shire.

Over the last decade the Shire has achieved a relatively low level of sustained growth, averaging around 0.5% per annum. The current estimated resident population (ERP) of the Shire is 18,388. Forecast population growth predicts the population will grow by around 162 people per year for the next 20 years. It is expected that by 2031, the total population of the Shire will be 21,112 people. Growth of this magnitude (i.e. approximately 3,000 people across the whole Shire over the next 15 years) is not expected to significantly increase demand for new/additional open space, therefore, aside from ensuring adequate accessibility to quality local open space (i.e. walkability objectives and connections), the focus should be on improving what we already have in order to enhance its capacity, amenity and appeal.

Shire forecast population growth



Castlemaine and Harcourt are projected to support the highest level of residential development activity until 2040.

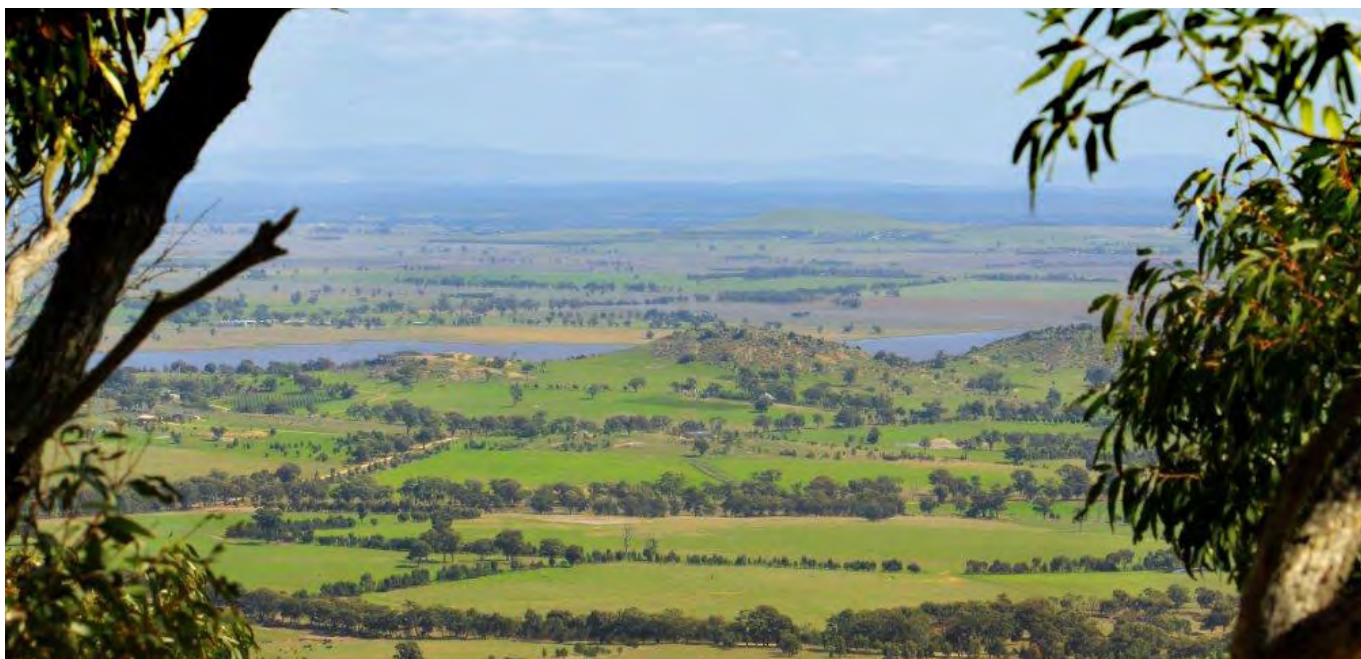
The profile of Shire residents across all areas is ageing, particularly increasing in the 50-74 year age groups.

Whilst ageing populations tend to have lower rates of participation in traditional sports (e.g. football, cricket, netball) this does not diminish the importance of continuing to support traditional sports clubs and groups in their use of open space, however it reinforces the challenge for Council in striking an appropriate balance in ensuring the open space and physical activity needs of an ageing population are considered in future planning and provision.

Local sport and physical activity participation trends reflect the ageing profile of the community and appear consistent with broader national trends which suggest an increase in the popularity of informal recreation activities, particularly walking, jogging, cycling and fitness-related activities.

The nature of our use of open space is changing (less formal, more self-directed), therefore it will be important for future provision, management and design of open spaces to respond and support these changes.





2.3 Open Space Management

Many of the Shire's open space reserves are recognised for the role that they play in protecting and enhancing native vegetation and contribution to the overall character of townships/settlements.

Improved vegetation management (e.g. tree maintenance, weed control, revegetation, etc.) has been identified as a common customer service request. In addition, Council plays a role in actively managing significant native vegetation corridors throughout the Shire and faces significant resource challenges to be able to effectively manage the large scope of urban waterway open space, particularly revegetation and land care initiatives.

With many open spaces in close proximity or adjacent to residential and commercial developments, it is important that the fire prevention is incorporated into vegetation management planning.

Demand for organised sport opportunities for children and young adults, both male and female, will remain significant and growing, in particular football, cricket, netball, soccer and basketball. Council's Investing in Sport Strategy (2011), reserve master plans and other site specific plans guide future resource allocation for sport and recreation facilities across the Shire.

Informal recreation participation accounts for the largest proportion of overall physical activity by the community, therefore reinforcing the importance of quality walking paths, trails and accessible open space facilities and programs. The way these facilities look, function and feel, including signage, way finding, accessibility and attractiveness, all impact on the appeal and usability of open spaces.

There are opportunities to improve open space outcomes, including developer contributions, via Council's Planning Scheme. The current Planning Scheme is largely silent in terms of open space provisions and requirements.

Instruments such as specifying a minimum amount of open space via Clause 52.01 provide a way for Council to support the growth and development of the open space network and a basis to effectively and proactively negotiate with developers.

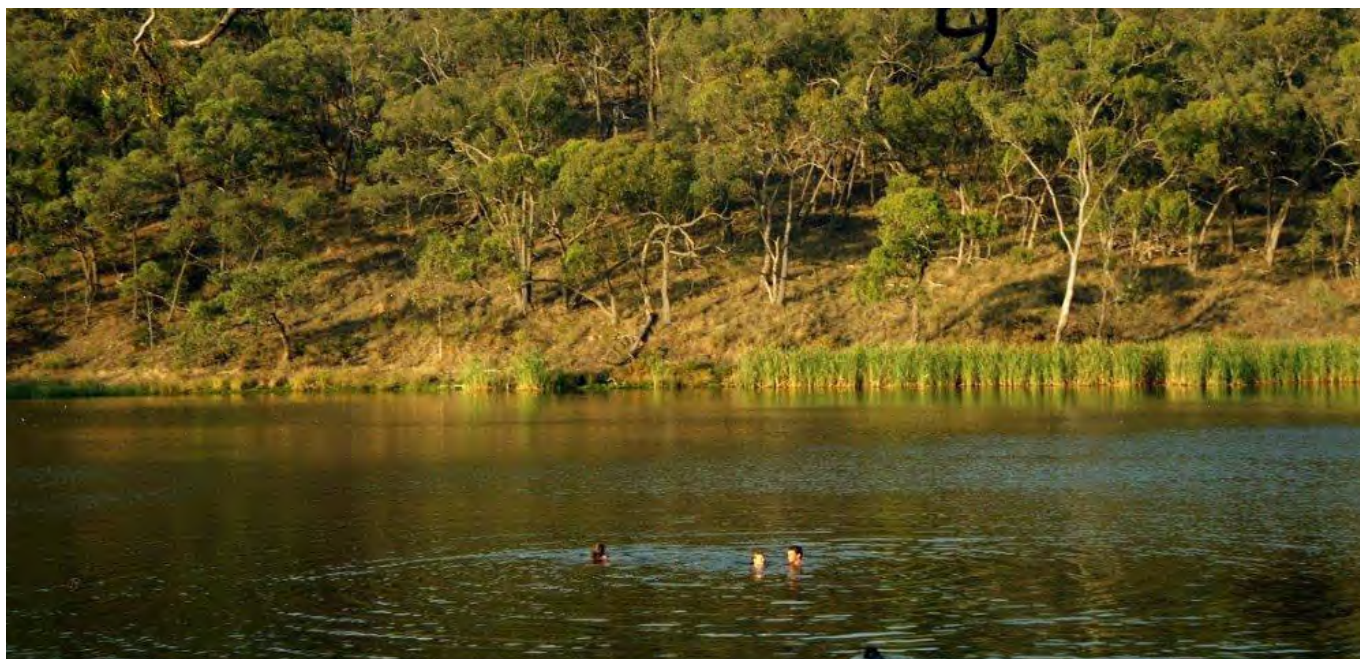
Historically there has been inconsistency in the level of open space contributions sought from developers which may have failed to maximise possible contribution opportunities for Council. There is also limited guidance to inform acceptable land contributions which has led to instances where the land provided may not be fit for purpose. Furthermore, there is limited guidance within Council regarding the use and allocation of revenue held in the open space reserve fund to help support open space improvements, development or enhancement.

Appendix 1 Open Space Policy & Guidelines is provided to address these important issues.

There are other planning tools that can be used to guide planning and development of future high-growth residential areas, including Precinct Structure Plans (PSP) or Developer Contribution Plans (DCP), however the cost to develop these can be significant (i.e. staff time, resourcing and direct costs) and likely to be beyond the financial capacity of Mount Alexander Shire alone, therefore funding partnerships with State Government and/or developers will be required if site/township specific PSP's/DCP's are to be pursued.

Finally, there may be a need to develop additional policies to address emerging issues as they arise. One such example is increasing demand for commercial uses and activities within existing open space reserves (e.g. food vendors, mobile cafés, events, personal trainers, etc.).

It is therefore recommended that Council document a policy to guide the use and management of commercial activities in parks and reserves that aligns with the overarching vision and principles outlined in this report. Another priority is the establishment of a policy that guides Council's role in effective vegetation management and bushfire preparedness.



2.4 Consultation Messages

Consultation activities undertaken to date have included community drop-in sessions, stakeholder interviews, surveys and review of consultation outcomes from other recently completed Council planning projects.

Overall, the engagement activities supported the view that there is generally an adequate supply of open space across the Shire, and that the focus should be on improving what we already have rather than developing new open space reserves. The noted exception to this being where new open space may be required to service emerging residential growth areas (i.e. local open space in Castlemaine, Harcourt and Maldon) and/or to improve open space linkages or connections.

The community places a high value and importance on local parks, walking trails and the broader regional bushland assets across the Shire. These assets are strongly aligned to participation trends and enhance the character of individual communities.

There is a recognised need for Council to establish an appropriate balance in the management of open space in order to support a broad range of community needs including formal sports, informal recreation and positive environmental outcomes.

There is a desire to improve effective open space linkages and connections, including links to/from key destinations, open space reserves, bushland/natural areas and greater use of waterway corridors for conservation, environmental outcomes and linear paths/trails.

Council has generally rated well in terms of the maintenance/standard/quality of existing parks and reserves across the Shire however, vegetation management and conservation, particularly weed control, were seen as areas that could be improved.

Effective asset maintenance and development, primarily refurbishment, renewal, rationalisation and consolidation of existing assets, buildings and sports pavilions is recognised as an ongoing challenge.



3.0 Open Space Vision & Principles

The following section is drawn from the research and consultation results and captures the community and stakeholder aspirations for open space planning, provision and management in Mount Alexander Shire.

3.1 Open Space Vision

The following strategic vision encapsulates the community and stakeholder aspirations for open space planning, provision and management in Mount Alexander Shire:

Mount Alexander Shire has a diverse range of attractive, appealing and sustainable public open spaces that protect and enhance natural environments, support a range of physical activity participation opportunities and enhance the character of individual townships or neighbourhoods in which they exist.

3.2 Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles have been developed to support the open space vision and to underpin Council's involvement in open space planning, provision and management.

Access and Connectivity:

- Council recognises that all residents should have access to appropriate open space reserves regardless of their socio-economic status, ethnicity, age, gender, ability or geographic location.
- A high level of connectivity to/from and within open space reserves will be encouraged in order to enhance overall walkability of townships and settlements and to support uptake of active transport options and informal physical activity participation (i.e. walking and cycling).

Diversity and Choice:

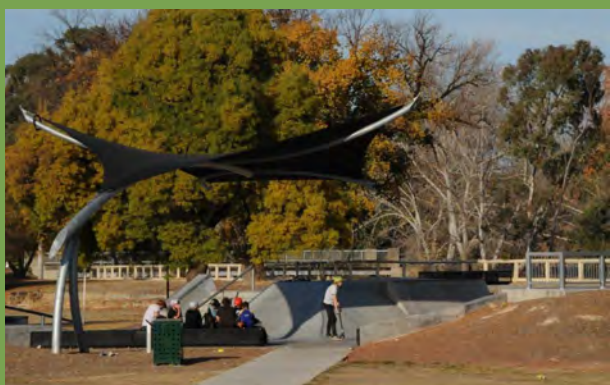
- Council encourages and supports a variety of culturally relevant open space options that enable individuals to make choices based on their needs and interests.

Lifelong Involvement:

- Council recognises that whilst individual activities may be structured by defined age categories, overall opportunities for participation and use of open space should not be limited by age.

Hierarchical Approach:

- Council supports a hierarchical approach to open space management which recognises that different standard of facilities, assets and maintenance may be required to support different levels of participation, catchments or functions.





Sustainability:

- Council encourages and supports the development, maintenance and enhancement of sustainable open space environments (i.e. social, economic and environmental sustainability).

Healthy Communities:

- Council supports development of open space reserves that facilitate healthy lifestyles, community connectedness and social cohesion.

Community Participation:

- Council will provide open space venues and facilities that support a range of formal and informal sport, recreation, physical activities, community events, festivals and gatherings.
- Council will actively support and encourage community involvement and stewardship in the management of appropriate open space reserves.

Shire Character:

- Council will utilise open space to provide relief from urban development and to preserve and enhance the natural and rural qualities of the Shire.
- Open space reserves may also be used to help support cultural expression and diversity through the use of public art, nature play, festivals, community gatherings and associated uses.

Environment & Cultural Protection:

- Council will utilise open space reserves to protect and enhance native flora, fauna, habitat, landscape and/or areas of environmental or cultural significance.



4.0 Strategic Management Directions

Mount Alexander Shire has an extensive supply of quality open space and recreation facilities, enhanced by access to significant State and Regional parks, bushland and conservation reserves.



The following strategic management directions have been developed having regard to the background research, analysis, consultation findings and identified vision for open space.

Information is presented under the following headings:

- Policy;
- Planning & Management;
- Provision;
- Settlement specific;
- Growth areas (Castlemaine, Harcourt and Maldon), and
- Other established areas.

4.1 Policy

Key issues and findings:

- **Developer contributions:** There are opportunities to improve developer contribution outcomes for open space through defined policy and guidelines.
- **Policy gap:** There may be a need to develop additional policies to address emerging issues as they arise.

Recommendations:

1. Recognise the Public Open Space Strategy within the Mount Alexander Shire Planning Scheme as a *Reference Document*.
2. Council to adopt the Public Open Space Strategy.
3. Establish a Council policy and/or guidelines to effectively guide commercial uses and activities within Council controlled reserves, including signage and advertising.
4. Establish a Council policy and/or guidelines that clearly outline Council's approach to vegetation protection and bushfire preparedness.

4.2 Planning & Management

Key issues and findings:

- **Waterways:** Council has limited financial and resource capacity to manage the extensive suite of waterway open space reserves. These reserves are highly valued by the community and contribute to the character of townships and neighbourhoods. Opportunities for more effective stewardship partnerships with the community may need to be explored.
- **Activation:** Increasing the use and activation of parks and reserves through community events, activities, sport, recreation and programming is strongly aligned to desired community health, liveability and wellbeing outcomes. Council has a number of plans and strategies that respond to site specific issues (e.g. reserve master plans and environmental management plans), however a more comprehensive review of Council's role in physical activity participation, promotion and activation of open spaces is needed.
- **Place Making:** - Many of the Shire's open space reserves are recognised for the role that they play in protecting and enhancing native vegetation and contribution to the overall character of townships/settlements. Public art, cultural expression and historic interpretation are important elements of effective Place Making that could be further embraced by Council.

Recommendations:

5. Explore opportunities to increase levels of Council support/resourcing for community groups or agencies in order to promote stewardship, conservation and enhanced environmental outcomes for *waterway and conservation & environment* open space reserves throughout the Shire.
6. Continue to develop site specific reserve Master Plans for priority high-use public open space reserves in order to avoid ad-hoc developments and improve asset management, usage, amenity and *Place Making* outcomes, including integration of public art, cultural expression, environmental outcomes and historic interpretation where relevant.
7. Utilising Council's asset management software, establish *Open Space Asset Management Plans* for all classes/types of open space assets and park infrastructure. This could be undertaken as one large project or divided into asset classes. The aim of the Asset Management Plan is to not only improve corporate knowledge of what already exists, but to implement a costed, systematic approach to asset replacement, renewal and maintenance. Ensure the proposed *Open Space Asset Management Plans* are linked/recorded in a GIS compatible format.
8. Explore opportunities to improve Council's open space GIS systems and capability for ongoing use as an effective management and customer service tool.

4.3 Provision

Key issues and findings:

- **Overall provision:** The Shire has a substantial level of open space provision in terms of individual sites and total land area. Aside from addressing demand for locally accessible open space in emerging residential growth areas (i.e. Castlemaine, Harcourt and Maldon), or to address strategic gaps in linkages or connections, the focus should be on improving the capacity and appeal of existing sites to cater for current and future needs.
- **Resource efficiencies:** A review of the open space data base has identified a number of 'undeveloped' sites (i.e. 42 sites representing approximately 47 hectares). The majority of these sites are quite small, provide limited appeal for community use and present an ongoing maintenance burden for Council. In addition, Council is currently responsible for a number of former landfill sites and disused gravel reserves, however there is no clear vision for their future use or development.

Recommendations:

9. Consider opportunities to improve the appeal of existing public open spaces for all ages where appropriate, including:
 - Installation of multi-use half-court areas;
 - Park seating;
 - Drinking taps;
 - Shade/shelter;
 - Public toilets;
 - Informal gathering spaces;
 - Play equipment and nature play elements;
 - Exercise equipment;
 - Improve paths, trail; and connections; and
 - Vegetation management, particularly weed control.
10. Review all undeveloped open space sites in the Shire and assess options for possible rationalisation or alternative management in order to maximise Council's existing maintenance resources.
11. Undertake a review of existing Council controlled former landfill and gravel reserves in order to consider future roles, functions, opportunities for rehabilitation and future management.
12. Where possible, support opportunities for arts and cultural expression in existing reserves including interpretive information and relevant signage in public spaces to promote heritage connections and to support tourism initiatives.



4.4 Settlement specific – Growth areas

The following section provides a summary of major findings and key directions for the Shire's main population and residential growth centres, i.e. Castlemaine/Campbells Creek Harcourt and Maldon.



4.4.1 Castlemaine/Campbells Creek

Castlemaine is the largest town in Mount Alexander Shire with a population of around 9,124 people.

Castlemaine and the supporting area of Wesley Hill provides the largest collection of existing open space reserves in the Shire (i.e. 79 individual sites). The population of the town is projected to grow to over 10,000 people, although this will predominantly be through consolidation of residential areas and increased densities.

There are a large number of undeveloped reserves in Castlemaine (i.e. 23 sites accounting for 15.6ha). Opportunities to rationalise underutilised and surplus parcels of land should be explored in order to maximise ongoing maintenance resource efficiencies.

In 2015 a draft Community Plan for Castlemaine was released. The plan highlights that Castlemaine's bushland, hills and climate are highly valued. Community aspirations for open space include a desire to enhance connections to nature and support adaptation to climate change and natural disasters. There is also a desire to strengthen connections between sporting clubs and to ensure that quality sporting facilities are available for community use.

Master plans have been developed to guide improvements at Camp Reserve and Wesley Hill Reserve. Improvements are directed at upgrading existing facilities, addressing presentation and amenity issues as well as providing new/ additional infrastructure to support a broader range of use, including playground and car parking works. The master plans will be progressively implemented by Council and stakeholders as resources allow.

Campbells Creek Recreation Reserve lacks a master plan to guide future improvement opportunities.

Addressing gaps in the network of on-road and off-road paths, tracks and trails as outlined in the Shire's Walking and Cycling Strategy also remains a priority, including completion of shared pathways on Campbells Creek.

There are a number of natural reserves located around the McKenzie Hill/Diamond Gully area, which is Castlemaine's primary residential growth precinct. However, there is a lack of open space suitable for family recreation and it lacks an integrated play space to service the needs of this emerging residential area.

Recommendations:

13. The focus for resource allocation in Castlemaine should concentrate on improving the amenity and appeal of existing open space sites and implementing recommendations from existing plans. Acquisition of new/additional open space should only be considered where required to address potential gaps in walkability access to a local reserve, to achieve environmental outcomes or to improve the scope and functionality of linear linkages / connections.
14. Develop a master plan to guide future use, revegetation, strategic trail linkages and management of the area known as 70Ft Hill Reserve (i.e. Diamond Hill). Explore options for transferring management responsibility to Parks Victoria for ongoing management as a conservation reserve.
15. Explore opportunities to acquire an open space site suitable for development of an informal park, play space and family recreation destination in the Diamond Gully / McKenzie Hill area.
16. Complete the development of shared pathways on Campbells Creek between Castlemaine and Campbells Creek and continue to support the Friends of Campbells Creek landcare and stewardship initiatives.
17. Support the development of a Master Plan to guide the future use, development and management of the Campbells Creek Recreation Reserve.



4.4.2 Harcourt

Harcourt is located 30km south of Bendigo and is nestled to the east of the Calder Freeway. The township has a population of around 479 residents. Key reserves include the Harcourt Recreation Reserve, James Park and Stanley Park.

The Regional Growth Plan identified Harcourt as having capacity to accommodate further residential development and population growth. Council have prioritised the development of a Structure Plan to develop a long term settlement framework for the township. Until then, this strategy will guide immediate open space priorities and directions.

A Community Plan was developed in 2013 which presented a range of key themes including connecting community groups, maintaining the natural environment and encouraging tourism activities. Aspirations related to open space included:

- Create a permanent performance space in James Park.
- Improve facilities in central Stanley Park e.g. barbeque, lighting, etc.
- Establish an improved playground suitable for a wider range of age groups.
- Improve drainage at Stanley Park north.
- Connect walking and bike tracks to the Goldfields/Great Dividing Trail.
- Encourage and attract additional outdoor activities including orienteering, rock climbing and cross country.
- Improvement of areas along Barkers Creek to create a walkway.

There are a number of issues affecting Harcourt Recreation Reserve including limited access to water, buildings requiring replacement or removal, poor signage, lack of security lighting, aged landscaping, playing surface issues and lack of walking infrastructure. These items are addressed in Council's Reserves Improvement Plan (2011) and will be progressively implemented as funds become available.

Harcourt is also becoming known as a destination for mountain bike activity in the region. There is considerable support for the development of a mountain bike park on Crown Land adjoining the western side of the Mount Alexander Regional Park.

Council has recently undertaken a site assessment to determine the most suitable location for development of a district level playspace in the centre of town to service residents, visitors and to attract passing traffic to stop in the town.

Recommendations:

18. Establish a district level playspace in central Harcourt and upgrade facilities in central Stanley Park to improve functionality and appeal.
19. Support the development of a regional mountain bike park on Crown Land adjoining the western side of the Mount Alexander Regional Park, including establishment of a connecting trail to/from Harcourt to the proposed Trail Head facility.
20. Ensure the proposed Structure Plan for Harcourt considers opportunities to incorporate public open space along Barkers Creek to support conservation and recreational needs, including a network of walking and cycling paths, tracks and trails.





Image courtesy of K. Selby

4.4.3 Maldon

Maldon is a township of approximately 1,236 people, located 18km north west of Castlemaine.

Maldon benefits from direct access to substantial tracts of Crown Land that provide access to Mount Tarrengower, the Beehive and associated old mining areas as well as the Muckleford forest further to the east.

Of the 17 open space sites in Maldon, 7 are used to accommodate a range of community facilities and a further 5 are provided for a range of special uses (e.g. golf course, racecourse, swimming pool. These sites may offer limited, or restricted access for public use.

The Tarrengower Community Plan encapsulates Maldon and identifies a desire to strengthen Maldon's reputation as a "Notable Town", by making it a tourism destination and protecting heritage assets. In relation to open space the plan identifies the following aspirations:

- Increase networking between community groups to ensure better park maintenance.
- Extend, improve and maintain walking and cycling paths, and establish new walking networks.
- Improve and maintain historic parks and public gardens.
- Promote recreational parks and improve interpretive signage.
- Upgrade sporting facilities, establish a community gymnasium and upgrade the playground.
- Support community driven efforts to establish the Castlemaine to Maldon Rail Trail.

The Bill Woodfull Recreation Reserve in Maldon had a master plan produced, outlining future improvements to the site which have been incorporated into the Reserves Improvements Plan (2011) and will be implemented as funds become available.

Recommendations:

21. Despite a high level of total open space provision, there may be gaps in accessibility to local open space in the north-west residential area (i.e. exceeding 400 meter walkability). Additional open space is not considered required, rather resource allocation should concentrate on improving pathways and connections to surrounding open space reserves, including Bill Woodfull Reserve and Beehive Reserve.



4.5 Settlement specific – Established areas

At a strategic level, future directions for open space in other established and low growth settlements will focus on maintaining and improving what we already have. Specific initiatives and actions will be guided by community priorities expressed in each respective Community Plan and other relevant lower order plans or strategies, e.g. reserve master plans, Walking & Cycling Strategy and Play Space Strategy to name a few.

The table below summarises open space management directions for established areas.



Township/ Settlement	Existing open space management directions	Additional directions
Chewton	Continue the staged implementation of improvement works to Solders Memorial Park in accordance with the Reserves Improvement Plan (2011).	Develop a master plan for Post Office Hill Reserve, incorporating the adjacent former landfill site, in order to identify a long-term vision for the future use and management of these sites. In addition to revegetation and rehabilitation works, explore opportunities to support increased use and appeal of the site for all ages
Elphinstone	Continue the staged implementation of improvement works to Elphinstone Recreation Reserve in accordance with the reserve master plan.	Investigate options to establish a safe shared path connecting the town centre to the Recreation Reserve.
Guildford	Continue the staged implementation of improvement works to John Powell Recreation Reserve in accordance with the Reserves Improvement Plan (2011). Explore opportunities to improve the Loddon River Walk, including connections to/from town.	Assess opportunities to dispose of the former Gravel Reserve as it appears surplus to open space requirements.
Newstead	Continue the staged implementation of improvement works at Newstead Recreation Reserve in accordance with the Reserves Improvement Plan (2011)	Focus on improving the appeal, functionality and access to existing open space sites.
Taradale	Continue the staged implementation of improvement works to Taradale Recreation Reserve in accordance with the reserve master plan.	Explore opportunities to rationalise the undeveloped parcels of open space in Taradale.
	Support staged implementation of the Mineral Springs Reserve Masterplan (pending completion).	Support redevelopment of the existing play ground to incorporate enhanced nature play opportunities and appeal.

5.0 Implementation Framework

The following section presents a summary of the recommendations within a prioritised implementation framework.

Whilst an indicative priority rating for implementation has been applied (i.e. Short, Medium, Long-Term or Ongoing) to guide operations, actual timing of implementation will be subject to Council's budget capacity, external funding and/or other partnership opportunities as appropriate.

Individual actions will be considered on an annual basis as part of Council's overall budget preparations.

A review of the organisations capacity to implement these recommendations within existing staff resources may also need to be considered.

Rec #	Recommendations	Ongoing Role	Short Term (0-3yrs)	Medium Term (4-7yrs)	Long Term (8+yrs)	Cross Ref / Report Section
Strategic Recommendations:						
1	Council to adopt the Public Open Space Strategy.		✓			4.1
2	Recognise the Public Open Space Strategy within the Mount Alexander Shire Planning Scheme as a <i>Reference Document</i> .		✓			4.1
3	Establish a Council policy and/or guidelines to effectively guide commercial uses and activities within Council controlled reserves, including signage and advertising.		✓			4.1
4	Establish a Council policy and/or guidelines that clearly outline Council's approach to vegetation protection and bushfire preparedness.		✓			4.1
5	Explore opportunities to increase levels of Council support/resourcing for community groups or agencies in order to promote stewardship, conservation and enhanced environmental outcomes for <i>waterway and conservation & environment</i> open space reserves throughout the Shire.			✓		4.2
6	Continue to develop site specific reserve Master Plans for priority high use public open space reserves in order to avoid ad-hoc developments and improve asset management, usage, amenity and <i>Place Making</i> outcomes, including integration of public art, cultural expression, environmental outcomes and historic interpretation where relevant.	✓				4.2
7	Utilise Council's asset management software to establish <i>Open Space Asset Management Plans</i> for all classes/types of open space assets and park furniture. This could be undertaken as one large project or divided into asset classes. The aim of the Asset Management Plan is to not only improve corporate knowledge of what already exists, but to implement a costed, systematic approach to asset replacement, renewal and maintenance. Ensure the proposed <i>Open Space Asset Management Plans</i> are linked/recorded in a GIS compatible format.				✓	4.2



Rec #	Recommendations	Ongoing Role	Short Term (0-3yrs)	Medium Term (4-7yrs)	Long Term (8+yrs)	Cross Ref / Report Section
Strategic Recommendations (continued):						
8	Explore opportunities to improve Council's open space GIS systems and capability for ongoing use as an effective management and customer service tool.			✓		4.2
9	Consider opportunities to improve the appeal of existing public open spaces for all ages; where appropriate including installation of multi-use half-court areas, park seating, drinking taps, shade/shelter, public toilets, informal gathering spaces, play equipment and improve paths, trails, connections and vegetation management, particularly weed control.	✓				4.3
10	Review all undeveloped open space sites in the Shire and assess options for possible rationalisation or alternative management in order to maximise Council's existing maintenance resources.		✓			4.3
11	Undertake a review of existing Council controlled former landfill and gravel reserves in order to consider future roles, functions, opportunities for rehabilitation and future management.				✓	4.3
12	Where appropriate, support opportunities for arts and cultural expression in existing reserves including interpretive information and relevant signage in public spaces to promote heritage connections and to support tourism initiatives.	✓				4.3
Growth Area Settlements:						
13	Castlemaine/Campbells Creek: Strategically, the focus for resource allocation in Castlemaine should concentrate on improving the amenity and appeal of existing open space sites and implementing recommendations from existing plans. Acquisition of new/additional open space should generally only be considered where required to address potential gaps in walkability access to a local reserve, to achieve environmental outcomes or to improve the scope and functionality of linear linkages / connections.	✓				4.4.1

Rec #	Recommendations	Ongoing Role	Short Term (0-3yrs)	Medium Term (4-7yrs)	Long Term (8+yrs)	Cross Ref / Report Section
Growth Area Settlements:						
14	Castlemaine/Campbells Creek: Develop a master plan to guide future use, revegetation, strategic trail linkages and management of the area known as 70Ft Hill Reserve (i.e. Diamond Hill). Explore options for transferring management responsibility to Parks Victoria for ongoing management as a conservation reserve.			✓		4.4.1
15	Castlemaine/Campbells Creek: Explore opportunities to acquire an open space site suitable for development of an informal park, play space and family recreation destination in the Diamond Gully / McKenzie Hill area.			✓		4.4.1
16	Castlemaine/Campbells Creek: Complete the development of shared pathways on Campbells Creek between Castlemaine and Campbells Creek and continue to support the Friends of Campbells Creek landcare and stewardship initiatives.		✓			4.4.1
17	Castlemaine/Campbells Creek: Support the development of a Master Plan to guide the future use, development and management of the Campbells Creek Recreation Reserve.			✓		4.4.1
18	Harcourt: Establish a district level playspace in central Harcourt and upgrade facilities in central Stanley Park to improve functionality and appeal.			✓		4.4.2
19	Harcourt: Support the development of a regional mountain bike park on Crown Land adjoining the western side of the Mount Alexander Regional Park, including establishment of a connecting trail to/from Harcourt to the proposed Trail Head facility.	✓				4.4.2
20	Harcourt: Ensure the proposed Structure Plan for Harcourt considers opportunities to incorporate public open space along Barkers Creek to support conservation and recreational needs, including a network of walking and cycling paths, tracks and trails.			✓		4.4.2
21	Maldon: Despite a high level of total open space provision, there may be gaps in accessibility to local open space in the north-west residential area (i.e. exceeding 400 meter walkability). Additional open space is not considered required, rather resource allocation should concentrate on improving pathways and connections to surrounding open space reserves, including Bill Woodfull Reserve and Beehive Reserve.			✓		4.4.3



Appendix

Appendix 1: Open Space Policy Guidelines

The following policy provision are to be incorporated into relevant sections of the Mount Alexander Shire Planning Scheme and Municipal Strategic Statement.

Guidelines for planning permit applications and Development Plans

Policy Basis

Mount Alexander Shire currently owns and manages a diverse range of public parks and reserves across the municipality. A well planned and connected network of open space contributes to the liveability of a municipality and provides opportunities for formal sport and passive recreation. Effective open space provision is therefore integral to the promotion of health and wellbeing outcomes for communities. There is a need to improve the existing open space system so that it is more effective in meeting the needs of the Mount Alexander community.

Mount Alexander Shire contains approximately 233 individual sites and 858.42 hectares of Council managed public open space, which equates to 46.68 hectares per 1,000 people (2015 estimated population). Managing and maintaining open space as well as planning for future commitments comes with significant cost. Failing to provide for well maintained and usable open space in a timely way will prejudice the proper and orderly development of the open space network into the future. The Shire is currently relying on the Subdivision Act to collect open space contributions with no policy guidance as to the form, type and percentage required.

The open space levies on subdivision contributions in accordance with the Subdivision Act 1988 and Clause 52.01 of the planning scheme, provide an important source of revenue for funding new acquisition and capital improvement of open space. Open space requirements may also be outlined in adopted structure plans (e.g. Diamond Gully Structure Plan) and other relevant strategic planning documents. This policy stems from the Municipal Strategic Statement which directs Council to actively seek funding towards new or improved open spaces and recreation facilities.

The *Mount Alexander Shire Open Space Strategy (2016)* provides a comprehensive framework for the management, use and development of open space assets. The strategy establishes principles for Council's long term strategic planning and development of the open space network and a basis in which to collect open space contributions for the Shire.

Open space contributions must be spent on either the acquisition of land for new open space or capital improvements to existing land, however excludes operational matters such as payment of salaries or reserve maintenance.

Capital improvements include initiatives that will enhance the capacity of the reserve to service a wider public benefit, this could include path/trail improvements (i.e. linkages and connections), new/additional infrastructure to support increased use or demand including park furniture, lighting, playgrounds, shade/shelter as well as landscaping that improves the overall amenity and appeal for community use.

The percentage amounts identified in the policy have been informed by a recent Victorian and Civil Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) decisions and an investigation into open space contributions in growth areas and recent Planning Panels Victoria reports for Melbourne (C209) and Moreland (C122) that both explored differential rates. The determination made by VCAT regarding open space contributions in *Stupak v Hobsons Bay CC* (2011 VCAT 618) and the decision of the Court of Appeal of the Supreme Court of Victoria in *Maroondah CC v Fletcher* (2009) has significant consequences for Victorian Councils.

Open Space Policy

It is policy that:

- In residential areas, new subdivision be levied at 5% unencumbered of the net developable area as total public open space or a mixture of open space and cash in lieu of land contribution comprising 5% to the Council's satisfaction as outlined in Developer Contributions: Cash & Land.
- In major commercial and industrial employment areas, approximately 2% of net developable area must be provided as a public open space contribution (cash or land) usually with a passive recreation function.
- In meeting this standard, encumbered land should be used productively for open space. Encumbered land usually includes land retained for drainage, electricity, biodiversity and cultural heritage purposes. The parkland created by such sharing and integration should be suitable for the intended open space function/s, including maintenance.
- A diversity of open space and recreational opportunity must be pursued.
- Active Open Space is defined as being of an appropriate size i.e. sufficient to incorporate two football / cricket ovals, but small enough to enable regular spacing of active open space provision across residential areas. This would generally require at least 8ha of land that is:
 - a) Appropriate for its intended open space use in terms of quality and orientation;
 - b) Located on flat land (which can be cost effectively graded);
 - c) Located with access to, or making provision for a recycled or other sustainable water supply;
 - d) Designed to achieve sharing of space between sports (where appropriate);
 - e) Linked to pedestrian and cycle paths;

- f) Environmental issues such as heritage and local culture can be taken into account in the location and development of open space;
- g) Open space has potential for a high degree of accessibility and Universal Access; and
- h) Open space provision in residential areas is based on the objectives of Clause 56.

Location Considerations

Guidelines to inform the location of open space in residential areas include:

- Requirements as outlined in Council adopted Structure Plan or other relevant strategic planning documents at the time of rezoning or subsequent development.
- Open space areas and facilities should be provided in locations that maximise accessibility for all users, including people with poor mobility, such as older adults and people with a physical disability, and parents with prams and strollers.
- Local open spaces should not be located on major roads, however, there should be good sightlines into an open space area from neighbouring streets, houses, schools or other buildings.
- Local parks and playgrounds should have active frontages on at least two dominant sides to provide surveillance, and where possible should avoid bordering rear yards.
- Local parks shall generally comprise a minimum area of 0.5 hectares. Exceptions may include small linear link reserves that may be required to provide vital connections between areas.
- Aside from open space whose primary function is to create linear links, long narrow areas should be avoided as open space contributions.
- Isolated pockets of land within a park (i.e. "dead" spaces) or those areas which cannot be overlooked, should be avoided.
- The provision of public open space should not be considered separate from the design of a subdivision. Rather, open space should be a primary consideration in the design of new subdivisions, rather than open space being simply provided after the housing and roadway layers have been prepared.
- Designed to protect native vegetation and other significant natural features.

Guidelines to inform the location of open space in commercial and industrial areas include:

- Requirements as outlined in Council adopted Structure Plan or other relevant strategic planning documents.
- Open space areas and facilities should be provided in locations that maximise accessibility for all users, including people with poor mobility, such as older adults and people with a physical disability, and parents with prams and strollers.
- Located so as to maximise opportunities for personal safety and security in siting and design, including consideration of sightlines.
- Located in areas of high pedestrian activity.
- Whilst there are no minimum or maximum sizes required, open spaces must be of an appropriate size (and design) to be attractive, appealing, usable and fit for purpose.
- Have regard to overshadowing, orientation and weather patterns (i.e. avoid siting open space in cold, dark, windy locations).
- Aside from open space whose primary function is to create linear links, long narrow areas should be avoided as open space contributions.
- Isolated pockets of land within a park (i.e. "dead" spaces) or those areas which cannot be overlooked, should be avoided.

Design Considerations

In considering applications for use and development the responsible authority will take into account:

- Any adopted structure plan or other relevant strategic planning documents that may require public open space.
- The need for a variety of open space areas (categories, functions, character and standard) in the context of broader municipal open space and recreation provision.
- Healthy Urban Design Good Practice Guidelines and other relevant planning guides (e.g. Food-sensitive Planning and Urban Design, National Heart Foundation, March 2011).
- Changing community standards and expectations for recreation.
- Co-location of open space with other community facilities.
- The usability of the space for its intended purpose.
- The desire for passive surveillance of open space areas, including streets/housing to front open space reserves.
- Universal Access design principles, including accessibility by pedestrians to open space.
- Utilisation of natural features in the design of open space.
- Consistency with Council's Open Space Infrastructure Guidelines.

Additional considerations include:

- Avoid dense shrubbery along linear paths and set plantings well back from path edges.
- The minimum width of shared paths should be not less than 2.5m and for pedestrian paths the minimum width should be not less than 1.5m.
- Linear paths should primarily be provided to add to and/or link to a broader trail/path system and located to connect residential areas with community facilities, shopping/commercial areas, other residential areas, or other key destinations/attractions. New residential subdivisions should include provision of sealed footpaths on at least one side of the entire street network which maximises connectivity to surrounding features, key destinations, overall walkability and encourages active transport options.
- Where possible, circuits of varying lengths should be considered to maximise the opportunity for people to utilise linear paths for exercise.
- Developers shall be required to either fund or undertake basic development works in parks and open space areas (in order to render the site usable by the community and fit for its intended purpose) as part of their contribution, over and above the contribution of the land.
- Where Developers undertake the works to develop open space areas provided as part of their contribution, a concept plan showing the park plan should firstly be approved by Council as part of the subdivision approvals process (i.e. Recreation Services, Parks Maintenance and Town Planning departments).
- The landscape design and standard of development of new open space areas provided by Developers shall be at a level that is able to be sustained by Council after the responsibility for maintaining the site is passed onto Council. The length of time Developers are required to maintain the site before handing over to Council will be outlined in the approval permit, however generally require a minimum of twelve months. A formal inspection and handover process with Council staff will be required prior to Council accepting responsibility for the asset.

Developer Contributions: Cash & Land

The following shall be considered by Council when assessing requirements for land or cash contributions.

- Any adopted structure plan or other relevant strategic planning documents that may require land for public open space or a cash contribution.
- Land should be taken in preference to a cash contribution in instances where:
 - There is demand for open space in that location (having regard to the proximity, accessibility and capacity of surrounding open space) and the proposed site will enhance the overall network of open space available to the community (refer to the Open Space Strategy township specific recommendations).
 - An existing open space corridor could be enhanced.
 - There is a strategically important link required with adjoining open space or other land uses.
 - There are mature trees, or features of regional (or greater) environmental or cultural significance. Such sites may be considered encumbered and provide limited usability for the community. In such instances, only partial contribution credit may be considered by Council.
 - The nature and condition of the land is compatible with the preferred end use/purpose, and its development for that purpose can be cost effective.
 - New residential areas, or undeveloped land residentially zoned in Development Plan areas, should look to achieve 5% provision for open space in land contributions.
 - New commercial or industrial areas, or undeveloped commercial or industrial land zoned in Development Plan areas, should look to achieve a minimum 2% provision for open space in land or cash contributions.
- Cash should be accepted from a Developer in lieu of land where:
 - The size of the subdivision does not allow sufficient land to be taken as open space to meet the demand for identified functions and setting types within the boundaries of the subdivision.
 - An adequate range of functions and setting types are already available within the locality (this is the case for the majority of the Shire).
 - Resources are needed to develop existing open space and recreational facilities in order to better service the needs of the current and future communities.
 - It is possible that the cash taken in lieu of open space land can be used to enhance an alternative site in the vicinity of where it was taken to service that communities needs.

The recommended changes to the schedule of Clause 52.01 Public Open Space Contribution and Subdivision are outlined below.

Schedule to Clause 52.01

Type or location of subdivision	Amount of contribution for public open space
Residential Subdivision	Land Contribution <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5% of the net developable area as unencumbered land.
	Cash Contribution <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5% of the site value of the net developable area.
	Combination: Cash and Land Contribution <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A combination of cash and land contribution can be negotiated up to the value of 5% of net developable area.
Industrial Subdivision	2% of the net developable area in cash or land contribution. Land provided must be unencumbered.
Commercial Subdivision	2% of the net developable area in cash or land contribution. Land provided must be unencumbered.





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