

Acknowledgement of Country

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. We pay respect to their Elders past and, present, as well as to all First Nations communities, who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

This is the DRAFT Merri-bek Open Space Strategy.

Council is inviting feedback from the community on this draft Strategy and associated documents. The associated documents are:

- Open Space Strategy DRAFT Action Plan 20224/25
- Open Space Background Technical Report
- Open Space Strategy 20 Year Projects List
- Open Space Strategy Phase 1 Community Engagement Report

The documents will be available for download on Conversations Merri-bek from Monday 12 December 2023.

The formal community engagement period will run for four weeks from Tuesday 16 January to Monday 19 February 2024.

A Public Hearing of Submissions will be held on Monday 19 February 2024 online and at the Coburg Civic Centre commencing at 6pm. Registrations for the Hearing of Submissions will close on Thursday 16 February 2024.

To offer feedback on the draft Strategy and associated documents, visit

<https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/open-space-strategy> .

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Strategy overview

Merri-bek City Council is dedicated to ensuring the provision of quality, inclusive, sustainable and diverse open spaces throughout the municipality.

The Vision for the Open Space Strategy is:

We envision our open spaces to be welcoming and accessible for everyone. We recognise that a resilient, biodiverse and safe open space network is integral to the environment and the health and wellbeing of our community.

We honour the deep spiritual connection, belonging and identity our First Nations people and Traditional Owners have with open space. We recognise the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the traditional owners of this land and waterways, today known as Merri-bek.

Extensive community engagement led to the following objectives to support the vision, recognising that open space is managed for both people and nature:

- Traditional Owner self-determination
- People value and look after nature
- Open space that helps people be healthy, active and well
- Open space that is inclusive and accessible
- Open space that supports local living
- Open space that is biodiverse and regenerative
- Open space that is adaptive and resilient
- Open space that supports canopy cover

The Strategy addresses and analyses the key influences, challenges and emerging trends impacting Merri-bek's open space network and our vision. It aims to address these and achieve the vision by enacting the five key Strategy directions:

1. Providing parks close to home
2. Having a mix of open spaces and open space experiences
3. Ensuring our open space network is adaptive, biodiverse, cooling, healthy and resilient
4. Open space for everyone
5. Improving access to our open space network through better links, corridors and collaborations.

In addition, Strategy enablers have been identified to facilitate the implementation of the strategy, such as planning, funding, capital project listings and decision making principles.

Each of the five directions has specific ongoing and short-term actions for the 2024/25 action plan as well as identifying medium (2025 to 2029) and longer (beyond 2029) actions that will help to achieve the Strategy vision.

The Strategy and the accompanying Open Space Background Technical Report has analysed Merri-bek's existing open space network, including different types of open spaces and their locations. Alongside forecasting of Merri-bek's residential and worker population growth and key densification areas, key recommendations for open space projects to address growing open space needs are made, such as land acquisition to create new open spaces. This is brought together in a long-term 20-year Open Space Projects List which can be read on conjunction with the Strategy.

The Strategy also acknowledges and respects the honour and deep connection our First Nations people and Traditional Owners derive through the land and open space in Merri-bek. The Strategy recognises the role that local government has in enabling First nations self-determination and embeds this importance in the Strategy vision, directions and actions.

The new Open Space Strategy, along with the corresponding Open Space Background Technical Report and Projects List, provides a comprehensive examination of Merri-bek's current open space network and the key challenges and influences. Together these will ensure we appropriately plan for the future of Merri-bek's open space and for our growing and changing community.

1 Introduction and context

1.1 Our First Nations history

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the City of Merri-bek is located. For tens of thousands of years, the area we know today as Merri-bek was a sparsely wooded forest with native grasslands that was governed by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.

The Merri Creek, also known as the “Merri Merri” Creek, means “very rocky” in Woi-wurrung, the traditional language of this Country. The Moonee Ponds Creek was named after Moonee Moonee, an Ancestor of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. It is older than the Merri Creek, originally cut as deep as 10 metres into the sandstone. This landscape formed the foundation for the cultural, spiritual, economic, and social aspects of life for the Traditional Owners of this Country.

This land, including our waterways, were vital food sources for our First Nations people. Cultural artefacts such as scar trees have been found along the banks of these areas and there still remains pockets of native vegetation.

The Traditional Custodians continue to maintain a strong and enduring connection to Country. They have played and will continue to play a significant role in the stewardship of the land, water and the natural environment that is Merri-bek.

The Merri-bek Open Space Strategy acknowledges that our open spaces occupy the ancestral lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. The development of this strategy represents an opportunity to show a deeper level of respect for the land within our open spaces. Our goal is to further integrate Traditional Owner philosophies and perspectives into the way we utilise, manage, plan, and maintain our open spaces. We acknowledge that embedded within our First People’s culture is collective responsibility of caring for Country, and we look to their long-standing history of land custodianship as an outstanding example of sustainable practice for Merri-bek to adopt in this Strategy.

1.2 Our vision

The importance of open space

Thoughtfully designed and accessible open spaces deliver a multitude of environmental, economic and social benefits. The significance and value of these natural open areas were emphasised during the pandemic lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 in Victoria, as accessible local natural environments proved invaluable in promoting substantial mental and physical well-being within the community.

Abundant research has also consistently demonstrated that high-quality open spaces, complete with shade and a tangible connection to nature, play an essential role in enhancing the mental and physical health of the community.

Prior to creating this Strategy, we spoke to our Merri-bek community extensively about how they use and value open space. The approach used and a summary of feedback is provided in Appendix 1. There is also a detailed engagement report available.

Ways we heard that people use open space include:

- 1) Meeting people and friends
- 2) Promoting health, wellbeing and fitness
- 3) Playing
- 4) Celebrating birthday parties and events and cultural activities
- 5) Playing casual sports and sports teams and clubs
- 6) Exercising dogs
- 7) Experiencing nature, natural bushland, creeks and animals.
- 8) Relaxing and being outside

Open space vision

Drawing on the Traditional Owner feedback and community input during strategy consultation, our Vision for Open Space in Merri-bek is:

We envision our open spaces to be welcoming and accessible for everyone. We recognise that a resilient, biodiverse and safe open space network is integral to the environment and the health and wellbeing of our community.

We honour the deep spiritual connection, belonging and identity our First Nations people and Traditional Owners have with open space. We recognise the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the traditional owners of this land and waterways, today known as Merri-bek.

Strategy purpose and approach

The Strategy will provide direction and assistance for the future provision, planning, design and management of Merri-bek's open space network. It will outline the direction for future land acquisition and specify the types of new open spaces to be developed. It will also offer guidance on how Council will address the various challenges impacting Merri-bek and our open spaces, while also aiming for these spaces to be robust and ecologically diverse and accessible to all. In summary, the Strategy approach is:

- Listen to the input and feedback of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and the Merri-bek community to understand what is important to people in the management, protection and development of open space land and assets.

- Set strategic objectives and decision making principles that respond to the feedback received.
- Review the function, diversity, setting, and spatial allocation of our current open spaces and assess their accessibility across the entirety of Merri-bek, as well as within each suburb.
- Provide principles to establish a foundation for decision-making regarding future open space provision and development.
- Support financial and resource planning, asset management, and open space maintenance.
- Explore the investment in open space needed in the next 20 years by creating a 20-year Open Space Projects List.
- Identify areas with insufficient open space provision based on current and future demographic profiles and priority precincts and propose strategies for acquiring or repurposing land for future open space.
- Identify gaps, challenges and opportunities, within the existing open space network based on the characteristics and types of open spaces and their walking catchment.
- Provide actions and projects to deliver the Vision and objectives of the Strategy.

1.3 Council strategies

Merri-bek Community Vision

The Merri-bek Community Vision provides the overarching pathway for our future Merri-bek. The Open Space Strategy plays a significant role towards achieving the Merri-bek Council Vision, which is:

“Merri-bek is our home. We respect and look after our land, air, waterways, and animals. We care for our people and celebrate our diverse stories, cultures, and identities. Merri-bek is enhanced by all of us supporting our local businesses, arts communities and social organisations. We work together proactively and transparently to continue to create a:

Vibrant

Safe

Healthy

Resilient

Innovative

Regenerative community.

Many faces, one Merri-bek.”

The five themes to achieve this Vision and reflect the aspirations of Merri-bek’s diverse and growing community in 2031 are:

Theme 1: An environmentally proactive Merri-bek:

Theme 2: Moving and living safely in Merri-bek:

Theme 3: A healthy and caring Merri-bek:

Theme 4: Spaces and places in Merri-bek:

Theme 5: An empowered and collaborative Merri-bek

The explanation of these themes and how they relate to the Open Space context is provided in Appendix 2.

Moreland Open Space Strategy 2012 – 2022

For the past 10 years, Council's approach to managing and upgrading open space was informed by the Moreland Open Space Strategy 2012 – 2022.

In 2017, Council released 'Park Close to Home: A Framework to Fill Open Space gaps'. It aimed to meet the Open Space Strategy goal of "providing parks close to home" by providing open space within 500 metres of all residential properties and 300 metres to all residential properties within activity centres. This has seen Council purchase land across our suburbs and create seven new open spaces since 2018, being: Bulleke-bek Park (Brunswick), Garrong Park (Brunswick) and Citadel Park (Glenroy), and three under construction at 260 Sydney Road (Brunswick), 14 Frith Street (Brunswick), Service Street (Coburg) and one being designed on York Street (Pascoe Vale South).

In addition, the 2012 – 2022 Open Space Strategy has seen:

- Purchase of land to create new public open space along the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor in John Street (Oak Park)
- Purchase of land to create a new all ability access ramp at Spry Street (Coburg North) to improve access to the Merri Creek corridor
- Creation of four new dedicated dog parks at Gilpin Park (Brunswick), Richards Reserve (Coburg North), Moomba Park (Fawkner) and Kingsford Smith Ulm Reserve (Glenroy)
- Creation of new urban pocket parks, such as Wilson Avenue (Brunswick), and community open spaces such as Bridget Shortell Reserve and the Wheatsheaf Community Hub (Glenroy)
- Renewal and upgrade of over 30 playgrounds such as Wylie Reserve in Brunswick West and Charles Mutton Reserve in Fawkner.

Complementary strategies and plans

Complementary strategies include the Nature Plan and associated Implementation Plan, the Urban Forest Strategy, Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan and the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy. These are discussed in later sections of the strategy and a longer list included at Appendix 3: Relevant Merri-bek City Council policies, inter-Council Strategies and Victorian State Government legislation.

1.4 State Government policy context

The Open Space Strategy aligns with Victorian State Government legislation and aligned state government strategies (an extensive list forms part of provided in Appendix 3). Some of the key guiding policies and strategies are outlined below.

Plan Melbourne and Open Space for Everyone

The Victorian Government policy Plan Melbourne 2017 – 2050 seeks to establish a network of accessible and diverse public spaces. These spaces should provide for multiple uses, including:

- Connection to nature
- Social recreation
- Wildlife corridors
- Sport, recreation and play
- Community gardens
- Flood storage basins.

Plan Melbourne aims for all residents to have open space within a 20-minute return journey from their home or place of work. This is supported by the metropolitan Melbourne Open Space for Everyone strategy which provides guidance for open space at a metropolitan level. This strategy acknowledges that Councils such as Merri-bek have a close open space relationship with our neighbouring Councils and how our open space is a network across Merri-bek and wider Melbourne.

The Local Government Act and the Victorian Planning System

The Local Government Act 2020, Merri-bek Local Laws and Victorian Planning system provide requirements and guidance for how Merri-bek plans, delivers and manages our open space.

The Local Government Act articulates that “the role of a Council is to provide good governance in its municipal district for the benefit and wellbeing of the municipal community” (section 8 (1)). This aligns with the Vision of the Open Space Strategy.

The Merri-bek City Council Local Laws provide clarity about responsibilities in our open spaces, including on-leash dog areas in our parks and playgrounds and protection of our natural environment in open spaces.

Via the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, the Victorian Planning system governs much of the development of land within Merri-bek. Merri-bek is experiencing substantial population growth and densification which is changing our open space needs. Through the Merri-bek Planning Scheme and the *Subdivision Act 1988*, private developments which increase dwelling yield are required to pay a financial contribution to public open space (or equivalent land). These funds are used to upgrade existing open space as well as create

new open space. The Merri-bek Planning Scheme also includes controls on private and public land to protect and enhance public open space.

1.5 Existing open space in Merri-bek

Merri-bek has over 350 open spaces that together create our open space network as shown in Figure 1. This network includes:

1. More than 54 dedicated facilities catering for both formal sports clubs and informal sports and recreational activities, featuring formal sports grounds and sports pavilions.
2. Over 120 playgrounds, offering a wide range of playground sizes, equipment and styles to suit various preferences.
3. Parks and open spaces with diverse amenities, such as restrooms, park shelters, BBQ areas and water fountains.
4. Features like skate parks, pump tracks and exercise equipment to promote physical activity and leisure.
5. Wetlands, raingardens and stormwater harvesting systems, designed to improve the health of our Creeks, reduce use of potable water for irrigation, reduce stormwater risk and improve local biodiversity and cooling.
6. Open space corridors which provide extensive shared user paths for walking, running and cycling, connecting to other regional trails such as the Main Yarra Trail.
7. Extensive habitat, tree canopy, biodiversity and native vegetation, with some species protected under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.
8. Open spaces that adjoin community buildings, aquatic centres and libraries, allowing users to use community facilities and open space together.

Merri-bek also features several regional shared path networks that provide extensive shared user paths for walking, running and cycling, including:

- The Merri Creek Trail, running along a significant portion of the municipality's eastern boundary, stretching from Fitzroy North to Fawkner
- The Moonee Ponds Creek trail, which spans much of the western boundary of the municipality, extending from Brunswick West up to Gowanbrae.
- The Upfield Shared Path, which runs along the Upfield Railway corridor running along the length of Merri-bek
- The Western Ring Road trail, located to the south of the Western Ring Road, which connects the Merri Creek Trails, the Moonee Ponds Creek trail and the Upfield Shared User Path
- The nearby Capital City Trail which runs along Merri-bek's southern boundary shared with the Cities of Melbourne and Yarra, and connects to the Upfield Shared Path, the Merri Creek Trail and the Moonee Ponds Creek trail.

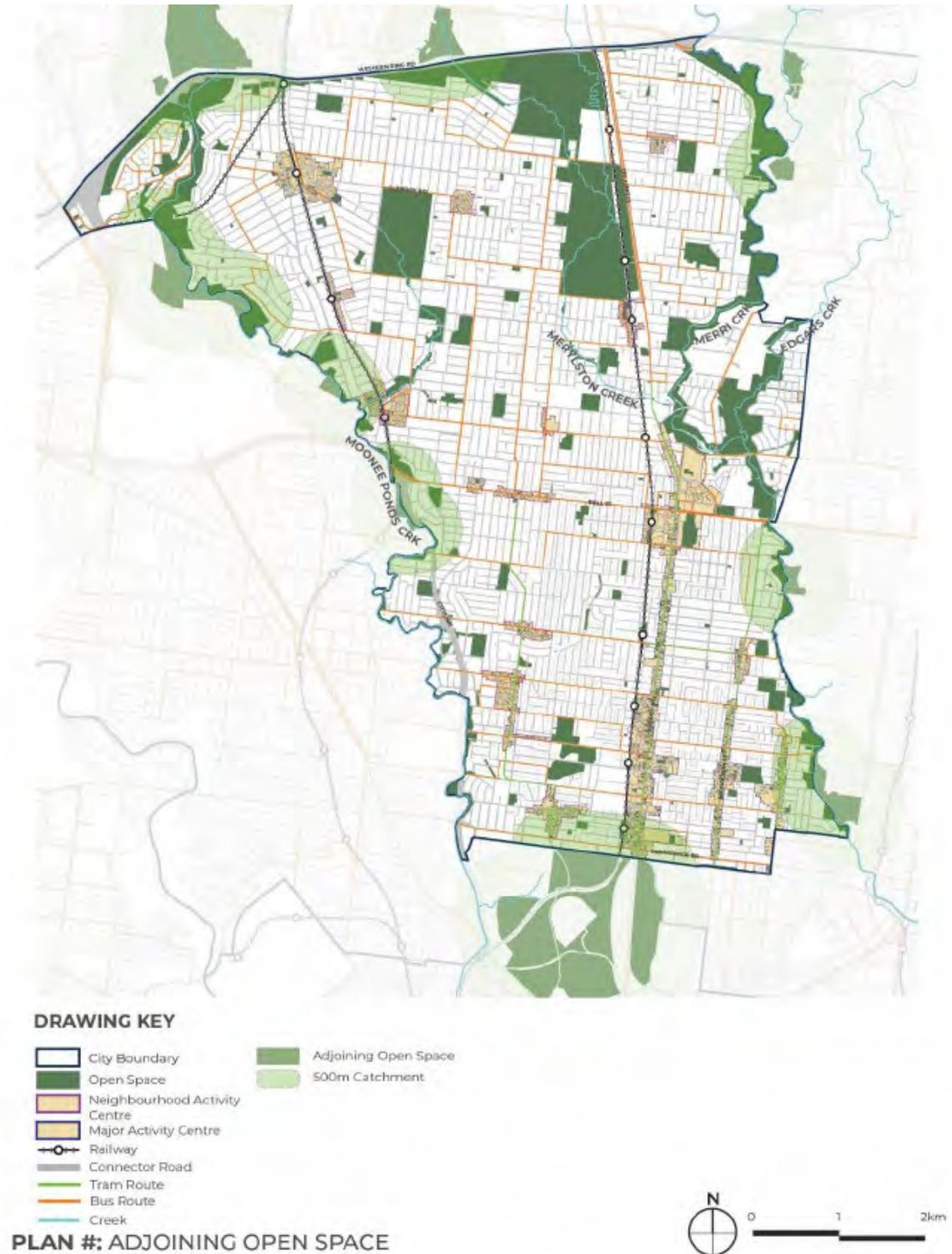


Figure 1: Map of Merri-bek open space and nearby significant open space.

Merri-bek additionally benefits from significant regional open spaces in adjoining municipalities, including:

- Princes Park, Parkville, a 39 hectare open space, and Royal Park, Parkville, a 188 hectare, in the City of Melbourne, which lie to the immediate south of Merri-bek.

They include various formal sports grounds, walking and running circuits, dog off-leash areas, key biodiversity areas, as well as many events and social activities.

- The Northcote Public Golf Course, a 25 hectare open space in Northcote next to the Merri Creek in the City of Darebin, that includes a public golf course and public open space.
- Jack Roper Reserve, a 52 hectare lakeside setting open space in the City of Hume, which contains various playgrounds and play spaces, walking trails, soccer field and shared user paths connecting to trails in Merri-bek, including the Western Ring Road Bike path.
- Boeing Reserve parklands, a large 23 hectare open space area in Strathmore Heights within the City of Moonee Valley. It contains a baseball field, community garden, dog off leash area and skate ramp and is accessible from Merri-bek by crossing the Moonee Ponds Creek via a footbridge at Devereaux Street, Oak Park.

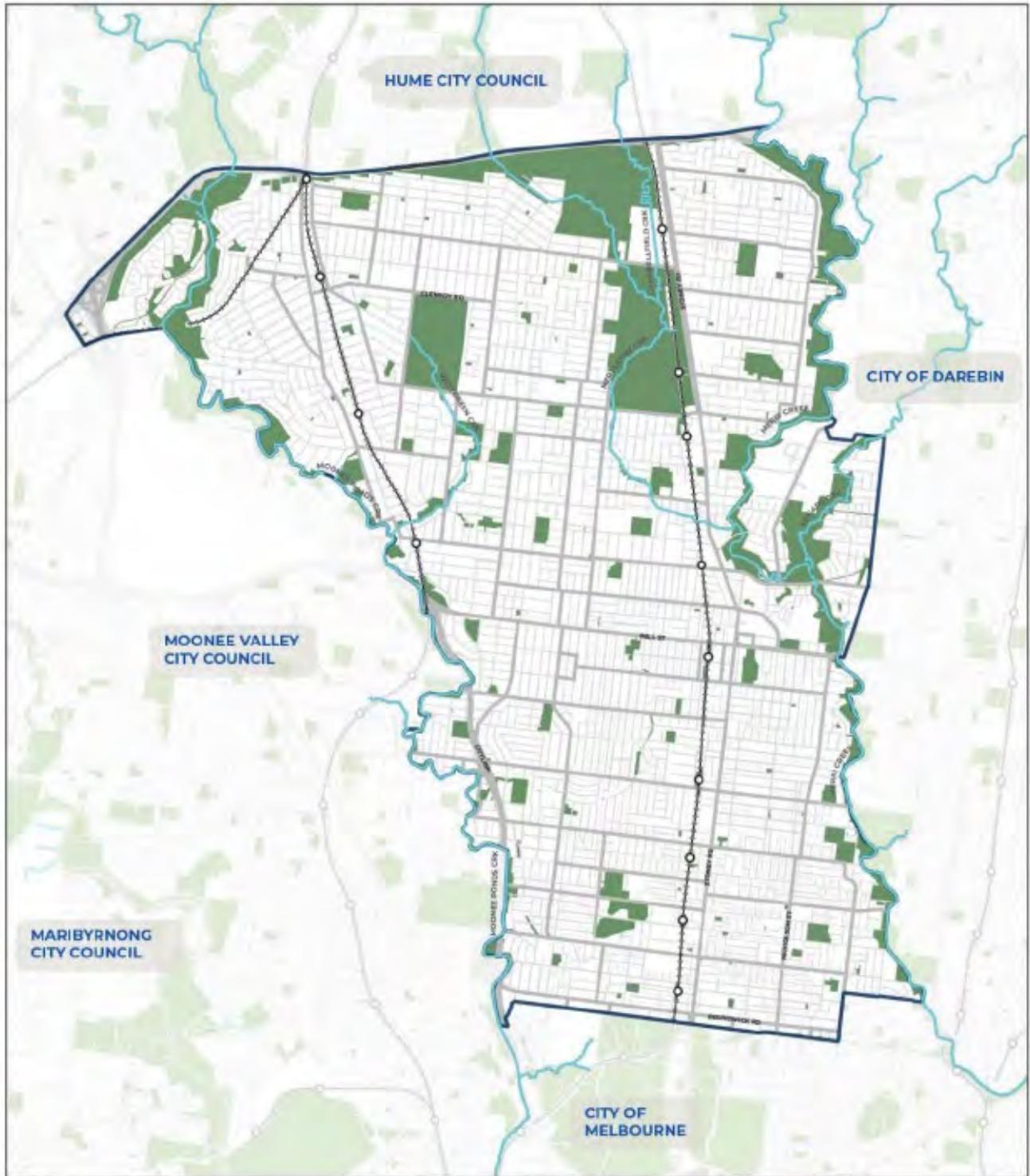
Merri-bek also contributes to a number of open space collaborations, including:

- The Chain of Ponds, an ambitious collaboration of 14 organisations¹ together seeking to transform Moonee Ponds Creek and its tributaries into an iconic waterway.
- The Northern Regional Trails Strategy, a key advocacy document that Merri-bek along with the Banyule, Darebin, Hume, Nillumbik and Whittlesea Councils, together use to improve cycling routes of regional significance. Within Merri-bek, these include the Merri Creek trail, the Edgars Creek Trail, the Upfield Rail Trail, the Craigieburn Line and the Moonee Ponds Creek trail.

Defining open space

This Strategy focusses on publicly owned open spaces, which are accessible and primarily intended for activities such as for sport and recreation, passive outdoor enjoyment, public gatherings, play, nature conservation and visual amenity. The term “open space” encompasses land used for organised sport, casual sports and recreation and active commuting. It also includes land with ecological and natural value, exemplified by our Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek Corridors, or land that can be improved to increase its ecological and natural value by improved management. Open Space also refers to privately owned land, such as schools, golf courses and cemeteries, which may have restricted or limited public access.

¹Merri-bek City Council, City of Moonee Valley, City of Melbourne, City of Hume, Parks Victoria, Yarra Valley Water, Greater Western Water, Kensington Association, Victorian Planning Authority, Melbourne Water, Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek, Living Colour Studio, Conservation Volunteers Australia and the Moonee Valley Bike Users Group.



DRAWING KEY

-  Study Area
-  Open Space
-  Railway
-  Creek
-  Connector Road

Figure 2: Map of open space in Merri-bek.

Merri-bek has many unique open spaces and natural experiences. The Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek corridors offer exceptional walking and running paths, opportunities for immersing oneself in nature and spaces for bush play. Our urban and suburban parks, playgrounds, and sports fields provide settings for more structured play, sports, and recreational activities, as well as immersing oneself in nature.

Council manages a diverse portfolio of open space, including playgrounds, sport grounds, wetlands, creek corridors and facilities such as barbecues. Furthermore, there are substantial open spaces in Merri-bek that are owned or managed by other entities, including the Northern Golf Course in Glenroy and the Fawkner Memorial Park in Fawkner and Northern Memorial Park in Glenroy. While these spaces are not owned or managed by Council, they still play a critical role in our network of open spaces. Figure 2 shows all the open space within Merri-bek.

Merri-bek at a glance

The City of Merri-bek lies between 4 and 14 kilometres north of central Melbourne. It is bordered by the Moonee Ponds Creek to the west, Merri Creek to the east, Park Street to the south and the Western Ring Road to the north. Suburbs with Merri-bek include Brunswick, Brunswick East, Brunswick West, Coburg, Coburg North, Fawkner, Glenroy, Gowanbrae, Hadfield, Oak Park, Pascoe Vale, and Pascoe Vale South. There are also small sections of the suburbs of Fitzroy North and Tullamarine within the municipal boundaries. Merri-bek covers 50.9 square kilometres and is one of Melbourne's most populous municipalities, with the estimated resident population in 2021 being 195,418 persons.

Some 33 per cent of Merri-bek residents were born overseas, with 39 per cent speaking a language other than English. Our diverse languages include Italian, Arabic, Greek, Urdu, Nepali and Turkish. Immigration trends have influenced Merri-bek's rich cultural community, including our ageing Greek and Italian population and an increase in people arriving from countries including India, Nepal and Lebanon.

Merri-bek is renowned for its thriving arts sector and creative industries, including along the Sydney Road and Lygon Street precincts. It is also a municipality experiencing significant urban densification and population growth. In the next 20 years the Merri-bek residential population is expected to increase by 35 per cent to approximately 258,000 people².

Our residents in Merri-bek live in a diversity of household types: just over half of our homes are separate houses, whilst 35 per cent are medium density townhouses and 13 per cent are high density apartments. An increasing trend of smaller households continues to emerge. Over 28 per cent of our households are lone persons, 24 per cent couples without

² This figure is from .ld Consulting population forecasts, 2020. An Action in the Action Plan is to update this projection in 2024/25 to provide a current 20 year forecast.

children, and 26 per cent couples with children and 9 per cent are one parent families, in addition to group households and other families. Merri-bek's suburbs and activity centre growth areas are shown in Figure 3.

Merri-bek serves as an important business hub, with a unique location near the Melbourne Central Business District, as well as large land holdings for industrial businesses. The Sydney Road corridor includes a 4 kilometre long retail strip home to a mix of shops, bars, cafés as well as various types of open spaces. The municipality supports a diversity of businesses, factories and commercial premises, and in 2021 supported 46,840 jobs³.

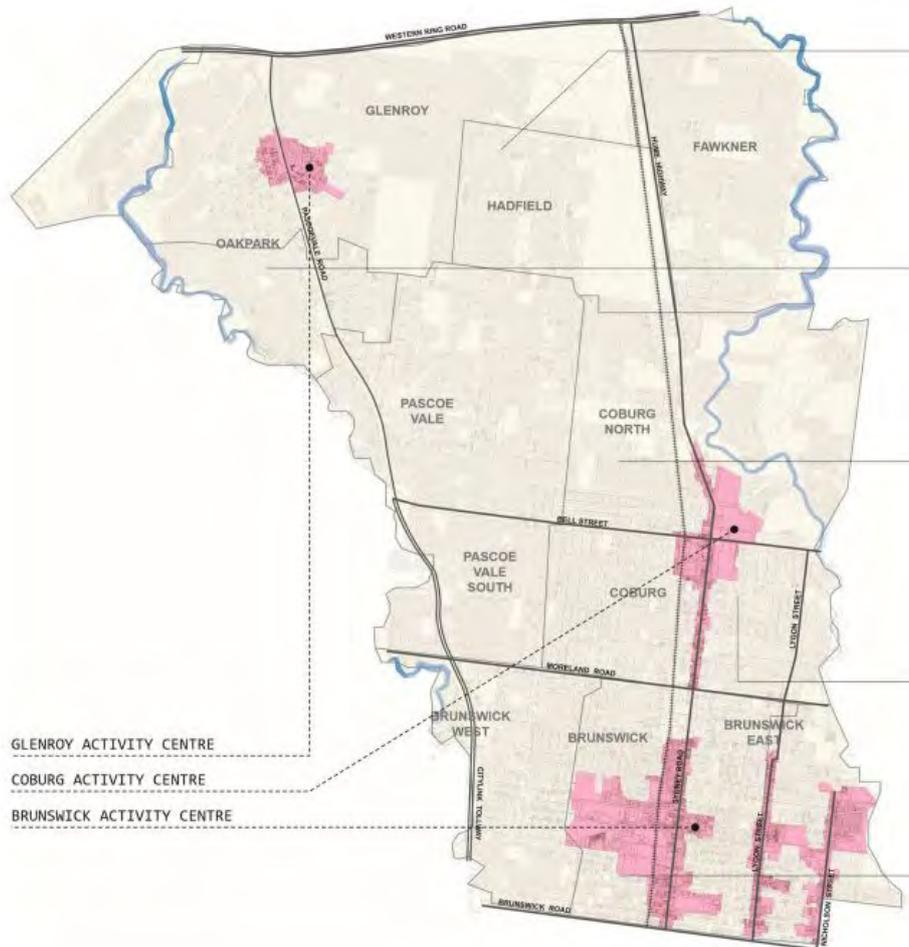


Figure 3: Merri-bek's suburbs and key Activity Centre growth areas.

³This figure is taken from the 'A Job in Merri-bek' data, March 2021.

1.6 Context changes

The Open Space Strategy recognises that the role of open space is evolving due to shifts in Merri-bek, including population growth, urban densification and the escalating challenge of climate change. Creation of a new Strategy also allows for an exploration of how Merri-bek is changing and how this impacts our open space needs, therefore allowing Council to better meet these needs.

There have been significant changes in our context since the Moreland Open Space Strategy 2012 – 2022 was created, and Merri-bek will continue to face further changes and challenges in the future.

Context changes since 2012

Some of the most significant changes affecting open space in Merri-bek since 2012 are:

1. **Population increase:** The 2012 – 2022 Strategy estimated Merri-bek's population to reach 177,777 persons by 2032; however, by 2021 the population already exceeded 195,418 persons.
2. **Escalating costs:** There has been a substantial increase in costs associated with land acquisition and construction over the years, with Council encountering construction costs escalating by 30 per cent to 70 per cent and land costs doubling. The amount of funding available for new parks and development of open space has however not risen at the same rate.
3. **Rapid rise in dog registrations:** Merri-bek has witnessed a large surge of dogs, with dog registrations in recent years increasing by over 300 per cent.
4. **Increased participation in formal sports:** Participation in formal sports, including soccer, football and hockey, has grown notably across the whole of Merri-bek. Female participation in community sports has also grown rapidly, as has the desire for more access to open space for informal sport and community / organised sport.
5. **Changing community expectations:** Council has heard from our community that they want to be able to use more open space locally, including being able to walk or cycle to different types of open spaces near their homes or workplaces. Our community has also expressed a greater understanding of the importance of open space with respects to health and wellbeing, fitness and social needs.
6. **Climate change and climate risk:** The impact and risk of climate change has become more understood in recent years, including the impact it will have on open space.

Current and future changes and challenges

In preparing a new Open Space Strategy, it is prudent for Council to review the previous strategy, reflect on what has been achieved and what has changed and determine what is needed for the future.

The changes of the last decade will continue to impact Merri-bek into the future as population continues to grow through densification and people's expectations continue to change. In light of cost increases and continued growth in demand and ambitions for open space, there is a growing need to explore fresh opportunities for funding.

The Strategy also recognises that the way we live and work has and continues to change, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes increased working from home and desire for local access to open space. Furthermore, Council recognises the growth in mental health challenges which necessitate open spaces for people's wellbeing, such as being in nature and providing for social connection.

Our open spaces will become increasingly important in climate risk mitigation and adaptation. This includes the importance of open spaces for cooling our city and also the need to further enhance and protect our open spaces and their biodiversity.

The Open Space Strategy also needs to respond to the Victorian Government's Metropolitan Melbourne *Open Space for Everyone* strategy introduced in section 1.4, which has introduced new dynamics and considerations for open space planning.

The development of this Strategy also provides an opportunity to analyse our existing open spaces, including their location, type and the activities they accommodate.

2 Open space needs

This section discusses a suite of open space influences, challenges and emerging trends that together inform Merri-bek's open space needs, as part of the enacting the Strategy vision. Many of these factors stem from the ongoing transformations driven by increased population growth and densification. Other needs are intricately linked to the evolving nature of both Merri-bek, greater Melbourne and Australia, reflecting broader shifts in societal dynamics as well as our changing world.

2.1 Traditional Owner recognition in open space management

Our vision as a Council for reconciliation is respectful and inclusive recognition of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. They are the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. In October 2021, Merri-bek City Council, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents signed a Statement of Commitment. This Commitment strengthens and formalises Council's commitment to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities of the City of Merri-bek via the following seven commitments:

1. Building partnerships with Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities
2. Engaging the Traditional Owners in delivering Welcome to Country and other traditional ceremonies.
3. Engaging Traditional Owners to provide Aboriginal cultural competence learning
4. Consulting Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to inform key decisions.
5. Protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage and continuing to protect the Aboriginal history of Merri-bek.
6. Protecting our waterways, communicating Aboriginal water values, and interpreting landscapes.
7. Bringing cultural values and cultural practices to natural resource management.

The Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021 – 2026 provides guidance for Councils to help embed the voices and priorities of Aboriginal communities at a local government level.

Figure 4 below identifies the important role of Local Government in creating stronger relationships and progressing self-determination and reconciliation.

Council is also mindful that the Victorian Government is progressing towards the landmark step of establishing Treaty to acknowledge the sovereignty of First Nations and to improve the lives of First Peoples, and that Treaty may occur in the lifetime of this strategy.

In alignment with our Statement of Commitment to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities of the City of Merri-bek will enhance this relationship, acknowledgement and self-determination in our open spaces. This includes the

Ballert Marroop site in Glenroy, in which Council is seeking for transfer of this land from State Government to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Corporation to allow the creation of a unique Community Hub. Council will also investigate ways to better integrate caring for Country in our open space, increase local employment of First Nations people in our open space and educate our wider community on our First Nations history.

Council will also explore partnerships with adjoining Councils such as the Cities of Hume and Whittlesea as part of the Marram Baba Merri Creek regional parklands. These parklands, which will be an area of over 2,778 hectares along Merri Creek, will be 16 times larger than Royal Park. They will include significant land being handed back to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and will represent the largest return of land to the Aboriginal custodianship within Greater Melbourne

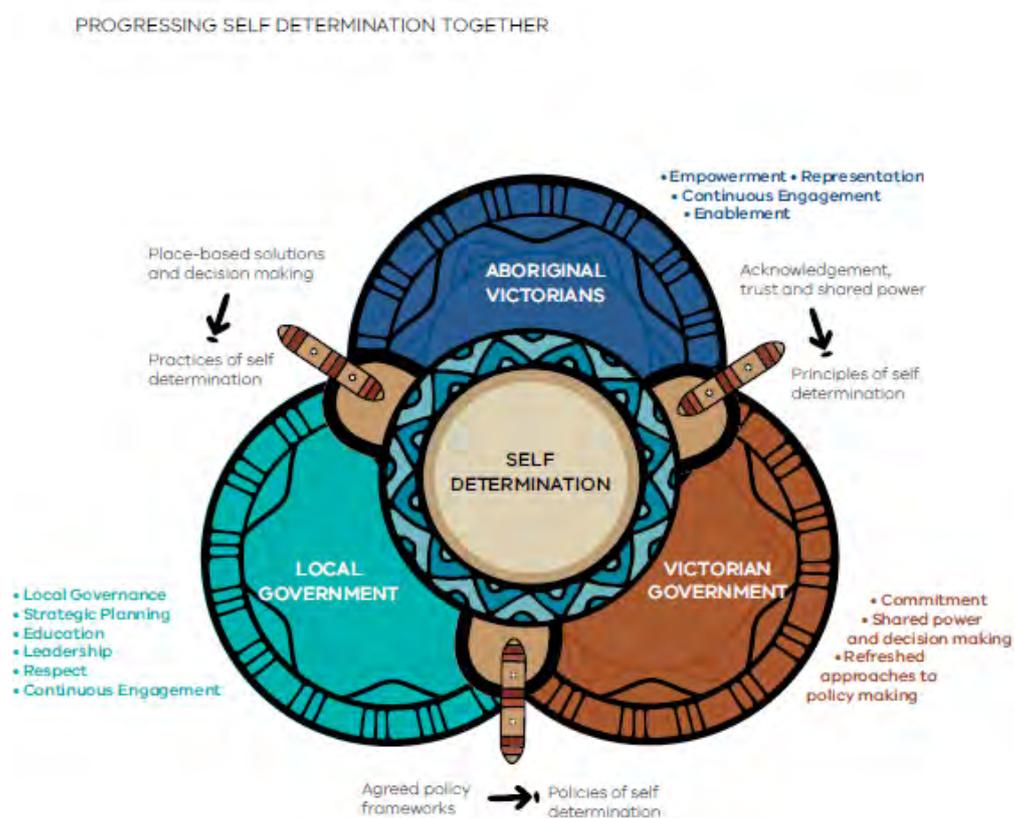


Figure 4: The Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021 – 2026 pathway to self-determination through stronger partnerships⁴.

⁴ Source: <https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/our-partnerships/victorian-aboriginal-and-local-government-strategy>

2.2 The impact of population growth on open space

A growing Merri-bek

Merri-bek's population is diverse, growing and densifying. The population of Merri-bek in 2021 was 195,418 persons⁵, an increase of 48,000 additional residents since 2011 when the former Open Space Strategy was written. In the years between 2017 and 2019, Merri-bek had an annual population increase of 4,400 residents.

Merri-bek's population will continue to increase across all suburbs (except Gowanbrae) to a total forecasted population of over 258,400 people by 2041⁶. Table 1 below shows the forecasted population increase across our suburbs:

Table 1: Forecast residential population change from 2021 to 2041 by suburb.

Suburb	2021 Resident Population	2041 Resident Population	Residential Population Change (2021 - 2041)	% change
Brunswick	30,287	40,687	10,400	26%
Brunswick East	16,737	23,458	6,721	29%
Brunswick West	18,035	24,190	6,155	25%
Coburg	30,126	42,438	12,312	29%
Coburg North	9,182	13,302	4,120	31%
Fawkner	15,769	19,925	4,156	21%
Glenroy	24,770	29,096	4,326	15%
Gowanbrae	3,179	3,149	-30	-1%
Hadfield	7,350	9,488	2,138	23%
Oak Park	7,610	8,582	972	11%
Pascoe Vale	20,042	27,801	7,759	28%
Pascoe Vale South	12,331	16,286	3,955	24%
Total	195,418	258,402	62,984	24%

Source: id.consulting (2020)

This population increase is linked to the continuing densification of Merri-bek, whereby land which previously contained commercial or industrial buildings and low-density single dwellings, is being redeveloped to create townhouses, apartments and high density buildings.

5 This figure is from .Id Consulting population forecasts, 2020. An Action in the Action Plan is to update this projection in 2024/25 to provide a current 20 year forecast.

6 As above.

To manage this growth, Merri-bek directs growth to areas known as ‘activity centres’. Activity centres are designated within the Merri-bek Planning Scheme as areas which have good access to public transport (key bus routes, train stations and tram routes) and services



(such as shops, schools and existing parks).

Figure 5: Merri-bek’s Activity Centres within the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.

As seen in Figure 5, Merri-bek has a hierarchy of 3 types of Activity Centres:

1. Major Activity Centres in Brunswick (largely along the three corridors of Sydney Road, Lygon Street and Nicholson Street), Coburg and Glenroy, which are to accommodate a substantial residential/mixed-use growth and change to create a new character of increased density and scale of built form.
2. Neighbourhood Activity Centres located throughout Merri-bek suburbs, largely centred around a key junction, which are to accommodate an increase in density and scale of built form appropriate to their role in the Activity Centre Hierarchy, but at a lesser intensity and scale to the larger centres of Coburg, Brunswick and Glenroy.
3. Smaller Local Centres, which are to accommodate growth and change respectful of the existing built form.

Merri-bek's Activity Centres will continue to play pivotal roles in accommodating this growth, with 54 per cent of Merri-bek's future residential growth expected to be in high density apartments and 27 per cent of this growth to be in the Coburg and Brunswick Activity Centres.

A growing workforce

With a population of over 195,418 persons, Merri-bek is home to an estimated 46,840⁷ jobs. Whilst traditionally, many Merri-bek workers laboured in factories, workshops and warehouses, many workers these days are found in offices, clinics and classrooms and working from home.

Alongside residential population growth, our Merri-bek workforce is growing. Whilst it is more difficult to forecast worker growth than residential growth, Council estimates that between 2000 and 2035, employment is forecast to increase by 9,361 jobs. Targeted strategies and investment can influence this trajectory and a more ambitious growth scenario (Scenario 2) could see jobs grow by up to 16,373⁸.

Future open space needs

It is critical that Council ensures all residents and workers in Merri-bek, whether living in detached homes, townhouses or apartments, working in factories or offices, have access to adequate open space.

As urban development changes our City open space needs are changing too. Council has the following safeguards to ensure open space needs are met in the face of urban development:

7 From 'a Job in Merri-bek' 2021.

8 From 'a Job in Merri-bek' 2021.

1. Designing individual developments to be accessible to open space and improve the interface with open space, including sunlight access and reduced overshadowing.
2. Taking opportunities for private developments to contribute to waterway buffers wide enough to improve the long-term sustainability of our creek corridors
3. Leveraging strategic redevelopment sites to incorporate a combination of public open space within the site as well as an open space charge, up to 10% of the site's value⁹
4. Using open space contributions (pursuant to Clause 53.01 of the Merri-bek Planning Scheme to purchase and develop new open space in identified gap areas and other open space improvements (such as park upgrades)
5. Establishing a fit-for-purpose contribution-rate method and using this method to determine an appropriate open-space contribution rate for the Merri-bek Planning Scheme
6. Seeking explicit open space contributions or requirements where high-density residential buildings are not planned to be subdivided (built to rent).

2.3 The impact of climate change on open space

Climate emergency and climate risk

Climate change is having a huge impact on the community and the environment. In 2018, Council declared a Climate Emergency. Through the Zero Carbon Merri-bek initiative, Council aims to achieve a 75 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030 (against the 2011/12 baseline), net-zero emissions by 2035, and even drawdown ('negative emissions') by 2040.

Merri-bek's open spaces, encompassing parks, creeks, sporting grounds and civic areas, are susceptible to the ongoing impacts of climate change and climate related risks. These changes encompass future weather patterns marked by prolonged droughts, more frequent heatwaves, increased flooding and changes in seasonal patterns. Some impacts may include vegetation loss from dry conditions, especially for newly established trees and their

⁹ Strategic redevelopment sites are sites which are larger sites providing significant housing growth. These sites are anticipated to generate increased demand for accessible public open space in comparison to average-sized sites where few dwellings are created. The Victorian Planning Authority has established Precinct Structure Plan Guidelines, for new residential communities to provide at least 10% public open space. These guidelines anticipate development outcomes for at least 20 dwellings per hectare will be created. Within Merri-bek's redevelopment setting, the outcome for public open space, associated with a strategic redevelopment site, may be a combination of on-site open space and/or open space contribution, up to 10% of the site's value. This approach should be applied with flexibility, so suitable site-by-site public open space solutions are achieved.

replacement costs, less use of playgrounds that are not shaded and storm impacts and their potential damage to shade sails. Natural assets in open spaces such as trees, vegetation and wetlands, have the ability to help mitigate and reduce the severity of some of these impacts.

The Merri-bek community has demonstrated strong support for environmental action during the engagement process for the Open Space Strategy. Many people identified climate change, reduced biodiversity and habitat loss as key challenges for the Council and our open spaces. The Merri-bek Climate Strategy outlines how the Council will proactively plan for and respond to the inevitable impacts of climate change. It aims to manage climate risks, enhance climate resilience throughout the community and ensure that no one is left behind in creating a sustainable and liveable community. This includes ensuring our open spaces are still able to be used by our community in this changing climate, as well as preserving and enhancing our nature and biodiversity.

It is therefore vital for Merri-bek to ensure that our open spaces both mitigate the impact of climate change risk as well as adapt.

The urban heat island effect

An example of increasing climate risk is the urban heat island effect (UHIE). The Merri-bek Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan (2016/2017 – 2025/2026) highlights how this occurs during hot weather when urbanised areas retain heat more than non-urban areas. This can lead to additional heat stress for residents, workers and wildlife. The UHIE Action Plan aims to significantly reduce this heat retention during hot weather by implementing measures such as creating cooler, greener open spaces.

Figure 6 below is an example of the UHIE in central Coburg, where the red colour can be seen along and around the dark and impervious areas along Sydney Road, whereas the green colour can be seen around the irrigated, green and shaded open space at Bridges Reserve.

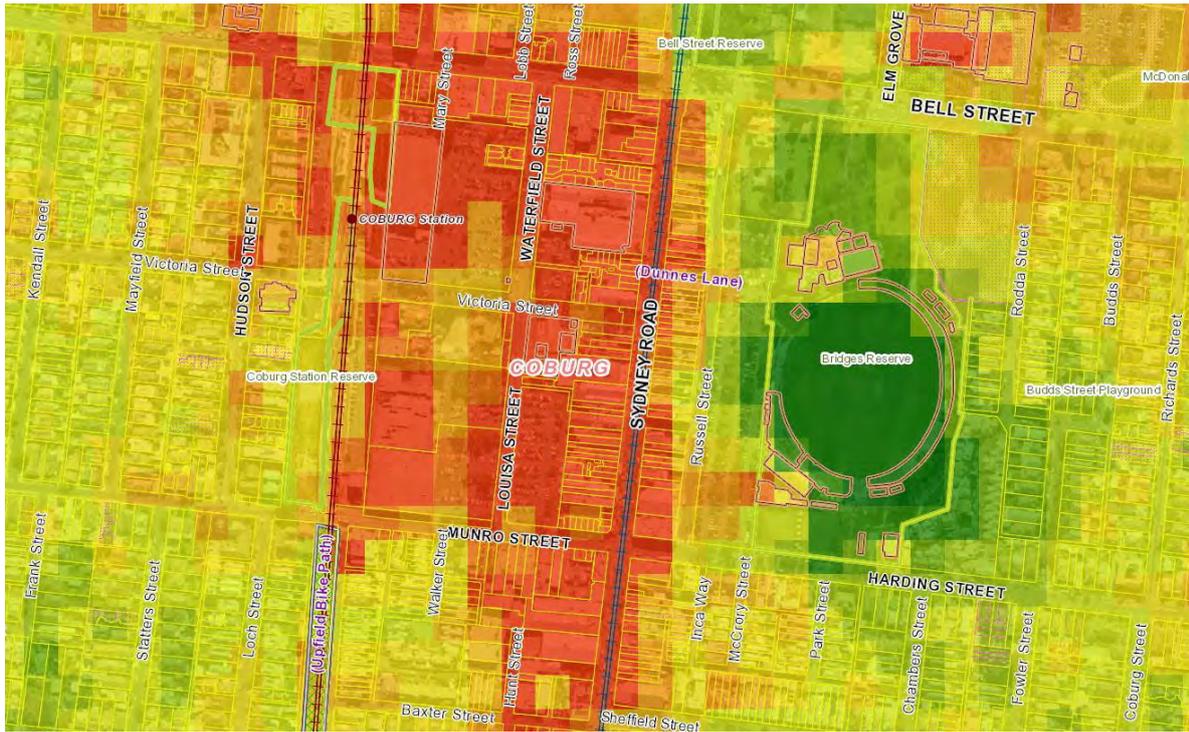


Figure 6: The Urban Heat Island Effect in central Coburg

Figure 7 is an image taken in 2018 during summer weather, confirming that the temperature across Merri-bek is significantly higher than non-urban areas during warm weather because of the UHIE. The colours on the image reveal that yellow areas are 7 to 9 degrees Celsius warmer because of the UHIE whilst the red areas are greater than 10 degrees Celsius warmer. The image also shows lighter yellow and green areas, which confirms that our green open spaces and Creeks corridors provide important cooling functions for our population, as well as flora and fauna. A more detailed image is seen in Appendix 4.

The Open Space Strategy recognises its role in managing climate risk within open space, such as helping to mitigate the UHIE, as well as other climate risks such as stormwater inundation risk (which is further discussed below).

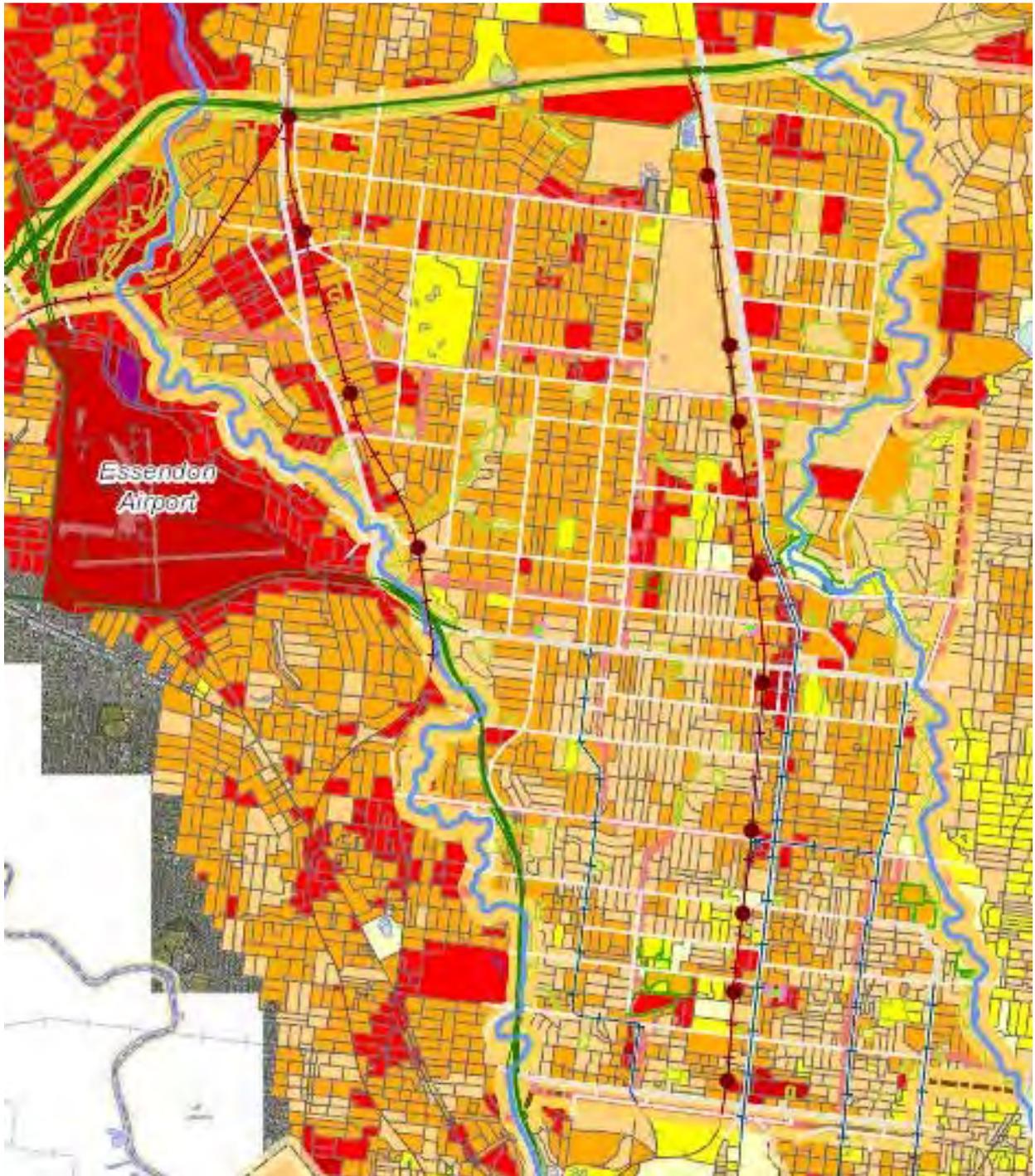


Figure 7: Thermal image during Summer, 2018, of Merri-bek

2.4 The role of open space in protecting nature

Merri-bek Urban Forest Strategy

Merri-bek's Urban Forest Strategy is geared towards transforming the municipality into a place where trees and vegetation become integral to the urban landscape and open spaces.

This strategy outlines several key objectives, including:

- **Doubling Canopy Cover:** The goal of increasing canopy cover across Merri-bek to 29 per cent by 2050 to help mitigate the impacts of heatwaves and increase shade, cooling and evapotranspiration.
- **Tree Health and Establishment:** Improving the health and successful establishment of Council trees.
- **Tree Protection:** Protecting existing trees through enhanced planning and enforcement measures.
- **Community Collaboration:** Collaborating closely with community groups and residents to support initiatives that promote greenery while fostering positive community attitudes towards the urban forest.
- **Tree Planting:** Continuing the planting of canopy trees in Merri-bek's streets and parks to fill vacant sites and replace underperforming trees.
- **Water Sensitive Urban Design:** Improving tree health and cooling through the integration of water-sensitive urban design.

Much of Merri-bek's existing canopy is found in open spaces, including large canopy trees in parklands surrounding sports grounds, playgrounds, along Creek corridors and near wetlands. As the Urban Forest Strategy expands our canopy, a substantial portion will be planted in streetscapes, nature strips and open spaces. This expanded canopy offers various benefits to open spaces, such as creating shaded and comfortable areas, increasing physical activity and fostering a stronger connection to nature. Furthermore, it enhances the municipality's resilience to climate change by providing relief from high temperatures, cooling open spaces and offering cooler places for people during excessively hot weather.

Merri-bek Nature Plan

Merri-bek offers an array of nature experiences, including areas of original (remnant) vegetation, grasslands, creek corridors, wetlands and habitats for a diverse range of native animals and birds. The Merri-bek Nature Plan aims to enhance and enrich our nature and biodiversity, as well as highlight challenges such as climate change, habitat fragmentation, loss of biodiversity and the adverse impact of increasing urban development, via four key themes:

1. Protect and enhance biodiversity conservation
2. Seek opportunities for the private realm to contribute positively to biodiversity
3. Connect people to nature
4. Improve governance and collaboration in natural resource management.

The Open Space Strategy acknowledges its crucial role in achieving the Nature Plan and these themes, as Figure 8 illustrates that much of our critical nature and biodiversity exists within open space (include public open space and several large private landholdings). These areas include our creek corridors, the Northern Golf Course and cemeteries



Figure 8: Map of Merri-bek showing key identified critical habitat corridors. ¹⁰

The Merri-bek Indigenous Vegetation Assessment 2011 (MIVA) provides the most recent detailed assessment of remnant and revegetated areas across Merri-bek. It confirms that much of our indigenous vegetation is on public land along waterways and also in private

¹⁰ Open spaces are indicated by the light green shapes and waterways in blue. The tree figure indicated the habitat corridor with a green buffer identified around it.

land at the Northern Golf Course and the Fawkner Cemetery and Northern Memorial Park in Glenroy.

The Merri Creek

The Merri Creek and its tributaries, including the Edgars, Merlynston and Campbellfield Creeks, form a rich environmental, heritage and recreation open space corridor. Together they create open space corridors that offer significant environmental and recreation values. A shared user path runs along the Merri Creek, allowing for walking, running and cycling from the south of Merri-bek in Fitzroy North up to the north of Merri-bek in Fawkner. It also includes a diversity of nearby open spaces such as playgrounds, sports facilities and picnic areas.

Across 2021 - 2023, Council created the Fawkner Merri Parklands plan to manage the areas of Merri Creek from Coburg North up to Fawkner (in excess of 71 hectares). It details key open space projects, including:

- New dog parks to provide dedicated dog facilities and reduce dogs entering key biodiversity areas such as the Merri Creek
- Additional access paths to improve community access to this creek corridor
- A community garden
- Specific facilities including new play spaces, toilets, BBQs and cricket wickets.

There remain challenges in maintaining the nature and biodiversity within the Merri Creek corridor, such as continued urbanisation, increased artificial lighting, construction waste and additional stormwater run-off. Furthermore, while the Merri-bek Planning Scheme requires public open space corridors along the creeks to be setback a minimum of 50 metres and the 30 metres to the embankment to be vegetated corridors, there are many private areas which are within as little as 6.0m of the Creek due to historical subdivisions and development patterns.

The Moonee Ponds Creek

The Moonee Ponds Creek and its tributaries, including Melville Creek, also form a significant linear open space corridor in Merri-bek. The Moonee Ponds Creek is a major tributary of the Yarra River, bordering much of Merri-bek's western boundary in the suburbs of Brunswick West, Pascoe Vale South, Pascoe Vale, Oak Park, Glenroy and Gowanbrae.

Originally a series of ponds and wetlands, the Creek has undergone significant human alterations since the arrival of Europeans, including transformation from a chain of ponds into a single concrete drain. Merri-bek and 13 other organisations have together formed the Chain of Ponds collaboration to return the Moonee Ponds Creek to its former natural state. This has led to substantial open space and environmental improvements to the Moonee

Ponds Creek and surrounding land, including concrete parts of the drain being removed to allow the re-introduction of the natural Moonee Ponds Creek setting.

The Northern Golf Course

The Northern Golf Course is a privately owned 50-hectare course in Glenroy. It contains stands of highly significant vegetation around the fairways from different vegetation communities, some of which are otherwise poorly represented within Merri-bek. The Westbreen Creek also traverses through the course and several wetlands and ponds provide further habitat.

Red Gum Woodlands mostly dominate the course containing approximately 800 mature River Red Gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) and approximately 40 Yellow Gums (*Eucalyptus leucoxylon*). Many of these are very large, having circumferences of over 3 metres, and contain tree hollows providing valuable shelter and breeding habitat for parrots, owls, bats and other native wildlife. Vegetation along the Westbreen Creek and around dams on the site add to the diversity of habitat at the course, supporting a range of waterfowl and frog species.

Council has been developing supportive relationships with the managers of the Northern Golf Course to protect remaining native vegetation, sympathetic land practices and tree hollows, and will continue this through the new Open Space Strategy.

Fawkner and Glenroy Cemeteries

The Glenroy Northern Memorial park and the Fawkner Cemetery, managed by the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (GMCT), exceed a combined 210 hectares of restricted open space. The Merlynston and Campbellfield Creeks both travel through the cemeteries which also contain pockets of remnant woodland vegetation and stands of old trees. The sites contain Grassy Woodland, potentially meeting the definition 'Grassy Eucalypt Woodland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain' community under the federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Expansive areas of this type are likely habitat for the Golden Sun Moth (*Synemon plana*) which is also listed under the EPBC Act as a threatened species and has been observed at the site on one occasion. Whistling Kite and Brown Falcon, both characteristic grassland raptors which require extensive, relatively secluded areas to hunt, have also been observed.

Challenges to this nature and biodiversity however include clearing as a result of cemetery expansion. Council is continuing to work with the GMCT to preserve this important habitat and biodiversity, as well as explore how the community can continue to use the cemeteries for open space (such as walking, cycling, experiencing nature and biodiversity).

Bababi Djinanang grasslands

The Bababi Djinanang grasslands is a large four hectare area along the along the western banks of the Merri Creek in Fawkner. Initially set aside as a freeway reservation, they contain some of the best quality examples of grassland vegetation in the municipality. It has been protected and intensively managed for conversation since 1995 by in collaboration with the Merri Creek Management Committee. Nearby, some smaller grasslands at Emma and Hare Streets in Fawkner also offer important grassland habitat.

The need for dark spaces

In 2023, the University of Melbourne undertook research for Council exploring wildlife connectivity across Merri-bek. This included existing habitat for arachnids, birds, frogs, fungi, insects, mammals, plants, reptiles and other invertebrates, such as the Superb Fairy Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*), the Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*), the Swamp Wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*), the Eastern Blue-tongued Lizard (*Tiliqua scincoides*) and the Blue Banded bee (*Amegilla asserta*).

This research highlighted the need to protect our existing spaces for nature as well as undertake key open space actions to improve habitat, biodiversity and wildlife corridors, including: land acquisition complementary to key biodiversity areas and known wildlife corridors, increase specific vegetation such as understory shrubs and creek riparian habitat, create artificial tree hollows and crossing structure sfor wildlife over creeks and large spaces to avoid roads, and protect and extend darker night-time skies by reducing artificial illumination. Figure 9 below is an example of recommended actions, such as protecting and extending night-time sky for the Lesser long-eared bat (*Nictophilus geoffroyi*).

The Open Space Strategy aims to promote, enhance and protect these significant open spaces for nature, habitat and biodiversity.

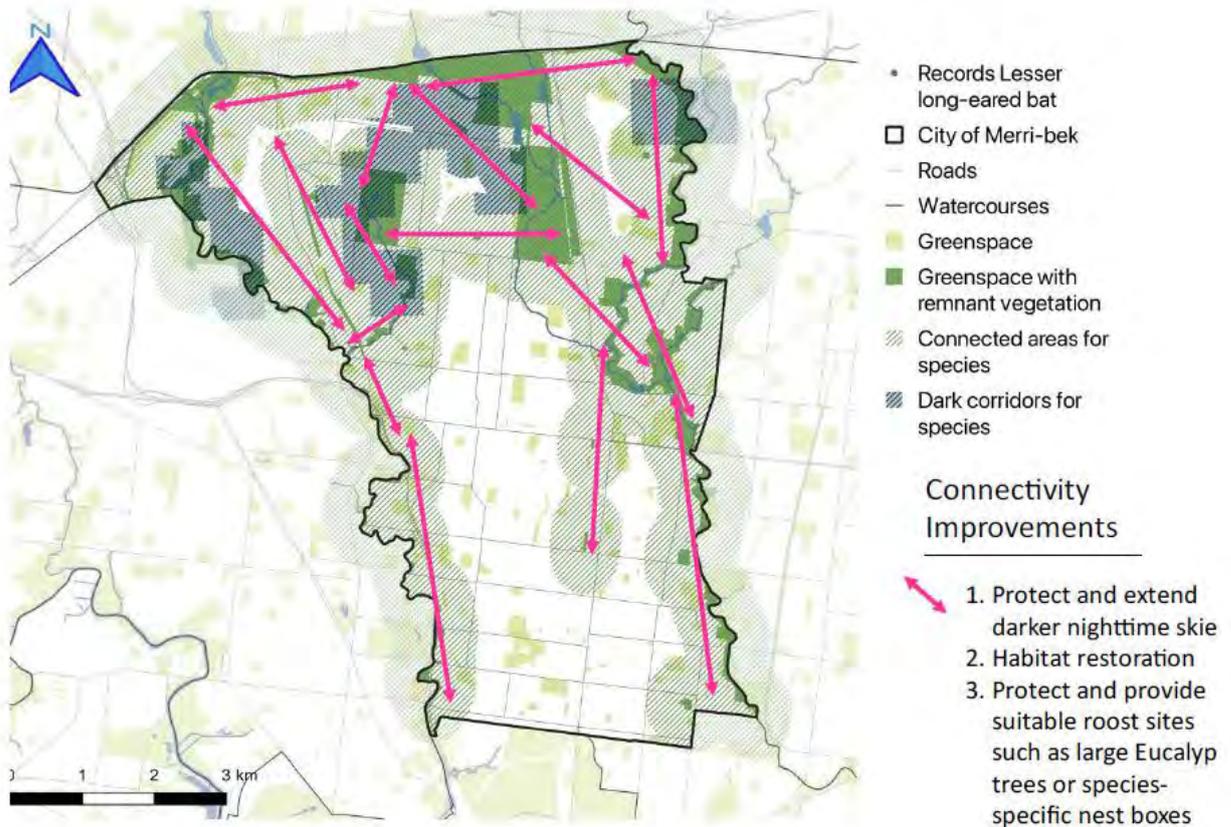


Figure 9: Example of areas to investigate protecting and extending night-time sky to improve connectivity for the Lesser long-eared bat (*Nictophilus geoffroyi*) and other species.

Source: Hahs AK, Mata L, Palma E, Schiller J (2023).

Integrated water management

The Merri-bek Integrated Water Management Strategy 2040 is dedicated to transforming Merri-bek into a water-sensitive city that can withstand the challenges of future population growth and climate change. The overarching vision is to integrate water into all aspects of the municipality. This Strategy aligns greatly with the Open Space Strategy as much opportunity for creating a water-sensitive Merri-bek lies within our open spaces. This is because our open spaces provide opportunity for cooling and greening, and are critical parts of our water system where water flows to and allows water to permeate (such as sports fields and parks), which aids in stormwater retention and reduction of floodwater reduction. Integration of water into our open space will help create a city that is not only healthy, green cooler and productive, but a city that is more resilient in the face of climate change with vital habitat for our plants and animals.

The Open Space Strategy incorporates a direction and actions which will help achieve the Integrated Water Management vision. This commitment underscores Merri-bek's dedication

to sustainable water management practices within its open spaces and aligns with the broader objective of creating a water-sensitive and resilient community.

2.5 The role of open space for people

Health and wellbeing

The Open Space Strategy reinforces recognition that there is a strong connection between public health and wellbeing and the physical design of spaces in urban places, including our open spaces. It is also mindful that our open spaces provide land for natural recreation and opportunity to access and experience biodiversity for our residents. There is great evidence that green spaces are vital in the support of positive physical and psychological impacts for users. During the COVID-19 pandemic this became even more apparent, and Council is aware of the important role that our open spaces played during this tough period.

The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan within the Merri-bek Council Plan 2021-2025 further acknowledges this and includes the following goals for open space, which are incorporated in the Open Space Strategy vision, directions and actions:

- Protect existing trees and plant more trees through development controls on private land and plant and nurture canopy trees on public land where needed most.
- Use open space in ways that protect and enhance biodiversity and tree canopy, creating spaces for nature to thrive and gives the community fair access to a wide range of passive and active recreational opportunities
- Strategically increase accessible and inclusive open spaces based on local needs and other priorities for parks, playgrounds, dog parks, sporting facilities, community gardens, eating, toilets, etc
- Invest in an integrated approach to water management in public spaces and private developments to improve water usage and water quality entering our local waterways and respond to flash flooding and the urban heat island effect
- Use open space in ways that gives the community fair access to a wide range of passive and active recreational opportunities while still enhancing and protecting biodiversity, waterway health and tree canopy.

Play

Public open spaces, including formal playgrounds, creeks corridors and overall open spaces, provide children with valuable activities and experiences that are often not available in their home. These contribute to children's personal development through physical and mental stimulation and social interaction and allow play which helps children's understanding of the world expand¹¹.

¹¹ Taken from the Merri-bek Play Strategy 2016 – 2020.

Play spaces with open space can provide a free, accessible and stimulating family entertainment opportunity. They contribute to the development of social connections in our community, as groups of families, friends and carers with children often choose a play space with picnic facilities for weekend gatherings and celebrations. Providing spaces which encourage physical activity and social interaction are also vital in addressing some of the physical and mental health challenges we face today.

Council is committed to providing a diverse range of play spaces which are presentable, challenging and cater to children of all abilities and ages. The Open Space Strategy includes a key direction to improving open space for everyone, with actions directed to making our play spaces across Merri-bek more accessible via universal design principles and a new premier All Access Abilities playground.

Bush play, nature play and bush kinder

Outdoor play in nature brings many benefits for children, while cognitive, social and emotional development are all shown to be greatly enhanced by time spent in nature. Time in nature also has positive effects on children's mental health and emotional regulation while outdoor play increases physical activity fitness and imagination. In addition, fostering nature connection in children develops positive environmental behaviours and is a common trait among those engaged in environmental protection in adulthood.

Nature play is a term used to describe outdoor play in a natural or naturalistic setting with natural materials. It can occur in natural landscapes or in designed landscapes which provide naturalistic elements such as rocks, logs and soil.

Bush kinder and bush playgroups describes early childhood education programs for three to six year olds which are delivered outdoors in bushland settings with nature play opportunities. They can be informal or formally organised. Whilst Council aims to increase these activities, the Open Space Strategy recognises there are both challenges and also opportunities for promoting nature play, bush play and bush kinders.

As this type of play usually occurs in landscapes along our creek corridors, Council needs to strike a balance between promoting this important play with environment protection. These areas also require a different maintenance approach to typical grounds, and a key aspect of this management is to regularly refresh play materials (such as retaining pruned tree branches, plant selection to include loose parts such as nuts or cones and add seasons interaction such as colourful fruit or flowers).

Community feedback on play spaces

Community consultation revealed that open spaces, particularly play areas such as playgrounds, skate parks, BMX parks, and bush play areas, are of great importance to

children, adults and caregivers alike. It also highlighted several challenges associated with these play areas, including:

1. **Need for More Playgrounds:** There is a need to increase the number of playgrounds throughout the municipality and to upgrade existing playgrounds to better cater to our growing population and needs such as disability access.
2. **Lack of Shade:** Many residents have expressed concerns about the absence of adequate shade in playgrounds, whether in the form of trees or shade cloths.
3. **Dog-Related Concerns:** Concerns have been raised about the presence of dogs (and dog waste) in or near playground areas.
4. **Facilities Near Playgrounds:** Feedback has highlighted the need for additional amenities near playgrounds, such as public toilets, to improve the overall experience for visitors.

The Open Space Strategy includes actions which are intended to continue promoting diverse play needs, as well as explore actions such as new dog parks and canopy tree planting, to address concerns raised about our play spaces.

Civic spaces and public forecourts

Civic spaces are a type of open space that can include urban plazas, squares, pedestrian malls and forecourts in our activity centres. They are ideally located to support the large numbers of people from all across our city who work in and visit civic facilities, commercial centres and cultural destinations, providing them with a place to spend time while out and about, and to connect with others.

These spaces are considered to be an extension of the community itself and a forum for public life, particularly in key areas of densification. They serve the many diverse groups and individuals in our community by providing free, inclusive and comfortable spaces for public activities such as: celebrations, festivals and events, protest, social gathering, cultural activities, and relaxation and enjoyment.

Good civic spaces help to create a unique identity for a neighbourhood or place, and through this engender a strong sense of community belonging and ownership, as well as a mutual sense of pride. These are critical to our community's health and wellbeing, particularly in combatting issues of loneliness and mental health. Civic spaces also provide important benefits to the local and cultural economy by providing spaces for creative exchange.

Examples in Merri-bek include the Victoria Street Mall in central Coburg, a vibrant space used for enjoying the local cafes, socialising and providing local human connections and interaction. The Open Space Strategy recognises the benefits of these unique open spaces and the important role they will continue to play in Merri-bek, especially in our key areas of densification in the Brunswick, Coburg and Glenroy activity centres.

Connectivity within and to open space

Council is committed to improving local walking and cycling opportunities within the municipality, recognising that these initiatives not only contribute to the health and well-being of the community but also play a vital role in reducing carbon emissions, alleviating traffic congestion, and enhancing the overall quality of life in Merri-bek.

Open spaces play a pivotal role in how people move and travel across Merri-bek, with open space often serving as a destination for people to travel to and also using open space to travel to other places. Open spaces serve as destinations, drawing people who use them for various recreational purposes. Our open spaces form a network connecting various locations, streets, community facilities and key transport nodes and routes. These spaces are interconnected, such as the Merri Creek trail, which stretches from Fitzroy North to Fawkner. Similarly, open spaces like Fleming Park in Brunswick East serve as vital connectors between streets on either side, forming part of an established cyclist corridor.

The Open Space Strategy aims to enhance the links, trails and corridors within our open space network. It seeks to improve the safety of passive users within these open space corridors by making shared paths wider and exploring the needs of users, such as separated paths for cyclists and walkers. It is also important to acknowledge that while our open spaces play an important part in walking and cycling networks, they may only meet some transport needs as they may not be suitable for night-time travel due to lack of passive surveillance or lighting (such as along creeks corridors) and are not suitable for higher speed cycling as the shared paths are used by many users.

The Strategy will continue exploring how our open space network can promote active transport and provide improved connections between open spaces and other facilities, such as exploring how to increase physical access to the regional Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek corridors and exploring different user needs, such as walkers and cyclists.

Formal and informal sport

Open spaces serve as the primary venues for various organised sports activities such as club baseball, football, netball, soccer and tennis. These areas also provide for informal and recreational sports, such as jogging, running, impromptu games and casual sports. The Open Space Strategy recognises the significance and value of sports and active recreation in our community and that these activities offer a plethora of advantages which are realised across all stages of life (including physical well-being, improved mental health, overall well-being, and fostering stronger communities).

Managing open space for formal and informal sport has challenges, including:

- Increasing participation in sports and growing demand for female sports teams, such as surge in soccer, football, and tennis participation and the emergence of sports like

hockey, necessitating continued investment in maintaining and enhancing the quality of existing formal sports facilities as well as new facilities.

- Concerns with dogs using open space that includes sports grounds, in particular instances where use of facilities by both dogs and people playing sport at the same time can lead to unease. There have also been instances where dogs have impacted quality of sports grounds by digging and leaving waste (which can cause nuisance and even injury to other users).
- Lack of suitable spaces for informal sports, particularly those with night-time lighting.
- Condition of sports grounds being inadequate for play, such as being flooding or inadequate drainage.

The Open Space Strategy will continue to explore how Council can better cater for sports and our overall community in open space. This includes key actions aimed at sharing open space between users better and exploring the need for more specific sports facilities.

Exercising dogs

As the human population of Merri-bek continues to grow, so does our dog population. The registration of dogs in Merri-bek has surged by over 300 per cent between the 2017/2018 and 2022/2023 financial years. Merri-bek has over 20,000 registered dogs, including dogs that live in detached homes with sizeable backyards, dogs who live in townhouses with smaller yards and courtyards, and dogs who live in apartments. Council therefore wants to ensure we are appropriately catering to our dog population.

The community engagement process for the Open Space Strategy confirmed that a common way people use and value open space is for exercising and socialising their dogs. Providing dogs with proper exercise and stimulation in safe environments is essential. Additionally, interacting with and walking dogs offers a valuable opportunity for individuals to socialise and establish human connections and walk more, which contributes to healthy lifestyles.

During the community engagement process, Council also heard that not everyone feels comfortable around dogs and that the presence of dogs can be a barrier for some people using or feeling comfortable in open space. Council also heard that dogs can cause concern to sports users during formal sports and training and participation, and adversely impact recreational runners and cyclists.

Merri-bek offers a diverse range of open spaces for dogs, including parklands designated as off-leash areas, sports grounds where dogs can roam freely when formal sports activities are not in progress, purpose-built dog parks equipped with agility apparatus and an assortment of trails and shared paths designed for dog walking on a leash. The Open Space Strategy will continue to explore the need for these types of open space facilities, as well as

explore actions aimed at balancing the needs of dogs and dog walkers and overall open space users.

Commercial leases

Council operates a diverse mix of commercial leases in our open spaces, including small cafés to telecommunications operators. Council has heard varied feedback about commercial leases. Many persons reiterated their desire for leases in open spaces that would enhance their use of existing spaces and activate them more, such as cafés, yoga classes and events. Council also heard concerns with some leases, such as telecommunications leases and associated infrastructure. Council will ensure that future decisions about leases in open space align with the vision of the Open Space Strategy and the 5 key directions, as well as aligning with the decision-making framework further outlined in Section 4.4 **Error! Reference source not found..**

2.6 Safety in open space for all

Safety

Concerns of personal safety in our open space has been highlighted as a major barrier to people using our open spaces and feeling comfortable when using them. Safety and perceptions of safety are very complex. Perceived safety and fear can depend on a combination of an individual's characteristics (such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic background and so on, as previously discussed) and the physical environments to which they are exposed. It is widely recognised that societies need to improve safety overall, including in our public and open spaces.

Concerns about safety were widely expressed by our communities – including women, homeless people, transgender and gender diverse people, teenagers, our culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD communities), older persons, persons with a disability and our LGBTIQ+ community. The Council received feedback about specific safety concerns, including:

- Concerns when using our open spaces, including areas along Creek corridors like Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek, due to spaces often being considered isolated or idle.
- Being made to feel unwelcome due to the persons cultural background when using parks and sports grounds, both during the day and at night.
- Concerns expressed by homeless people about their safety in public open space.
- Feeling unsafe due to insufficient lighting in open spaces at night, a lack of activity during the day and evenings in many areas, and specific locations with restricted view lines and obscured entry and exit points.
- Concerns when actively commuting, including cyclists, particularly in the evenings and during the winter months.

- Frequent observations that open spaces felt safer during the pandemic lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 as they were busier with more people around.

This feedback reaffirmed results from the YourGround research commissioned by the Victorian Government between April and July 2021. This research, undertaken by the XYX Lab and Crowdspot, provided a digital mapping platform whereby over 6,000 submissions highlighted detailed lived experiences in locations across Victoria. Merri-bek was mentioned throughout, with participants detailing significant safety concerns in our open spaces.

Council also commissioned XYX Lab to explore safety along the Merri Creek in Coburg, which identified various key interventions aimed at improving women's experience and safety in open space, including: infrastructure and amenity improvements such as lighting, wayfinding signage, improved entry and exit points and path etiquette; communication and engagement, including promoting the importance of respect and equity in open space; and inclusion of women in open space decision-making such as infrastructure design.

Council is also working in partnership with Darebin City Council and CERES in development of the Merri Merri Wayi, which is a community-led collaboration to enable our natural and urban worlds to thrive along the Merri Creek. This includes exploring ways to build improved community connection with the Creek, Indigenous ecological and cultural knowledge, connecting to and caring for nature, enhance recreation use, and promote peaceful and safety as well as shared use.

The Open Space Strategy acknowledges the complexity and challenges associated with safety in open spaces and recognises that achieving positive change and improvement extends beyond the strategy and the Council's scope. Council is dedicated to collaborating with the community, institutions like Victoria Police and social organisations to make society as a whole safer and more inclusive.

The strategy outlines actions designed to help improve safety in open space, such as:

- Exploring safety in infrastructure, which includes lighting, promoting activity, ensuring unobstructed view lines, and clearly marked entry/exit points.
- Actions to foster social cohesion to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their identity, feel safe and welcomed.
- Highlighting the importance of designing and managing open spaces to enhance the perception of safety, incorporating principles such as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

Key actions also highlight the need to balance these with other considerations, largely increased artificial illumination along open spaces in key biodiversity areas. Actions including creation of a holistic dark parks policy will help balance these objectives.

Open space for girls and gender diversity

Council is aware from talking with our community, and from campaigns such as the Make Space for Girls campaign based in the United Kingdom, that many of our open spaces do not adequately cater for girls, young women or gender diverse persons. The Strategy includes actions to explore open space needs and how to better cater for these needs. For example specific ideas such as social seating allowing girls to face each other or lounge together, walking loops and social events such as park dances, were discussed during community consultation, as seen in Figure 10 and Figure 11 below.



Figure 10: Example of Better design suggestion for parks by Make Space for Girls.



Figure 11: Example of Better design suggestion for parks by Make Space for Girls.

Gender equity and diversity

Council's Human Rights Policy 2016-2026, Gender Equality Commitment and first LGBTIQ+ Action Plan 2023-2026 promote that the principles of gender equity must extend beyond traditional gender binaries. Council's work at the local level is supported by community voices from the Human Rights and Inclusion Advisory Committee, the Gender Equality Reference Group and the LGBTIQ+ Reference Group to ensure that the rights of everyone are respected and included, regardless of their gender identity or expression. Council's work is further strengthened by the Gender Equality Act.

Council will continue to explore how our open spaces can better provides for all of our community, regardless of their gender or diversity. This includes exploring how to make all people feel welcome, by looking at new artwork and events in open spaces.

Child safety

Merri-bek City Council is committed to being a Child Safe organisation and has zero tolerance for child abuse. We believe children and young people have the right to be and feel safe and that their safety and wellbeing is the responsibility of everyone. All child safe incidents will be treated seriously and responded to promptly.

At Merri-bek we support and encourage the empowerment and participation of all children and young people. As an inclusive organisation we recognise and respect diversity. We are committed to providing culturally safe environments where all children and young people are heard, respected and encouraged to reach their full potential.

We recognise the distinct history and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and their families and encourage the expression, enjoyment and sharing of their cultures.

Cultural diversity

Merri-bek boasts a culturally diverse population, with 33 per cent of its residents born overseas and 39 per cent speaking languages other than English, according to 2021 data. Immigration patterns have greatly contributed to the rich cultural tapestry of the community, with notable groups including the Italian and Greek populations among the elderly, as well as an increasing number of people arriving from countries like India, Nepal, and Lebanon. The diversity of languages spoken in Merri-bek is wide-ranging and includes Italian, Arabic, Greek, Urdu, Nepali, and Turkish.

Certain suburbs within Merri-bek have higher concentrations of specific cultural communities. For example, Glenroy has a substantial Nepalese population, while Fawkner has approximately 10 per cent of its residents speaking Urdu.

This cultural diversity presents unique opportunities for the design and provision of open spaces. Consideration must be given to facilities catering to emerging non-traditional sports, accommodations for female-only participation, spaces for larger social gatherings, and safety concerns.

Throughout the consultation process for the Open Space Strategy, the Council recognised the need to better acknowledge and incorporate the various cultures present in open spaces. This entails providing cultural facilities in or near open spaces, such as prayer rooms, as well as offering more events and activities in open spaces. Additionally, there is a demand for inter-generational facilities in open spaces, such as areas equipped with playgrounds, BBQ facilities, shelters, and restrooms to cater to diverse community needs and foster inclusivity. Council will continue to explore these throughout the five strategy direction and actions.

Homelessness

Merri-bek City Council is dedicated to designing and providing public spaces that support homeless individuals. Recognising the universal right of all people, including those experiencing homelessness, to access public spaces and facilities and participate in society to improve overall well-being. Understanding the health implications of homelessness, Council is taking a human rights and health equity approach, including: actively engaging with individuals with lived experiences to create welcoming spaces (including open space), acknowledging the value of informal architecture and considering essential facilities such as toilets in open space, and fostering stronger communities and a more equitable, connected and compassionate community (including within open space).

Open space for all abilities

Merri-bek is committed to ensuring that persons with a disability have equal access to opportunities, support and assistance, enabling them to fully participate in and engage with their community. During the community engagement process for the Open Space Strategy, Council received feedback from many individuals who expressed their struggles in adequately accessing open spaces or utilising open space as desired. These concerns highlighted a range of barriers, including:

1. Inappropriate surfaces in playgrounds, rendering them physically inaccessible for wheelchair users.
2. Playground equipment that is not equipped for children or adults with physical disabilities.
3. Insufficient or unclean restroom facilities in open spaces.
4. Inadequate facilities for neurodiverse children and adults.
5. Concerns related to poor dog behaviour, dog waste and safety.

The Open Space Strategy will address these identified barriers, challenges and concerns. Section 4.3 includes the direction 'Open space for everyone' and outlines key actions aimed at making open spaces in Merri-bek more inclusive, accessible, and enjoyable for individuals. This commitment confirms Council's dedication to ensuring that all community members, regardless of their abilities, can fully engage with and benefit from the open spaces within Merri-bek.

3 Spatial analysis of open space in Merri-bek

3.1 Categorising of open space in Merri-bek

Open space categories

In the metropolitan Melbourne Open Space for Everyone Strategy, open space is categorised into one of three types, as illustrated in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Open Space categories within the Metropolitan Melbourne Open Space for Everyone categories.

Category	Accessible	Restricted	Encumbered or restricted
Primary purpose	Open Space	Open space	Not open space
Examples	Parks	Botanical and zoological gardens	Government schools
	Coastal foreshores, bays and waterways	Conservation reserves	Retarding basins
	Pathways and promenades	Golf courses	Pipe tracks
	Community sportsfields	Racecourses	Utility easements
	Off-road recreation trails	Community farms	Reservoirs
	Lakes and wetlands		Cemeteries
	Gardens		Boulevards
	Civic squares		Road reserves
	Public forecourts		Airspace over and space under transport corridors
	Piers and jetties		Streets and transport corridors
		Publicly accessible rooftops	
		Disused quarries in public ownership	

Source: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2021.

Merri-bek has a diverse mix of these open spaces illustrated in Figure 12, including:

1. **Accessible open space** owned and managed by Council, the Victorian State Government or public authorities such as Melbourne Water. These open spaces are accessible by the public at all times, including parks, playground, Creek corridors, shared user paths, picnic areas and civic malls and plazas. Examples include the Brunswick Central Parklands parks A G Gillon Oval, Brunswick Park, Clifton Park,

Gilpin Park and Reaburn Reserve, the Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek corridors, new parks such as Citadel Park in Glenroy, and open spaces underneath railway corridors such as underneath Moreland and Coburg Railway stations.

2. **Restricted open space**, including open space that is publicly owned and managed however is restricted in access or use, such as the Box Forest Retarding Basin in Glenroy which is open space owned by Melbourne Water however is currently restricted in access.
3. **Encumbered or restricted open space**, which is privately owned and managed. These open spaces can provide direct or indirect public benefit however may not be able to be accessed by all persons at all times. Examples include the Fawkner Cemetery and Northern Memorial Park in Glenroy, which can be publicly accessed for walking, running and experiencing nature, however cannot be used for other common open space activities such as formal sport. Another example is a private sports facility, such as the Northern Golf Club in Glenroy, which is open space however requires membership to use.

The Open Space Strategy recognises that the majority of open space that Council has direct control to adapt, change and manage, and that much of the open space that our community uses, is considered accessible open space (type 1). It also acknowledges that restricted and encumbered open spaces remain complementary important parts of our open space network, such as providing opportunity for leisure and recreation as well as important areas of habitat, nature and biodiversity.

To facilitate informed decision-making regarding open space and to gain insights into the quantity and variety of open spaces within Merri-bek, each open space is assigned a specific position within an open space hierarchy. The unique role of each open space in the network is determined by factors such as its location, size, usage, character, and its urban or natural surroundings.



Figure 12: Map of open space broken into the three categories across Merri-bek.

An open space hierarchy

During the development of the Open Space Strategy, Council explored our existing open spaces and their individual characteristics such as their size, common uses and location. This allowed Council to understand our existing open space network, allowing identification of shortcomings in the network and necessary changes and opportunities for the future.

Table 3 below, presents the Merri-bek Open Space Hierarchy, which defines open spaces according to their role in our open space network. This hierarchy is tailored to Merri-bek's open space network. It recognises that our open spaces differ, largely depending on their size, location and features, which therefore impacts what open space uses and needs the open spaces can provide for.

Table 3: Merri-bek open space hierarchy

Hierarchy	Size (hectares (ha) / square metres (sqm)	Catchment	Purpose and function
Where it sits in the hierarchy	The size of the open space	Based on a walking distance of the open space	The key uses and activities the open space provides for
Regional	Undefined	No specific distance as this type of space is often a destination space people will travel further to reach.	Open spaces valued and visited by a broader catchment of users as well as the local community. They are generally accessible to persons from adjoining municipality and offer many attractions and uses. Examples include the Coburg Lake Reserve, the Merri Creek trail, the Moonee Ponds Creek trail, and Royal Park within the City of Melbourne.
District	More than 3.0 ha / more than 30,000sqm	A walking distance of 500 metres.	Open spaces visited primarily by the municipality, providing facilities including formal and informal sporting facilities, large scale recreation or play facilities, key significant sites, etc. Examples include the Brunswick Central Parklands in Brunswick and ATC Cook Reserve in Glenroy.

Local	Between 0.5 – 2,99 ha / 5,000sqm – 29,999sqm	A walking distance of 400 metres.	Open spaces that provide a diverse range of facilities for a local or suburb level population. There are still various functions (however fewer than a 'district' space). Examples include Brosnan Park in Coburg and Cox Reserve in Coburg North.
Neighbourhood	Between 0.1 – 0.49 ha / 1,000sqm – 4,999sqm	A walking distance of 300 metres.	Open spaces that are smaller than the Local spaces and still provide facilities including playgrounds, BBQs, etc. Examples include Bulleke-bek Park in Brunswick, Edward Street Reserve in Fawkner and Jacinta Bartlett Family Reserve in Pascoe Vale.
Pocket	Less than 0.1 ha / less than 1,000sqm	A walking distance of 200 metres.	More intimate open spaces within safe and easy walking distance. Whilst they provide fewer formal uses, they complement larger spaces by serving as places for relaxation and as a pause or resting place on a journey. An example is the Wilson Avenue Park in Brunswick.

Note: For more information, see the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.

3.2 Analysis of accessibility to open space

In 2017, Merri-bek established the Park Close to Home framework to enhance accessibility to open spaces throughout the municipality. The primary goal of this initiative is to ensure that residents live within 500 metres of walking distance to an open space, or 300 metres for residents residing in neighbourhood, local, major and principal Activity Centres.

The framework has significantly influenced the allocation of resources in Merri-bek's open space planning in recent years, leading to the acquisition of multiple properties in various suburbs to create new parks. Some of the newly established open spaces include Bullekebek Park and Garrong Parks in Brunswick, Citadel Park in Glenroy, and several others that were under construction at the time this Strategy was written (in Brunswick, Coburg and Pascoe Vale South). These efforts have proven highly successful, addressing the need for additional open spaces in areas that were previously underserved.

Council has undertaken further analysis to explore not just access to any open space, but access to different types of open space, and spaces that meet the needs of the local community. This helps Council to have a greater understanding of how our open spaces meet the needs of our growing population.

To guide our efforts and the Open Space Strategy, Council commissioned an open space analysis, which entailed three key mapping tasks:

1. **Analysis #1:** This phase involved a mapping exercise similar to the Park Close to Home initiative. It entailed mapping open spaces within a walking catchment of 500 metres and open spaces within Neighbourhood or Major Activity Centres with a 300-metre walking catchment.
2. **Analysis #2:** Building upon the findings of Analysis #1 and the Park Close to Home framework, each existing open space in Merri-bek was mapped according to its Hierarchy (pocket, neighbourhood, local, district, regional) and corresponding walking catchments of 200 metres, 300 metres, 400 metres, 500 metres and 500 metres. This analysis helped identify underserved areas with a lack of open space and allowed for the identification of new opportunities.
3. **Analysis #3:** This phase involved mapping key and representative open spaces, including playgrounds, dog off-leash parks, formal sports grounds and creek corridors. These types of open spaces were chosen for their representativeness of key uses and their contribution to building upon the previous analyses.

These three analyses, further discussed below, were then used to recommend key upcoming projects over the next twenty years. These helped create the 20-year Open Space Projects List which provide Council with an understanding of the quantum of projects required to be delivered in open space over this timeframe.

The following sections provide the municipal-wide view of the findings, while the suburb-by-suburb analysis which includes maps showing the specific recommended zones to focus new investments is presented in Appendix 5.

The three analyses described in section 3.2 have been undertaken at a Merri-bek municipal level and also for each suburb in Merri-bek.

3.3 Analysis #1: Mapping existing open spaces

This analysis mapped all existing open spaces in Merri-bek, covering parks, playgrounds, sports grounds, creek corridors, and pocket parks. Open spaces within Major Activity Centres were mapped with a walking catchment of 300 metres, while those in other areas had a catchment of 500 metres. This analysis was a progression from the Park Close to Home framework, differing slightly by focusing on open space catchments rather than residential catchments to facilitate comparisons with Analysis #2.

As shown in Figure 13, the results indicate that several areas in Merri-bek are still not within walking distance of an open space. Notable large gaps in accessibility are observed in central Glenroy, central Brunswick, Pascoe Vale South, and Fawkner. These findings provide crucial insights for planning and developing open spaces to address these underserved areas.

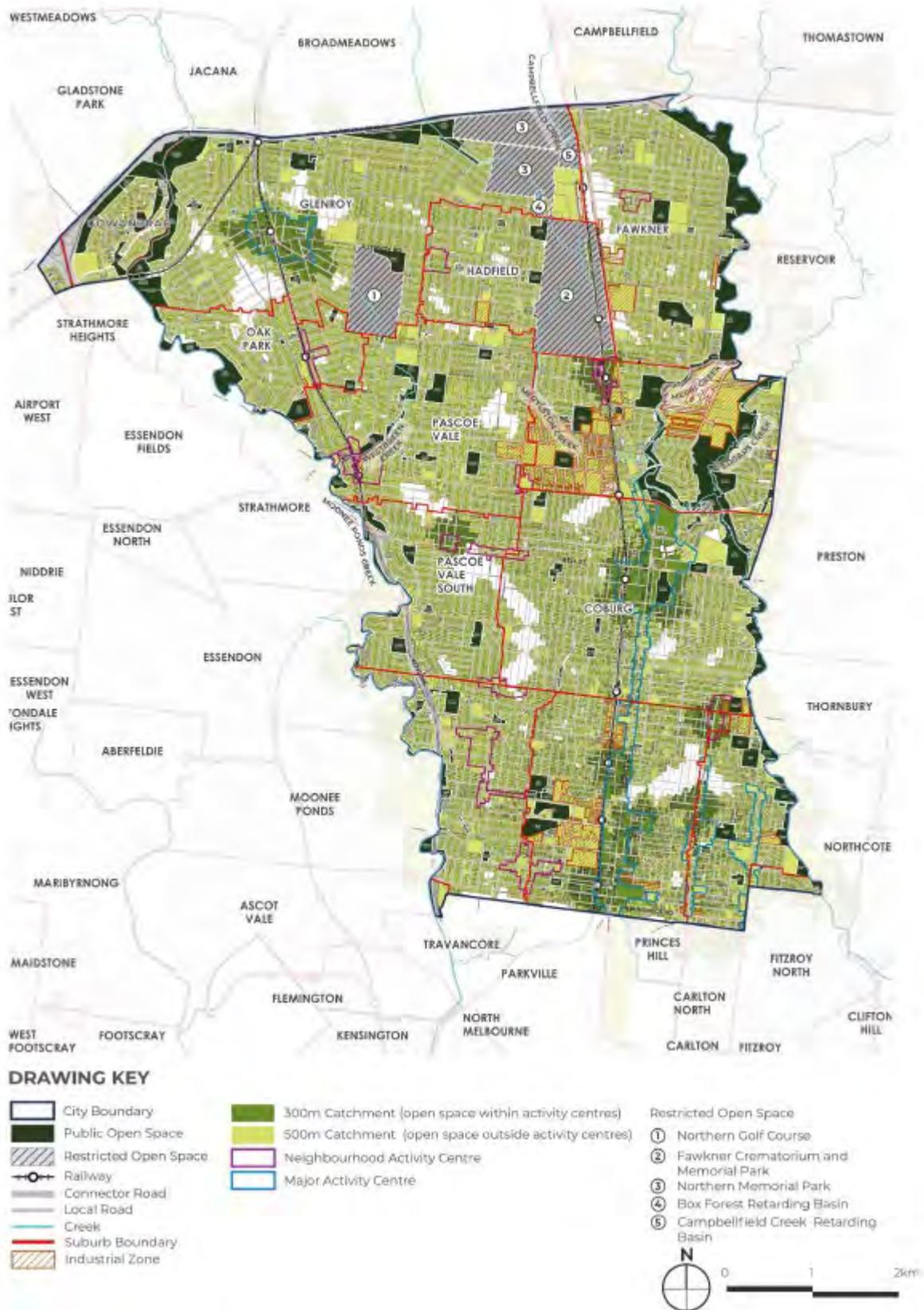


Figure 13: Mapping of open spaces in Merri-bek with 300 metres (if the open space is within a Major Activity Centre) or 500 metres.

3.4 Analysis #2: A hierarchy analysis

In this phase, every existing open space in Merri-bek was categorised according to the hierarchy described earlier section 3.1. These classifications are:

- **Pocket open space:** With a walking catchment of 200 metres.
- **Neighbourhood open space:** With a walking catchment of 300 metres.
- **Local open space:** With a walking catchment of 400 metres.
- **District open space:** With a walking catchment of 500 metres.
- **Regional open space:** With a walking catchment of 500 metres.

Why did we do this?

1. **Community feedback:** During community engagement, Council received feedback from residents expressing dissatisfaction with the types of open spaces near their homes or workplaces. Some open spaces were considered too small for activities such as walking dogs, engaging in informal or formal sports, or relaxation; conversely, other open spaces were seen as offering more extensive opportunities due to their size and the facilities they provided. This analysis allows Council to explore access to different types (and hierarchy) of open space (rather than any open space).
2. **Understanding of our open space network:** Council aimed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the open space network, including the distribution of various types and hierarchies of open spaces. This helps Council gain a greater depth of understanding of open space needs, and furthermore, open spaces type needs.
3. **Population growth:** Council's population growth since Park Close to Home and the Moreland Open Space Strategy 2012 – 2022 has risen greatly and is projected to continue to increase and densify.

Mapping each existing open space according to its hierarchy and associated walking catchment helped pinpoint areas that are underserved in open space or lacking in larger open spaces, and therefore helped identified the need for new open spaces and enhancement in existing open spaces. Figure 14 shows the results of the analysis of open space by hierarchy (Analysis #2), while Figure 15 shows the gap areas identified in either or both of Analysis #1 or Analysis #2.

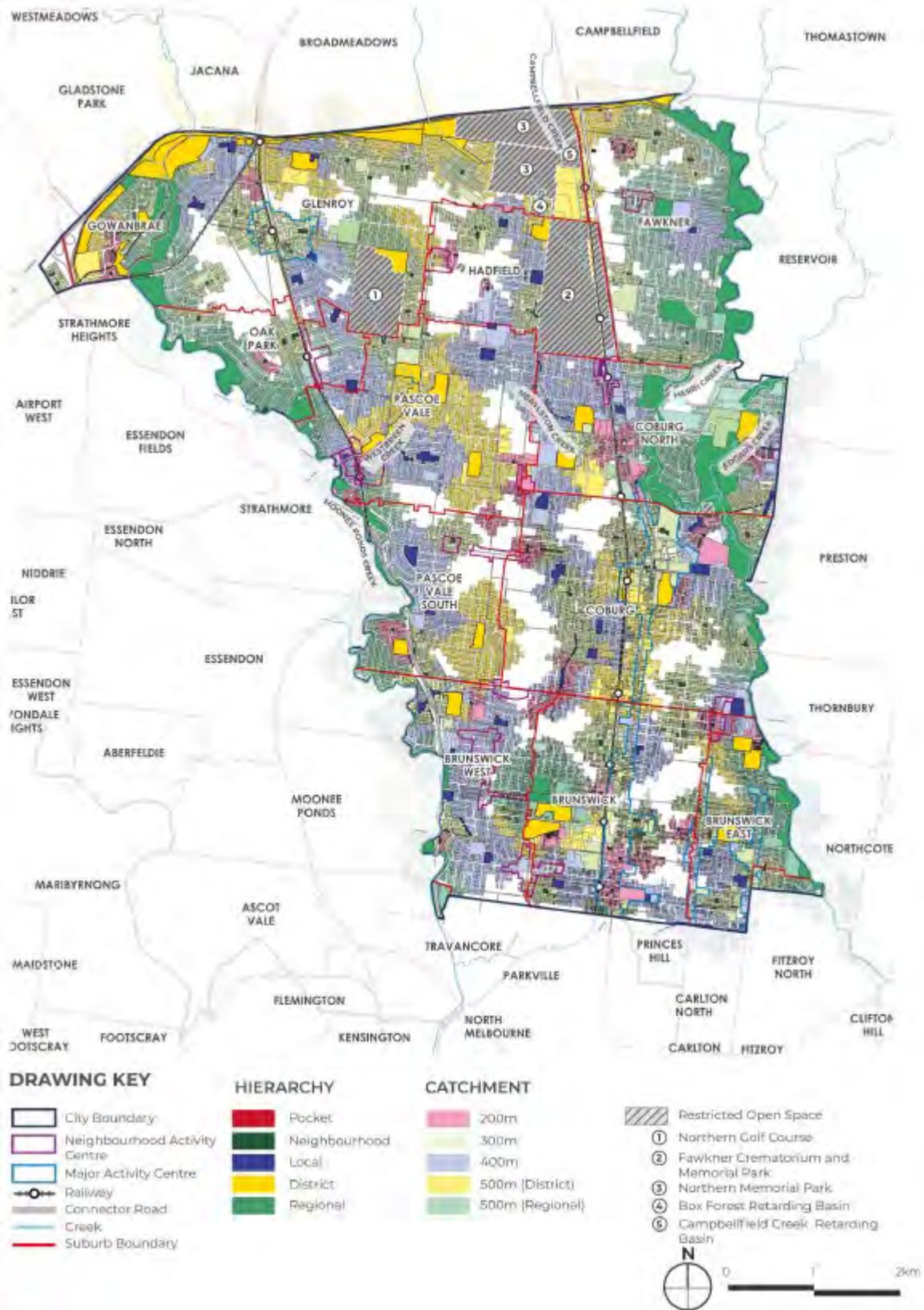


Figure 14: Mapping of all existing open spaces in Merri-bek by their open space hierarchy and open space catchment.

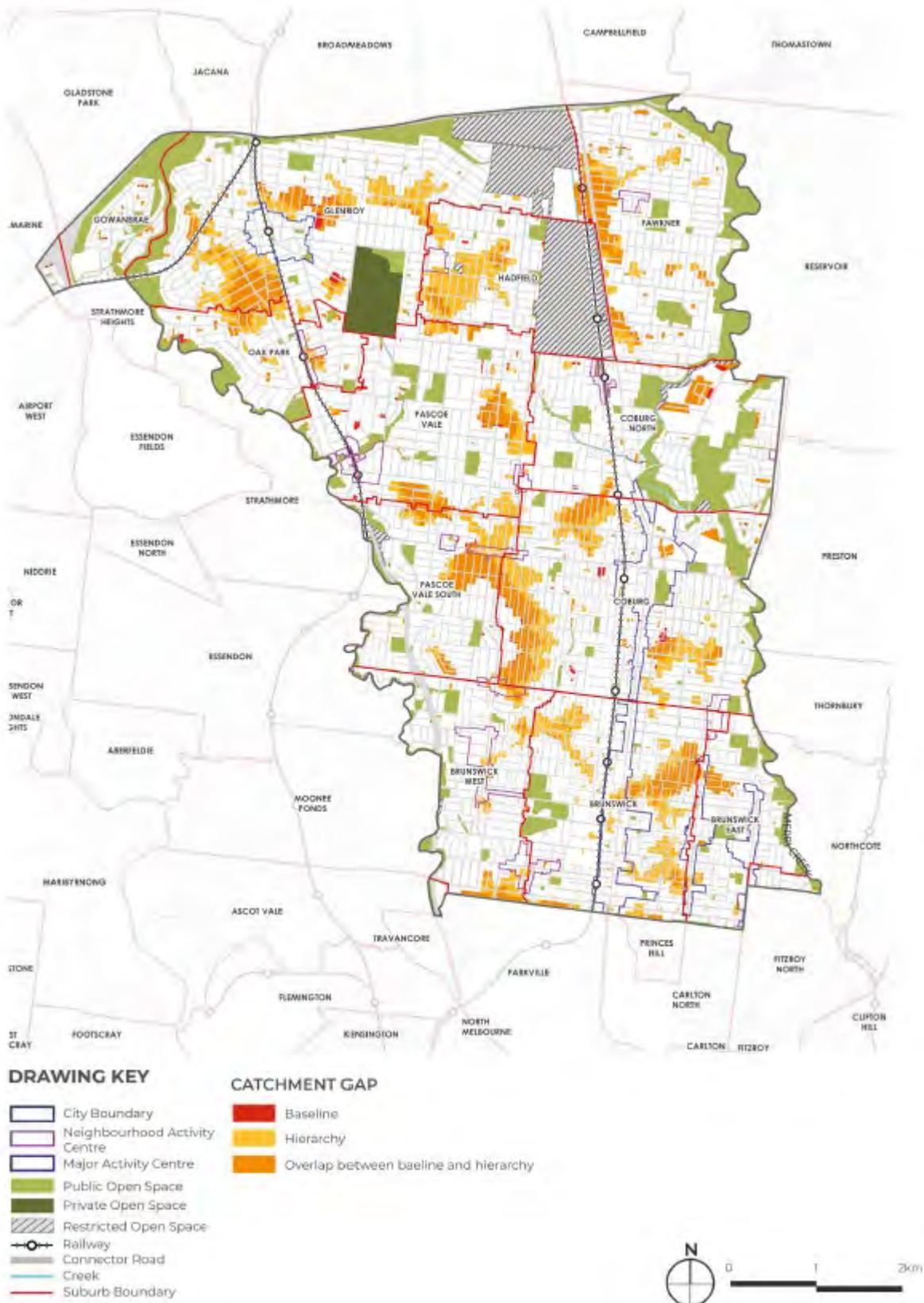


Figure 15: Gap areas highlighted, showing the difference between the gaps identified in analysis #1 and #2 and where they overlap.

3.5 Analysis #3: Specific open space analysis

In this analysis, the Council's existing open spaces were mapped based on four specific functions or land uses: playgrounds, dog off-leash parks, formal sports grounds and creek corridors. These four functions and uses were chosen as they were considered to represent four differing prominent ways open space is used (for play, for exercising or socialising dogs, for experiencing nature and creeks and for participating in formal or informal sports at formal sports grounds).

The analysis has used a 500 metre catchment area, which is established through the existing Park Close to Home framework as a benchmark distance for access to open space. This is useful to allow comparison of different open space functions against one another. In delivering projects based on these analyses, further investigation is required to establish a reasonable service level and need for these facilities in open space.

The results of this analysis provide valuable insights and can be used in conjunction with the findings from Analysis #2 to offer more detailed information, including:

- **Access to Nature and Biodiversity:** Areas that were identified as being greater than 500 metres walking distance of a waterway were found to have less access to open space with significant nature, biodiversity, and canopy. This underscores the need to enhance nature and biodiversity open space experiences in areas not within walking distance (500 metres) of a Creek corridor to allow greater access to nature and biodiversity throughout Merri-bek. (see Figure 16)
- **Playgrounds and Dog Off-Leash Areas:** The analysis identified gaps where residents do not have walking distance access to playgrounds and off-leash dog parks or grounds. This information allows Council to identify priority areas for establishing these play spaces and dog facilities and better cater to our community's needs (see Figure 17 and Figure 18).
- **Sports Grounds:** The location of existing sports grounds helps the Council analyse access to areas for formal and informal sports. It provides further guidance to the Council in identifying priority areas for exploring new sports facilities, which could involve new land acquisitions or shared-use arrangements with other owners such as schools (see Figure 19).

These detailed findings provide the Council with a comprehensive understanding of how to address specific open space needs, enhance the variety of open space experiences available to residents, and prioritise areas for improvement and development in alignment with the community's requirements and preferences.

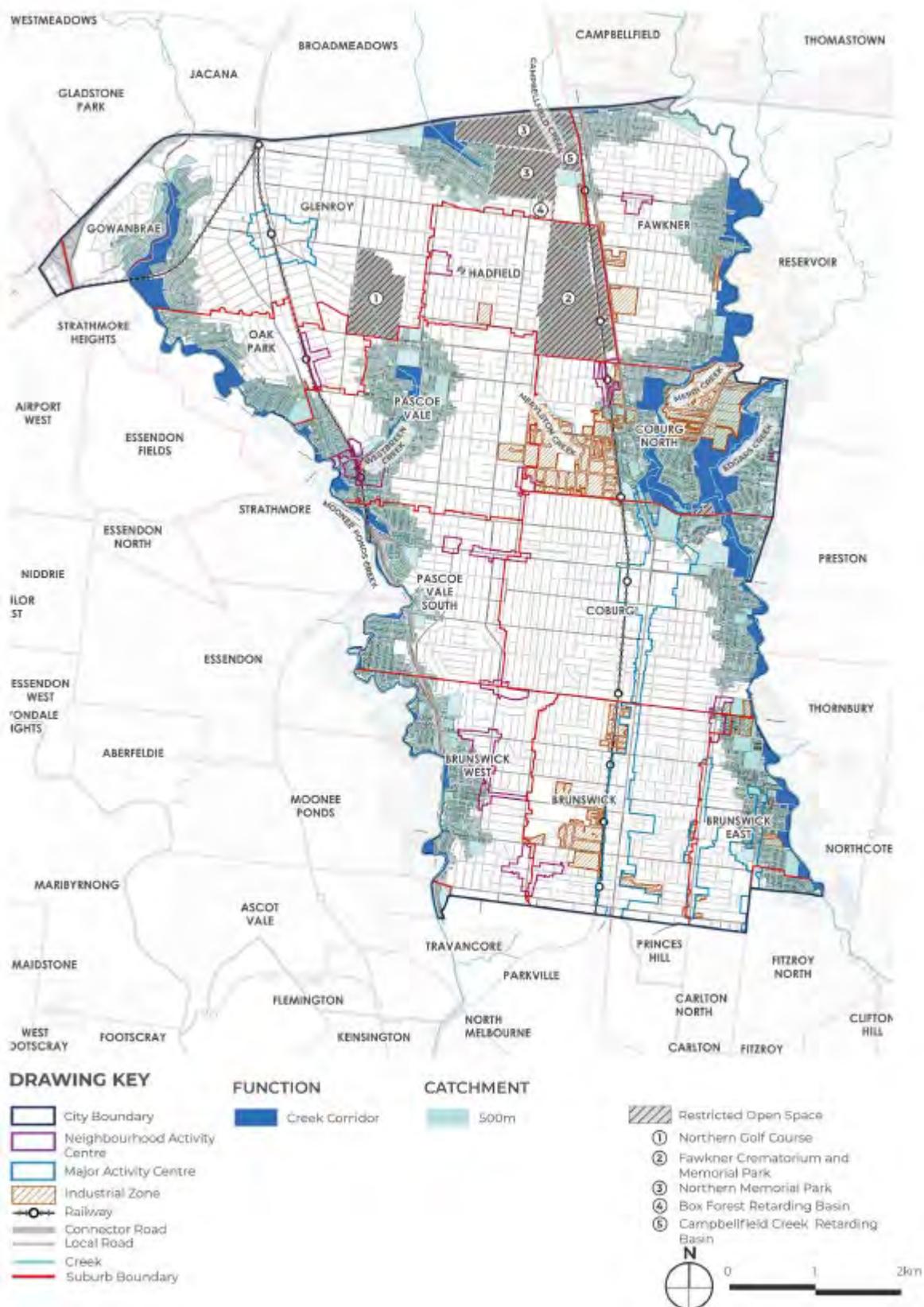


Figure 16: Location of Merri-bek Creek corridors and 500 metres catchment

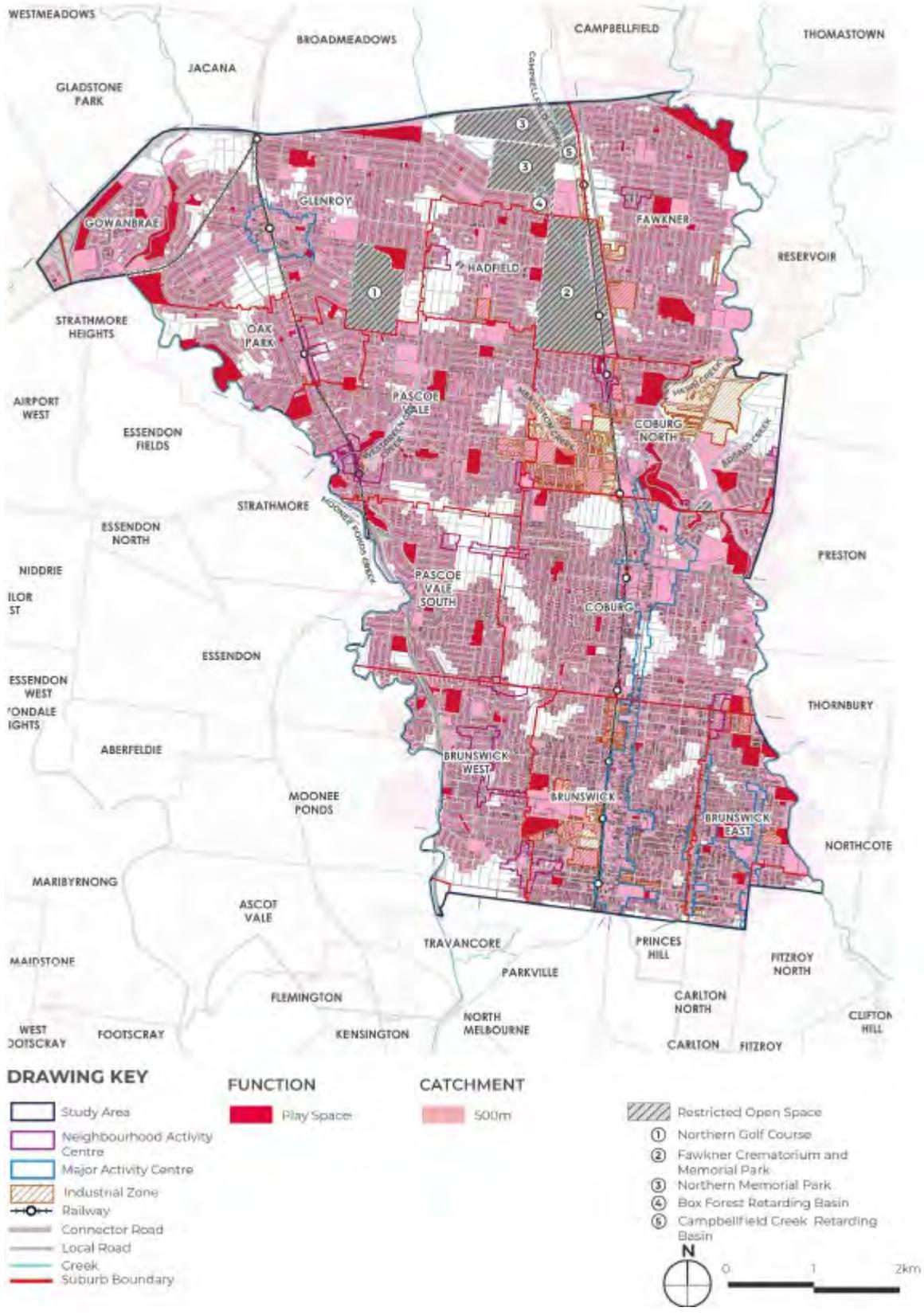


Figure 17: Location of existing play spaces (including playgrounds, BMX / pump tracks and skate parks) and their 500 metres catchment

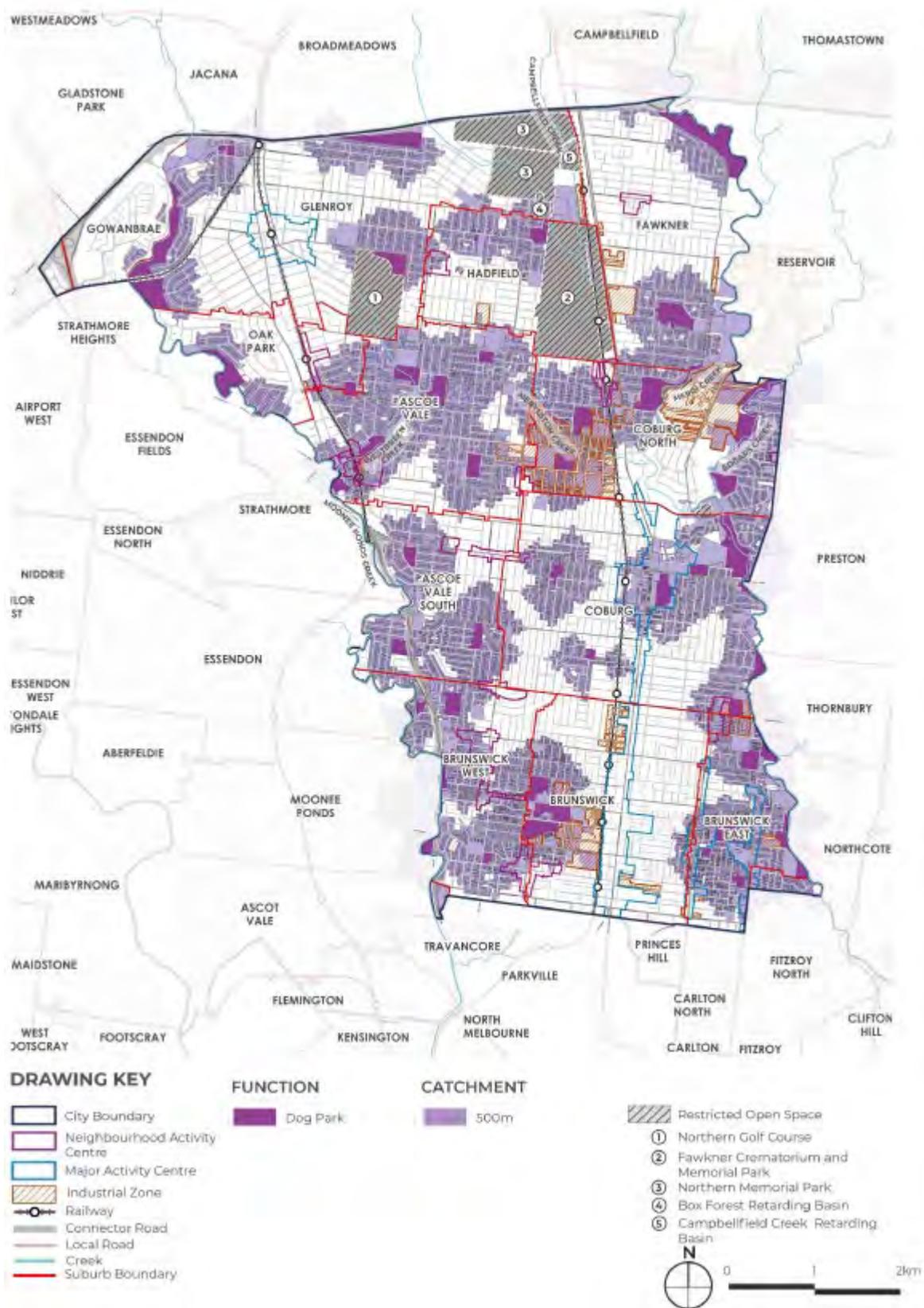


Figure 18: Location of existing contained off-leash dog areas and 500 metres catchment.

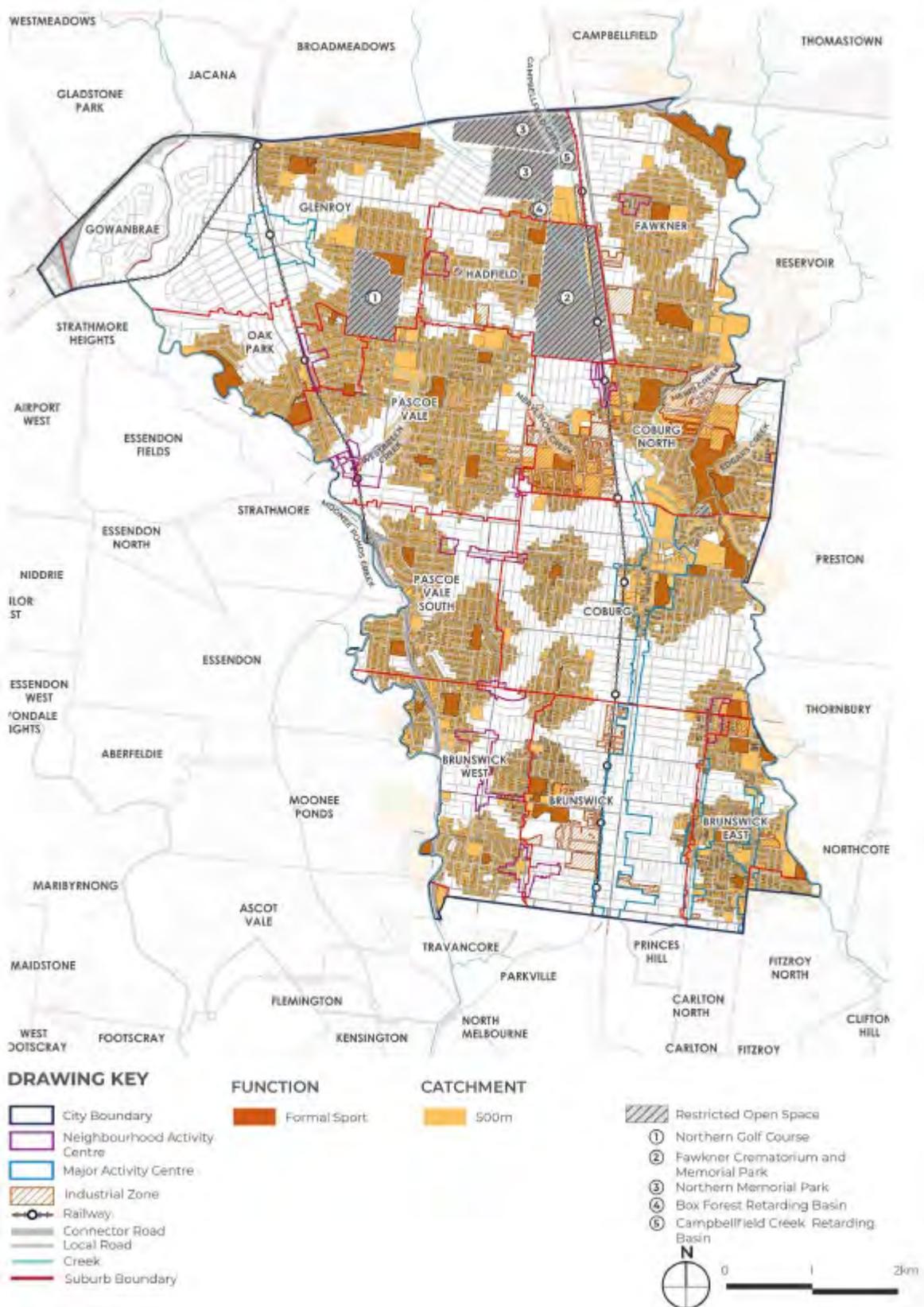


Figure 19: Location of existing formal sports grounds and 500 metres catchment.

4 Our Strategy

4.1 Strategy vision

As introduced in section 1.1, the vision for the Open Space Strategy is:

We envision our open spaces to be welcoming and accessible for everyone. We recognise that a resilient, biodiverse and safe open space network is integral to the environment and the health and wellbeing of our community.

We honour the deep spiritual connection, belonging and identity our First Nations people and Traditional Owners have with open space. We recognise the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the traditional owners of this land and waterways, today known as Merri-bek.

The vision for the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy promotes holistic open space planning and management, ensuring that open spaces are not only beautiful and accessible but also serve as a platform for unity, connection, and wellbeing for all members of the community.

4.2 Objectives for managing open space

The vision is supported by objectives that apply to open space for people and open space for nature. The objectives are illustrated in the diagram and explained below.



- **Traditional Owners:** Merri-bek City Council acknowledges First Nations history and aims to pay respect to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, as our First Peoples and Traditional Owners. As documented in the Merri-bek Statement of Commitment, Council is committed to working towards self-determination and local, regional or national Treaty or Treaties that enshrine the rights of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. We recognise that open space and its management can play a role in achieving this.
- **People value and look after nature:** We want to promote the connection between people and nature. This includes reinforcing the importance open space and being in nature has towards improved health and wellbeing, as well as highlight the need for

Council and our community to continue caring for Merri-bek's nature and biodiversity.

- **Healthy active and well:** A resilient and safe open space network is essential for the health and wellbeing of the community and the environment. Open spaces are important places for recreation, relaxation, social connection, connection with nature, and physical and mental well-being.
- **Inclusive and accessible:** Merri-bek's open spaces should be welcoming and accessible to everyone, irrespective of their background or age, housing situation, culture, or abilities. It seeks to create open spaces that are multi-functional, safe and inclusive and embrace the diversity of the community.
- **Supporting local living:** Merri-bek's open spaces should be connected, close to where people live and provide a wide range of different experiences so that the many benefits of open spaces are close to everyone, even as urban areas densify, and household patterns change.
- **Adaptive and Resilient:** Open spaces to be resilient, both in the face of climate change and in terms of their ongoing maintenance and renewal. As largely permeable spaces, they also play a significant role in integrated water management. Open spaces need to be able to adapt to a changing world.
- **Biodiverse and regenerative:** Substantial creek corridors and other wildlife corridors support biodiversity of plants and animals. To allow our natural environment to thrive, we need to rehabilitate open spaces and waterways from the effects of litter and contamination and protect them from pollutants and damage from other human activities.
- **Supports canopy cover:** Open spaces are critical to addressing the urban heat island effect and provide refuge from heat as well as contributing to overall reduction in average temperatures. Tree planting and protection in open space is a key contribution to achieving Council's canopy cover objectives for our urban forest.

4.3 Strategy directions

Arising from this vision and objectives are five directions. Each of these directions will be accompanied by a set of specific actions that will support delivery of the directions and the overarching vision.

The directions are:

1. Providing parks close to home,
2. Having a mix of open spaces and open space experiences,
3. Ensuring our open space network is adaptive, biodiverse, cooling, healthy and resilient.
4. Open space for everyone,
5. Improving access to our open space network through better links, corridors and collaboration.

1. Providing parks close to home

This direction is focused on expanding access to open spaces for both residents and workers. It builds upon the successes of the Park Close to Home initiative and leverages the findings from the gaps analysis described in sections 3.4 and 3.5.

This direction involves ongoing investment in existing open spaces, which includes upgrading facilities, enhancing playgrounds, and expanding amenities like BBQ areas and park shelters. It also continued the creation of new open space via land acquisition.

Importantly, this direction is deliberate in its approach to offer a diverse range of new open spaces. The decision-making process for these spaces is guided by the analysis detailed in section 3.4.5, striving for a balance between smaller pocket parks and larger local open spaces.

Furthermore, this direction emphasises the significance of establishing agreements with open space landowners within identified gaps, including schools that often possess underutilised open spaces and sports grounds. It also highlights the importance of continued collaboration with major open space landowners such as Melbourne Water, the GMCT and the Northern Golf Club, to preserve crucial open space nature and habitat while exploring opportunities for increased public access.

2. Having a mix of open spaces and open space experiences

This direction is centred on creating open spaces that are inviting, engaging, enjoyable and inclusive. It seeks to achieve this by increasing the presence of artwork and sculptures, and organising events like sports classes, tai chi groups, yoga classes, to promote greater activation of open space and make all persons in our diverse community feel welcome. Additionally, the direction aims to enhance community participation in open space management and encourage collaboration with neighbouring entities like businesses and community groups. The direction is underpinned by collaboration with the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung and associated and emerging actions from this relationship.

3. Ensuring our open space network is adaptive, biodiverse, cooling, healthy and resilient

This direction is dedicated to the enhancement and conservation of Merri-bek's natural habitats and biodiversity whilst also ensuring our open space network is healthy and adapts to climate change. It also highlights the importance our open space plays for urban cooling in our warming climate. This direction has key actions to enhance these critical features of open space, such as exploring the need for dark parks to preserve and enhance night-time habitat for local animals and explore changes to land (such as land acquisition) to enhance public open space waterway corridors.

4. Open space for everyone

This direction is designed to enhance the accessibility of our open spaces and the broader open space network to a more diverse range of individuals and enable all persons who live, work or visit Merri-bek. This encompasses persons with disabilities, women, teenagers, dog owners, those who are uncomfortable around dogs, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and people of all generations.

To achieve this direction, specific actions will concentrate on the development of dedicated infrastructure, such as the creation of an All Abilities Access playground and dedicated dog parks. Furthermore, alterations to existing open spaces will include the installation of additional seating and park furniture to better cater to the diverse and evolving needs of our community.

5. Improving access to our open space network through better links, corridors and collaboration

This direction aims to expand access to our open space network through improvements such as better connections between and to open spaces and collaborating with private landowners and state agencies. Actions include exploring land acquisitions to increase physical access to existing spaces and exploring opportunities to better link existing open spaces to the regional Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek corridors. It also directs Council to promote this direction when collaborating on future Victorian State Government projects, such as future level crossing removal projects which may create new open space that will need to appropriately link to existing corridors.

4.4 Strategy enablers

In addition to the Strategy directions, there are some key enabling actions that will ensure the Strategy is able to be implemented. These include:

- The development and maintenance of a long-term listing of capital projects for open space
- Actions to support securing and setting aside funding for open space projects
- Actions supporting the regulation of land use and development relevant to protecting and enhancing open space
- Actions leading to decision-making support with respect to open space management, allocation, prioritisation and investment

This section outlines the scope of the enabling actions, and the associated specific actions are separately documented in the Action Plan.

Open space project list

To inform the likely projects that Council needs to construct in coming years, a 20-year Projects List has been created. This includes:

- Recommended projects for suburbs across Merri-bek, as detailed in Appendix 5, which are intended to address increasing demand and need to additional open space to accommodate residential and worker population growth and continued urban densification.
- Projects in open space that complement and address key challenges, influenced and emerging trends in open space, such as: new wetlands, stormwater harvesting systems, raingardens, dog parks, playground upgrades, works to improve sports facilities, and new picnic facilities such as BBQs, shelters and drinking taps.
- Land acquisitions required for the above projects.
- An indicative timeframe for when the project will proceed.

The Projects List, which is an accompanying document to the Open Space Strategy, is an aspirational list of open space projects. It will be used to support the review of the city's public open space contribution rate in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme. If not all projects are allocated to a reviewed contribution rate, Council reserves the right to consider their suitability for a separate Development Contribution Plan.

The Projects List is not an exhaustive list and should not be considered an endorsed capital works program. All projects included in this list will be subject to Council's future budget processes and further work planning. Projects will be assessed alongside the needs and priorities of Council's overall portfolio and community expectations. Projects will also be subject to further analysis to ensure their relevance and suitability in Merri-bek and our overall open space network

Open space funding

Funding for open space in Merri-bek mostly comes from annually collected rates, government grants, and contributions from land developers. Collectively, these provide for Council:

- Planning and designing for open spaces and its infrastructure.
- Maintaining open spaces and its infrastructure.
- Renewing open spaces and its infrastructure, when at end-of-life.
- Upgrading open spaces and its infrastructure.
- Creating new open spaces with infrastructure.
- Acquiring land for larger or new open spaces.

Many of these open space activities are expensive and must be prioritised to ensure Council's responsible long-term financial management. The Strategy's vision, directions and action plan together help guide future investment in open space across Merri-bek. They also inform Council's long-term budget planning for its open space portfolio and corresponding maintenance and management. These are ultimately enabled by the Council Plan, Council Action Plan, 4-year Budget and 10-year Asset Plan.

Land use and development

The Open Space Strategy explores various land use and development matters, such as population increase, densification, existing open space, demands for types and uses of open space and needs for future enhancement and investment across Merri-bek's open space network. Many of these relate to Council's role in managing our city's growth and open space provision. The Merri-bek Planning Scheme is one of Council's key vehicles for managing these changes and needs, including when there is an open space relationship with land use and development.

The following implementation actions for the Merri-bek Planning Scheme ('Planning Scheme') therefore arise from the Strategy:

1. **Updating the Merri-bek Planning Scheme's Planning Policy Framework:** Council will use the Strategy to update the city's strategic direction for its open space network in the Planning Scheme.
2. **Updating developer contribution rates:** Council will use the Strategy, the accompanying Technical Report and Projects List, to inform strategic work that will consider if updated developer contribution rate/s are needed in the Planning Scheme.
3. **Reviewing Planning Zones and Overlays:** Council is in the process of reassessing planning zones and overlays to better protect open spaces. This includes themes for sunlight access, habitat preservation, biodiversity, and environmental protection.

Decision making framework

When decisions need to be made about the development, protection and use of open space it is important that they account for a range of community views and user needs and are clear about which objectives are being given highest priority. To achieve this, it is helpful to use a decision-making framework that allows consistent approaches.

In setting up a decision-making framework, principles to guide decision making are required. The following principles set the scene for decisions about open space:

- **Traditional Owner input invited:** In line with Council's commitment to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, an invitation will be open for Traditional Owner participation in any decisions.
- **Strategically aligned:** Supports achievement of the Open Space Strategy vision and objectives and other Council decision making frameworks.
- **Evidence based:** Scientific and social data and research inform decisions.
- **Transparent and participatory:** Community engagement forms a key pillar of decision making in the management of open spaces and processes guiding decisions are transparent.

- **Intergenerational focused:** Decisions will be made with the long term future in mind, so that future generations will continue to experience the benefits of the decisions we make regarding open space today.

Decision support guidance

There are many different types of decisions that need to be made in the prioritisation, development, maintenance and allocation of open space. Some of these decisions are at the highest level, foreshadowed through the priorities and actions identified in this Strategy. Others will be at the specific, detail level and will require a different type of consideration at different times.

Decision support guidance already exists for some decisions – for example purchase of property for open space purposes is covered in the Merri-bek Strategic Property Framework, and decisions about whether to use synthetic surfaces for sportsgrounds are supported by the Merri-bek Sportsground Surface Policy.

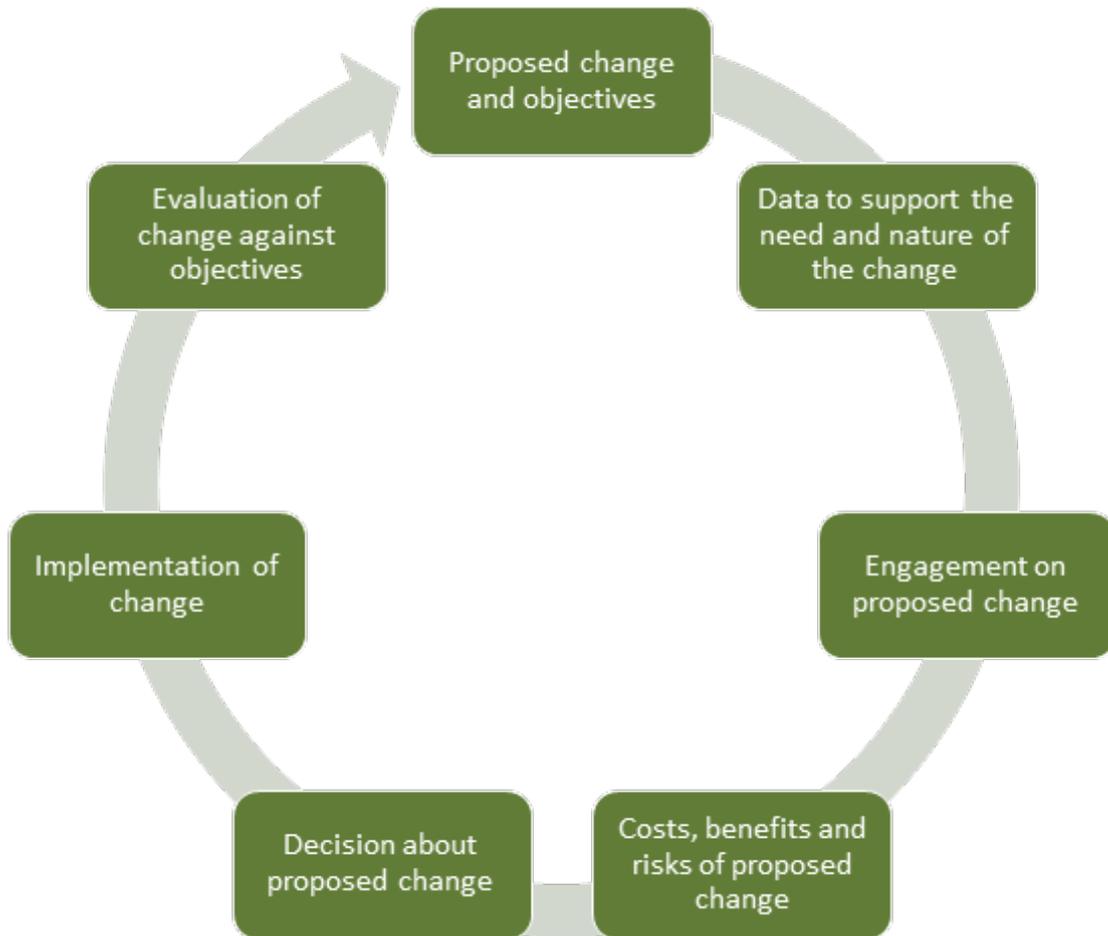
Other types of decisions that could benefit from decision support guidance include:

- Working through specific scope and locations to implement a strategy action
- Determining the best use of particular open space or prospective open space
- Significant changes to the way open space (or specific open spaces) is managed or used
- Confirming where dogs can be off leash and where on-leash restrictions should apply
- Determining which open spaces have facilities such as toilets, BBQs and picnic shelters
- Exploring which open space will be dark parks without substantial illumination.
- Design outcomes to be applied when project scope is determined.

On this last point, the following considerations are provided to illustrate the benefit of a decision support process in the upgrade and creation of new open spaces (such as parks and playgrounds):

- How the design addresses safety through Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).
- How the design adapts to climate change and mitigates climate risk (such as flooding, excessive heat, water sensitive urban design, cooling methods, increase canopy and vegetation coverage) and improves biodiversity, habitat and nature
- How the open space meets the needs of our diverse community (including persons with a disability, all ages, all genders, differing cultures).
- And how the design responds to universal design principles (disability lens perspective and inter-generational perspective).

The following diagram is a high-level decision-making framework showing the pathway decisions will step through to create a final decision. It highlights how specific steps will be undertaken and analysed to make a decision. Further development of these decision paths will be progressed through the implementation of the Open Space Strategy.



4.5 Action planning, strategy monitoring and review

Action plans

Action planning will play a pivotal role in advancing the implementation of the Open Space Strategy. An initial Action Plan is proposed for the period until the end of Financial Year 2024/25 and then subsequent Action Plans will be four-year Action Plans aligned with Council Plan cycles. This periodic assessment ensures that the outlined actions continue to align with the evolving needs and circumstances of the community and Merri-bek.

The actions within the Strategy's Action Plans are organised under the strategy's five key directions. Collectively, these directions and their actions work in harmony to realise the Open Space vision.

Implementation of these actions relies on a number of factors (including budget, contributions received, population growth, the level of development activity and the availability of land to purchase in appropriate locations).

The draft 2024/25 Action Plan is an accompanying document to this Strategy.

Monitoring and review

To maintain the relevance and effectiveness of this Strategy in the face of evolving circumstances, regular reviews and updates are essential. These reviews should consider changes in factors like population growth, new legislation, shifts in community needs and values, and available funding resources.

The recommended review schedule for the Open Space Strategy is:

1. **Population Statistics Review:** Update population statistics and assess their impact on the Open Space Strategy and action plan when new population modelling data becomes available / at a minimum, every five years aligned with the Census.
2. **Action Plan Review:** Review the action plan after 12 months and thereafter every four years to align with the Merri-bek Council Plan. This will ensure its alignment with the evolving needs of the community and the Strategy's objectives.
3. **Strategy Review:** It is usual good practice for open space strategies to be reviewed at approximately 10-year intervals. On this basis, it is considered that a new strategy will be needed on or before the mid-2030s.

These regular reviews and updates will help ensure that the Open Space Strategy continues to effectively address the needs of the Merri-bek community and remains a valuable and adaptable resource over time.

5 References

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Community engagement

Approach to community engagement

Between April and July 2023, the Merri-bek community was actively consulted to provide insight into their use, values, challenges and needs related to open spaces. Council undertook a range of targeted and more general consultation activities throughout the development of the Open Space Strategy.

These included:

- Six pop-up community events held in parks and shopping centres.
- Four in-depth deep dive workshops.
- Two workshops geared toward Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities and workshops focused on youth and persons with a disability.
- Online consultation, including an open space survey.
- Consultation with Council's Advisory and Reference Groups.

The feedback received throughout this process included:

- The Merri-bek Conversations website, which garnered 2,571 visitors, 253 contributions across various maps and noticeboards, and 227 completed surveys in seven different languages.
- Over 260 individuals attended pop-up events.
- 40 participants engaged in the four deep dive workshops.
- 65 individuals participated in the specific stakeholder workshops.

Council heard diverse feedback about how open space is used, valued, and barriers and challenges to using and accessing open space.

More information about this community engagement program can be found in the Open Space Strategy Community Consultation report.

Feedback from community engagement

Council heard extensive feedback from this consultation. We heard extensive feedback:

How do you use and value open space in Merri-bek?

Our key uses are:

- Meeting people and friends
- Health and wellbeing
- Fitness
- Place for children to play

- Birthday parties and other celebrations
- exercising dogs
- Club-based sport or casual sport.

What do you like about open space in Merri-bek?

Our top five things people like are:

1. Our trees
2. A place to relax and unwind
3. Our creek and water
4. Getting out of the house
5. Place to meeting up with people and being outside

What barriers or challenges do you face when using / accessing open space in Merri-bek?

Our common challenges using open space were:

- Concerns about dogs
- Inadequate maintenance and facilities (such as rubbish, dog poo, toilets, open space too wet)
- Inadequate safety and lighting (such as during night-time)
- Insufficient space and sports clubs using open space

What would you like to see change?

The key items people want to see changed:

- Improved environmental protection, biodiversity, more trees, native plants, place for nature, etc.
- More open space and parks across Merri-bek
- Improved facilities, maintenance (i.e. more bins, night-time lighting, shelter and shade, cleaner and more toilets) and safety measures.
- More events in open space, such as cultural events, festival and fitness classes.
- A need to explore how open spaces are accessible for all, including persons with a disability, reduced mobility and carer

Appendix 2: Merri-bek Community Vision

The Merri-bek Community Vision provides the overarching pathway for our future Merri-bek. The Open Space Strategy plays a significant role towards achieving the Merri-bek Council Vision, which is:

“Merri-bek is our home. We respect and look after our land, air, waterways, and animals. We care for our people and celebrate our diverse stories, cultures, and identities. Merri-bek is enhanced by all of us supporting our local businesses, arts communities and social organisations. We work together proactively and transparently to continue to create a:

Vibrant

Safe

Healthy

Resilient

Innovative

Regenerative community.

Many faces, one Merri-bek.”

The five themes to achieve this Vision and reflect the aspirations of Merri-bek’s diverse and growing community in 2031 are:

Theme 1: An environmentally proactive Merri-bek:

In 2031, Merri-bek is carbon neutral, embracing an entirely renewable energy system, innovative management of waste, and accessible active transport.

We have a circular economy, passive housing, food security, ample green spaces and canopy cover led by a well-informed proactive community.

We are a community connected to Country with healthy flora and fauna, through protection of ecosystems.

Our Open Space Strategy vision acknowledges that our open space is integrally woven to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. The Strategy also acknowledges the important role open space has in environmental action and connection to Country.

Theme 2: Moving and living safely in Merri-bek:

In 2031, Merri-bek is safe. Our streets are safe for pedestrians and cyclists, day and night. Everyone in Merri-bek is able to live in their homes without fear from others, both known and unknown.

In Merri-bek, we actively look out for each other and are well supported to do this by council.

Our open space plays an important role in promoting safety, including when using open space and moving in open space. Open space also incorporates key parts of the transport network. The new Open Space Strategy will explore how we can further progress this work.

Theme 3: A healthy and caring Merri-bek:

In 2031, the Merri-bek community has healthy bodies and minds.

We have our basic needs met. We have ready access to mental health, crisis and domestic violence services as well as high-quality health care.

Merri-bek has reliable housing, and nutritious food, with ample opportunities to move our bodies, keep our minds active, and socially connect. Access to these are tailored to the unique needs of our diverse community.

No one is lost between the cracks.

The Strategy reinforces the importance of open space in promoting a healthy and caring community. Key actions within the 5 directions will further support this, including exploring how our open spaces can be improved to allow greater access to everyone in our community.

Theme 4: Spaces and places in Merri-bek:

In 2031, living and working in Merri-bek is easy and enjoyable. Housing is affordable and caters to vulnerable and lower income groups. Our buildings are smart, green and fully integrated into the surrounding environment.

Merri-bek's public and commercial spaces bring people together in diverse ways. Acknowledging the unique strengths in different areas of Merri-bek, the council and community support the development of vibrant hubs of arts, businesses and recreation.

The Open Space Strategy recognises that public spaces, such as open space, provide opportunity to bring people together in diverse ways, such as arts, sports and socialising. Key actions in the action plan and the 5 directions will reinforce this Theme.

Theme 5: An empowered and collaborative Merri-bek:

In 2031, Merri-bek is a place that engages meaningfully and has a real commitment to collaboration.

The community is aware of all council activities and trust in decisions and processes. The community will know where the unmet needs of our neighbours are and will be actively engaged in working towards a brighter future for all.

The Open Space Strategy reinforces this theme via the five Strategy directions and the decision-making principles, which provide assurance and clarify how Council will make decisions and undertake processes in open space.

Appendix 3: Relevant Merri-bek City Council policies, inter-Council Strategies and Victorian State Government legislation

Merri-bek City Council

- Accessible & Inclusive Communications Policy
- Active women and Girls in Merri-bek Strategy
- Advocacy Plan 2021-2025
- Allocation and use of sporting facilities, grounds, and pavilions
- Arts & Culture Strategy 2023-2030
- Children, Young People and Families Plan 2021 – 2025
- Cooling the Upfield Corridor Action Plan
- Community infrastructure plan 2022 – 2032.
- Council Plan 2021-2025
- Living and Ageing Well Framework
- Merri-bek Planning Scheme
- Climate Risk Strategy and Foundational Action Plan
- Community Engagement Policy
- Draft Homelessness strategy (draft at time of writing)
- Disability Access and Inclusion Plan
- Edgars Creek conservation and development plan
- Fawkner Transport Study
- Fawkner Merri Parklands Plan
- Housing Capacity Study
- Human Rights Policy 2016 - 2026
- Gender Equality statement of Commitment
- Integrated Water Management Strategy + Action Plan
- Later Years Strategy
- LGBTIQA+ Action Plan 2023 - 2026
- Long Term Financial Plan
- Merri Creek Environs Strategy
- Merri-bek General Local Laws 2018
- Industrial Land Use Strategy
- Nature Plan
- Park Close to Home framework
- Parking Management Policy 2019
- Play Strategy
- Road Management Plan 2021-2025
- Shopping Strip Renewal Policy
- Social Cohesion Plan 2020 - 2025
- Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020

- Sportsgrounds Surface Policy
- Transport Strategy
- Urban Forest Strategy
- Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan 2016 – 2026
- Upfield Corridor Action Plan 2018-2029
- Westbreen creek conservation and development plan
- Zero Carbon Merri-bek Framework + Action Plan
- 10-year Financial Plan (2021 – 2031)

Inter-Council Strategies

- Chain of Ponds
- Northern Trails 2022 (developed by Banyule City Council, Darebin City Council, Hume City Council, Merri-bek City Council, Nillumbik Shire Council, City of Whittlesea, plus Yarra City Council).

Victorian State Government

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Climate Change Act 2017
- Gender Equality Act 2020
- Local Government Act 2020
- Open Space for Everyone: Open Space Strategy for Metropolitan Melbourne 2021
- Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Plan Melbourne 2017-2050
- Victoria's Climate Change Strategy
- Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021 – 2026.

Appendix 4: Image of the Urban Heat Island Effect in Merri-bek, 2018

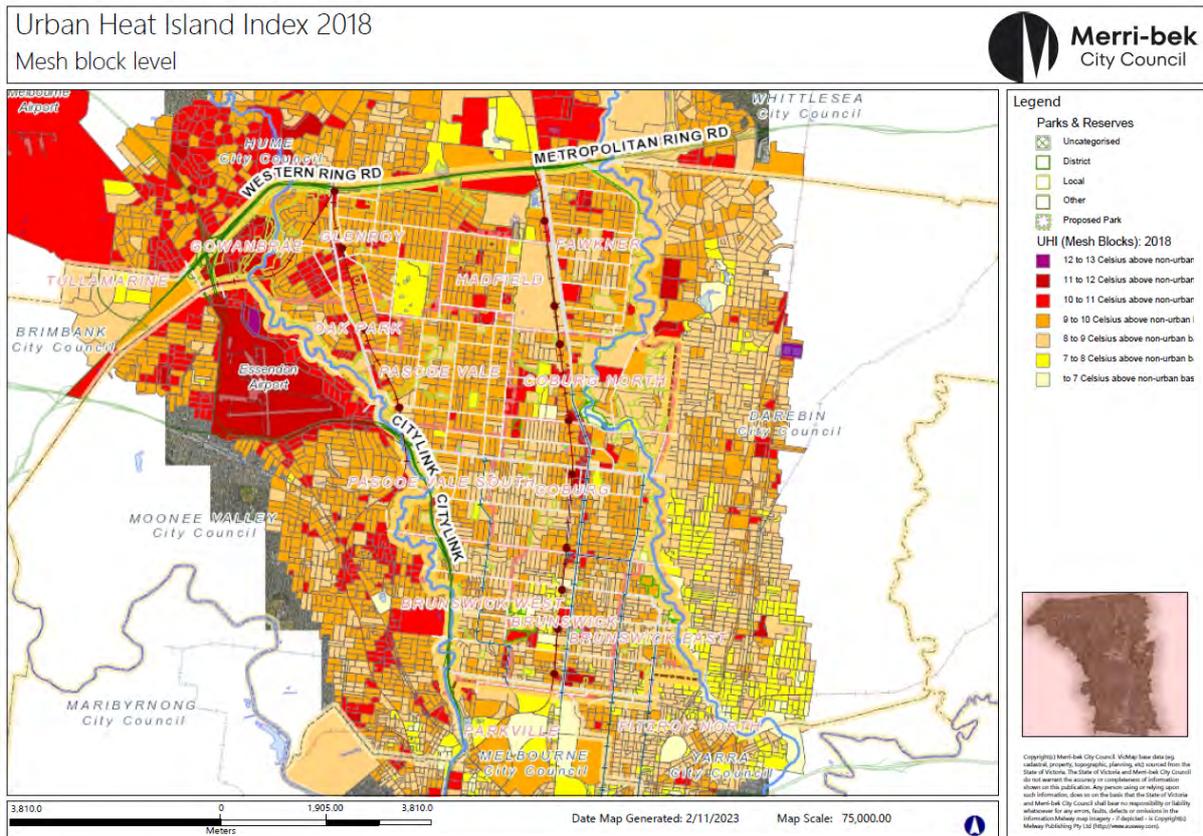


Figure 20: Municipal-wide map of the UHIE.

Appendix 5: Suburb analysis

Brunswick

Brunswick is a 5 square kilometre suburb bordering Coburg, Brunswick East and Brunswick West within Merri-bek, and the suburbs of Carlton and Parkville in the City of Melbourne.

Brunswick has significantly experienced densification, with the Brunswick Major Activity Centre along the Sydney Road and Lygon Street trams corridor undergoing significant development.

The future Brunswick Level Crossing Removal project, being led by the Victorian Government, will create significant new public open space underneath a new elevated rail corridor, for a stretch of 4 kilometres in Brunswick.



Brunswick has a key regional open space at the Brunswick Central Parklands, which includes Gilpin Park, Clifton Park, A G Gillon Oval, Reaburn Reserve and Brunswick Park, which contains over 74 per cent of Brunswick total open space.

Key open space figures for Brunswick include:

- A population of 30,287 residents in 2021, projected to increase by 34 per cent to 40,687 residents in 2041
- A workforce of 14,153 individuals in 2021, with a projected increase of 26 per cent to 17,858 workers by 2041.
- In 2021, there were 8.3 square metres of open space per resident, which is expected to decrease to 6.2 square metres by 2041 if no additional land is acquired.
- 25.2 hectares (252,000 square metres) of open space occupying 5.2 per cent of the suburb's total area.
- The majority of larger regional and district open spaces are located in the Brunswick Central Parklands precinct, including Brunswick Park, Clifton Park and A G Gillon Oval. There are additionally 4 neighbourhood open spaces (including Bulleke-bek Park and Garrong Park, constructed via the Park Close to Home program), 4 local open spaces (including Warr Park), and 7 pocket open spaces (including the new 260 Sydney Road park and the Wilson Avenue urban pocket park).
- The majority of formal sports reserves are also located in the Brunswick Central Parklands.
- 15 play spaces, including at the Brunswick Parklands, Temple Park and Symons Park.

Key challenges and open space recommendations:

- Brunswick will continue to experience significant residential and worker population growth. It is anticipated that 40 per cent of the residential growth will be in high-density apartments, with 18 per cent along the core major and neighbourhood

activity centres in Brunswick. This will continue to place pressure on the existing open space, despite the construction of new spaces in recent years including Garrong Park, Bulleke-bek Park and new projects at 260 Sydney Road and 1 Frith Street.

- The majority of larger open spaces in Brunswick are located in the Brunswick Central parklands, meaning that persons living in parts of Brunswick such as to the north of Blyth Street, north of Albion Street and north of Dawson Street, are considered underserved for open space.
- Much of open space spaces in the western side of Brunswick are smaller open spaces which allow for lesser activities and capacity.
- Land acquisition to create a new local scale open space to the east of Sydney Road to address gaps between Victoria Street and Albion Street.
- Undertake land acquisition to create two new neighbourhood scale open spaces in the north-west and south-east of Brunswick to reduce open space gaps
- Create two new pocket parks near the Sydney Road Major Activity Centre to meets the needs of urban densification
- Continue enlarging existing open spaces to increase the opportunity for open space activities, as well as improving connections to the large Brunswick Parklands space.
- It is not recommended to acquire land in gaps around Brunswick Road as they are opposite district open spaces at Royal Park and Princes Park in the City of Melbourne.

Further detail is contained in the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.



Figure 21: Existing open space in Brunswick.

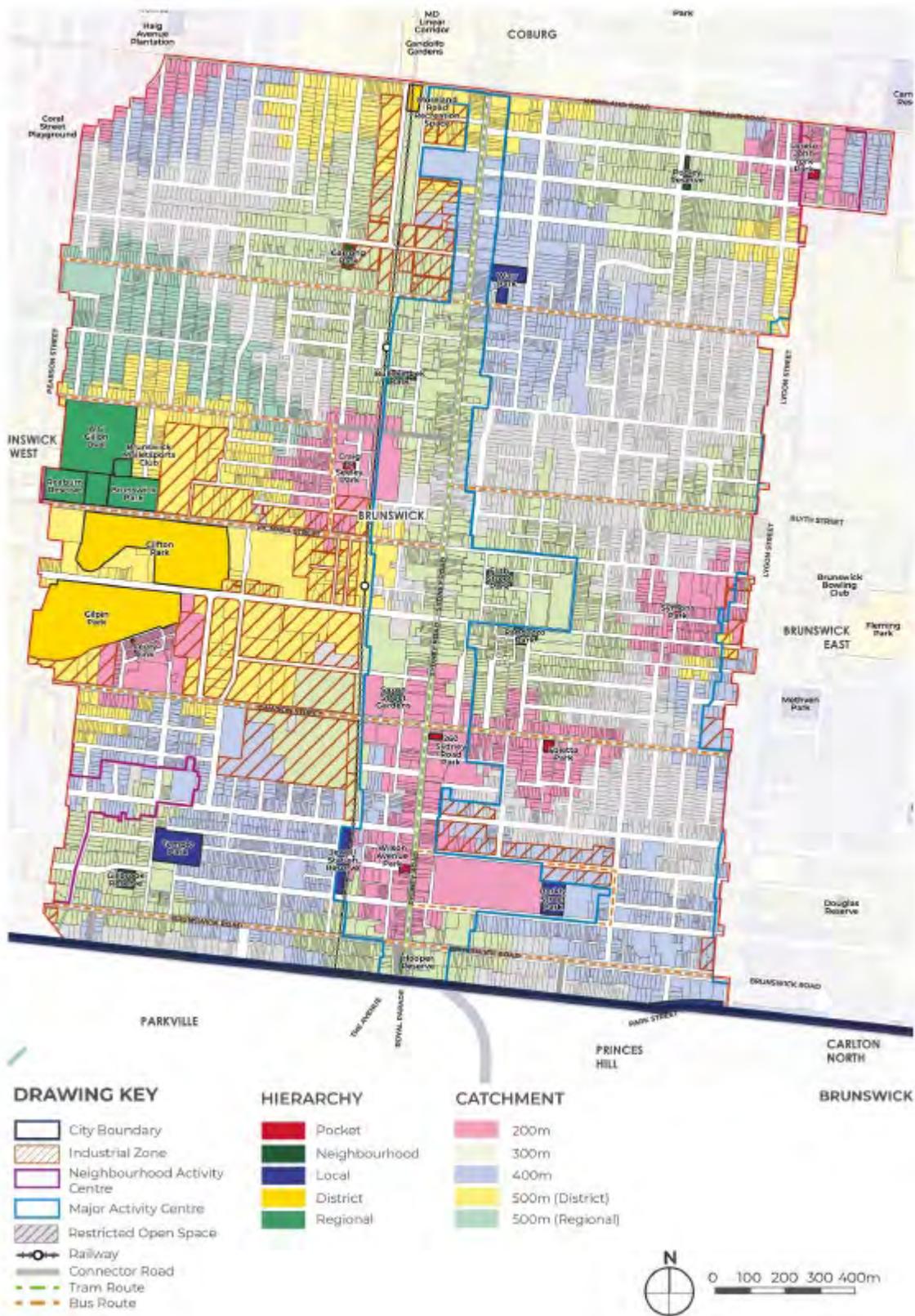


Figure 22: Analysis #2 and mapping of the open space hierarchies, their catchments and open space gaps, Brunswick.

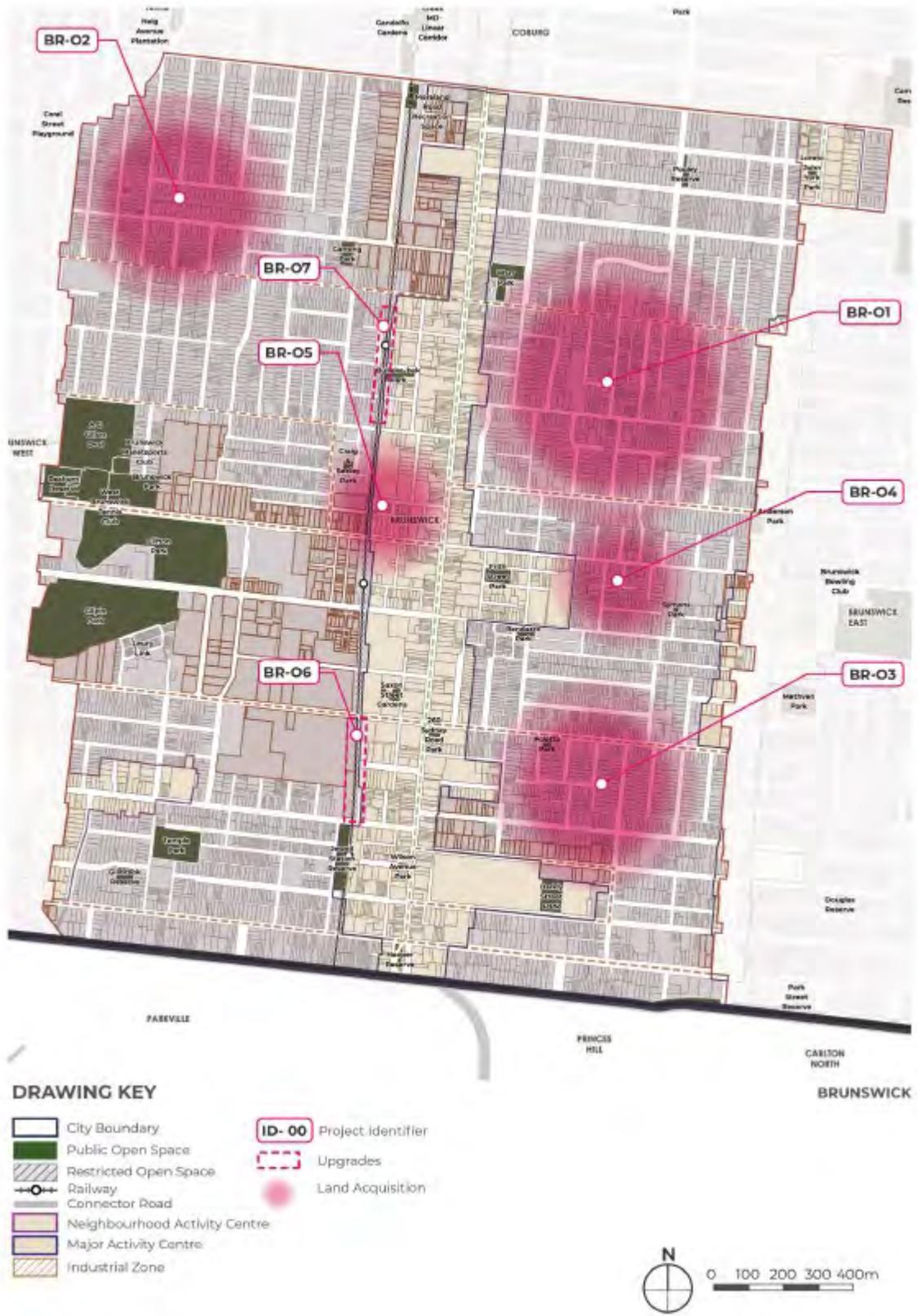


Figure 23: Key recommended projects in Brunswick.

Brunswick East (and part of Fitzroy North)

Brunswick East, along with a part of Fitzroy North (hereafter referred to as 'Brunswick East'), comprises a 2.4 square kilometre area situated in the south-eastern region of Merri-bek. It is surrounded by neighbouring suburbs such as Brunswick, Northcote, Thornbury, and Carlton North.



Brunswick East is primarily delineated by geographical features and roadways, with the Merri Creek forming its eastern boundary. The northern boundary is demarcated by Moreland Road, the western boundary by Lygon Street, and the southern boundary by Park Street. These boundaries intersect with adjoining municipalities of Yarra, Darebin, and Melbourne.

Much of the open space in Brunswick East is located along the near the Merri Creek, including the Creek corridor itself and also parks such as Sumner Park, CERES, and Jones and Allard Parks. A large open space, Fleming Park, is centrally located in Brunswick East. Brunswick East will continue to experience densification, including along the Major Activity Centre Lygon Street and Nicholson Street tram corridors.

Key open space figures for Brunswick East include:

- A population of 16,737 residents in 2021, projected to increase by 40 per cent to 23,458 residents by 2041.
- A workforce of 4,473 individuals in 2021, with a projected increase of 13 per cent to 5,054 workers by 2041.
- In 2021, there were 15.8 square metres of open space per resident, which is expected to decrease to 11.8 square metres by 2041 if no additional land is acquired.
- 33.5 hectares (335,168 square metres) of open space, occupying 14.0 per cent of the suburb's total area.
- The presence of 11 key regional public open spaces, 3 district open spaces, 4 neighbourhood open spaces, 3 local open spaces, and 2 pocket open spaces.
- Six sports reserves, including Fleming Park and Sumner Park
- 13 play spaces, including at Jones Park and Roberts Reserve.

Open space challenges and key open space recommendations:

- Brunswick East will continue to experience significant population growth. Of this growth, over half is expected to be high-density apartments which will be largely located in Activity Centres of Brunswick East. This will continue to place pressure on the public open space in and near these Activity Centres and across the entire suburb.

- Undertake land acquisition to create a neighbourhood scale open space to address an identified open space gap between Albion and Blyth Streets to the west of Lygon Street.
- Undertake land acquisition to create two new pocket scale open spaces is also recommended near the Lygon Street and Nicholson Street Major Activity Centres to meet the needs of densification.
- Continue to invest in existing open spaces and explore opportunities to enlarge these spaces / increase access to the Merri Creek regional corridor.

Further detail is contained in the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.



Figure 24: Existing open space in Brunswick East.



Figure 25: Analysis #2 and mapping of the open space hierarchies, their catchments and open space gaps, Brunswick East.

Brunswick West

Brunswick West is a 3.2 square kilometre suburb which adjoins Brunswick, Pascoe Vale South, Coburg, Moonee Ponds, Parkville and Ascot Vale. It is delineated by the Moonee Ponds Creek and the CityLink freeway to its west, Moreland Road to the north, Pearson Street to the east and Park Street to the south. It adjoins the adjoining municipalities of Melbourne and Moonee Valley.



Brunswick West contains four Neighbourhood Activity Centres, at the nodes of: Grantham and Union Streets, Melville Road and Albion and Victoria Streets, Moreland and Melville Roads, and Albion Street and Waxman Parade.

Significant open space is located along the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor, which provides access to a regional open space corridor stretching along the length of Merri-bek. A large regional open space at Dunstan Reserve also provides for formal sport and other uses.

Key open space figures for Brunswick West include:

- A population of 18,035 residents in 2021, projected to increase by 34 per cent to 24,190 residents by 2041.
- A workforce of 1,974 individuals in 2021, with a projected increase of 22 per cent to 2,408 workers by 2041.
- In 2021, there were 11.5 square metres of open space per resident, which is expected to decrease to 8.6 square metres by 2041 if no additional land is acquired.
- 20.8 hectares (208,000 square metres) of open space, occupying 6.4 per cent of the suburb's area.
- The presence of 8 key regional public open spaces (including several parks along the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor), 1 district open space (Dunstan Reserve), 2 neighbourhood open spaces (Curtin Avenue Link and Barker Reserve), 7 local open spaces (including Hudson Reserve, Jacobs Reserve and Denzil Don Reserve), and 3 pocket open spaces (including Jewell Crescent Reserve).
- Four formal sports reserves, including Holbrook Reserve.
- Seven play spaces, including at Denzil Don Reserve.

Key challenges and open space recommendations:

- Similar to Brunswick and Brunswick East, Brunswick West will continue to experience significant increased residential population growth. Apartments will account for approximately a quarter of new suburb dwellings in the future.
- Much of the existing public open space exists in the west of Brunswick West along the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor, while population growth in the four Neighbourhood Activity Centres is located in the middle and eastern side of Brunswick West.

- The hierarchy analysis indicates the need for open new open spaces near gaps south of Moreland Road, north of Albion Street and to the north of Brunswick Road.
- Undertake land acquisition to create a new neighbourhood open space near the Melville Road / Albion Street / Victoria Street Neighbourhood Activity Centre to accommodate this increased population as well as high-density housing.
- Undertake land acquisition to create a new neighbourhood scale open space in the south-west of Brunswick West is also recommended, including a playground (as identified in Figure 29).
- Undertake land acquisition to create a small pocket scale open space near the Grantham Street / Union Street Neighbourhood Activity Centre is recommended to fill an open space gap as well as reduce pressure on existing open spaces from population increase.

Further detail is contained in the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.



Figure 27: Existing open space network in Brunswick West.

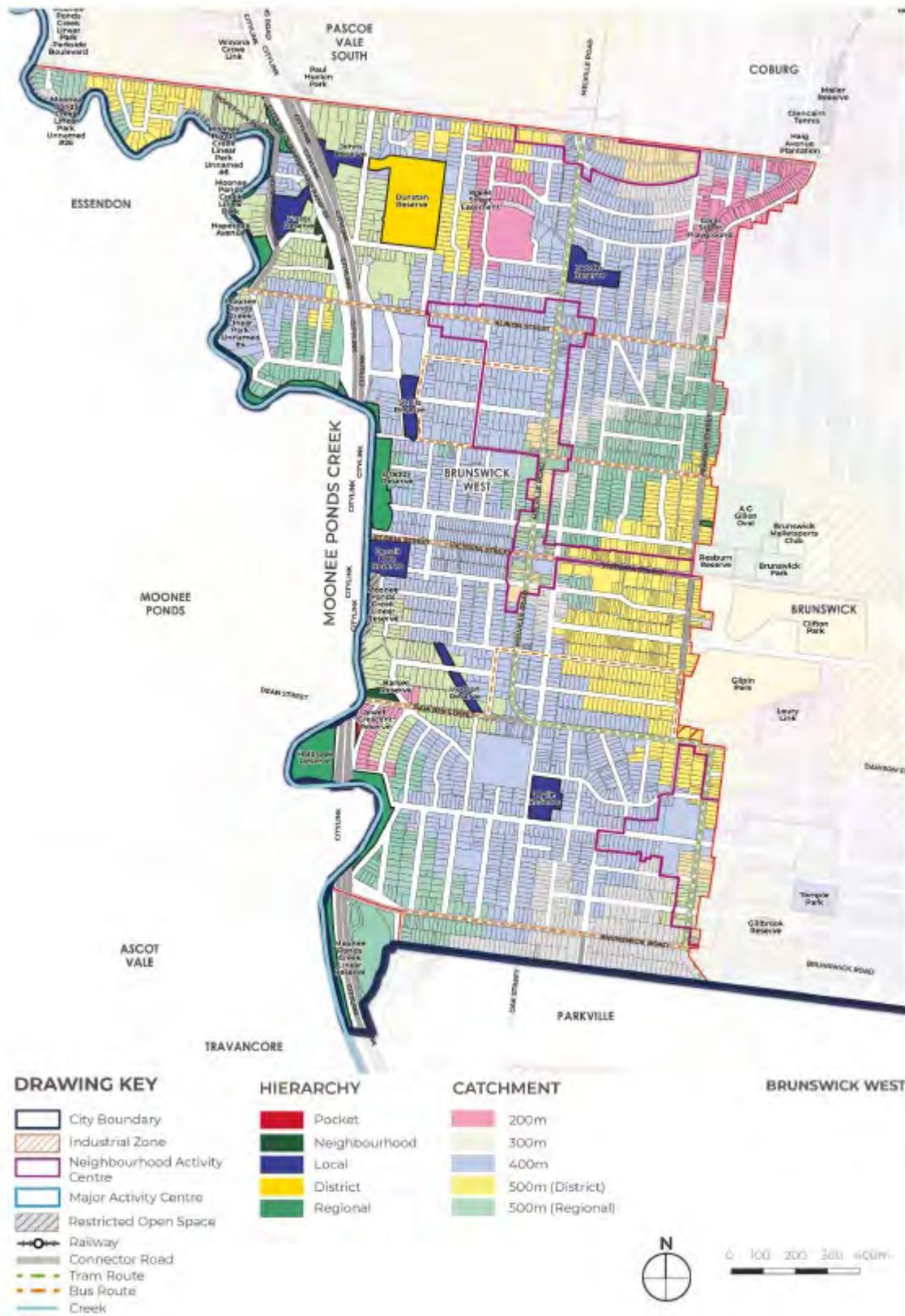


Figure 28: Analysis #2 and mapping of the open space hierarchies, their catchments and open space gaps, Brunswick West.



Figure 29: Key recommended projects for new land acquisition and existing open space expansion.

Coburg

Coburg is a 6.9 square kilometre suburb centrally located in Merri-bek. It adjoins Brunswick, Brunswick East, Brunswick West, Pascoe Vale, Pascoe Vale South and Coburg North within Merri-bek. The Merri Creek defines its western boundary, and to the north, west and south respectively lie Murray Road, Melville Road and Moreland Road.

Coburg is experiencing a mix of apartment densification as well as townhouse densification. The Coburg Major Activity Centre (MAC) along Sydney Road and the former Pentridge Prison has seen the highest buildings in Merri-bek be constructed. Densification is also expected in pockets including the Holmes Street / Moreland Road Neighbourhood Activity Centre. Coburg is also experiencing significant commercial and worker growth, with key businesses expected in the coming decade associated with the Coburg Health and Community Service Precinct.. Council is also exploring open space needs in central Coburg near the Coburg Train Station as part of the Heart of Coburg project, which will likely see the creation of new housing and business in this dense part of the suburb,

A prominent open space in Coburg is the Merri Creek corridor, which contains the Merri Creek shared used trail and adjoining open spaces such as De Chene Reserve. In central Coburg near the Coburg MAC are large open spaces such as Bridges Reserve and McDonald Reserve as well as civic spaces such as the Coburg Mall. Harmony Park in the north of Coburg contains a mix of functions, including a playground, skate park and large pergola and picnic facilities.

Key open space statistics include:

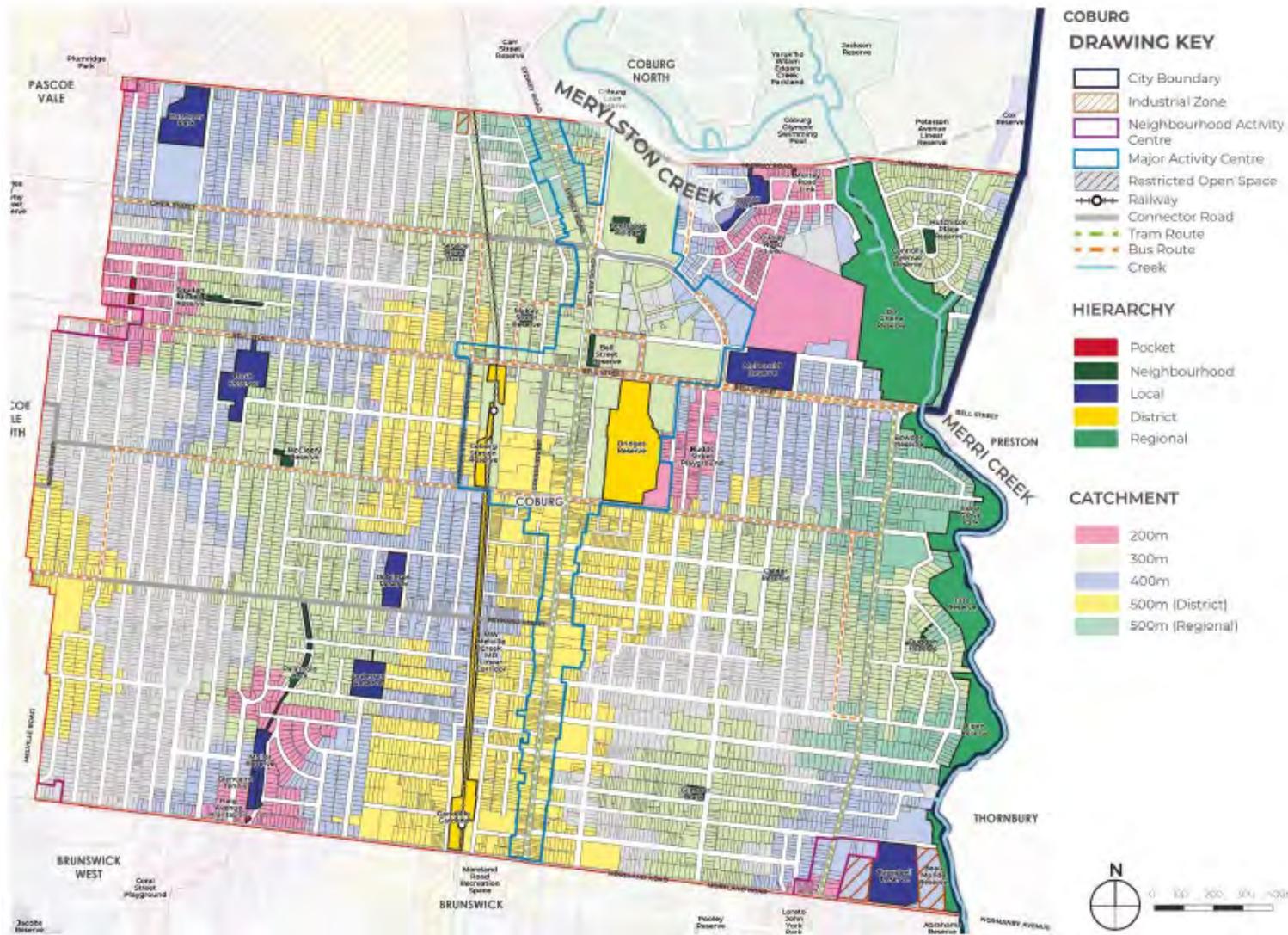
- A population of 30,126 residents in 2021, projected to increase by 41 per cent to 42,438 residents by 2041.
- A workforce of 8,292 individuals in 2021, with a projected increase of 24 per cent to 10,297 workers by 2041.
- In 2021, there were 17.3 square metres of open space per resident, which is expected to decrease to 12.3 square metres by 2041 if no additional land is acquired.
- 51.9 hectares (519,000 square metres) of open space, occupying approximately 7 per cent of the suburb.
- Seven formal sports reserves, including at Bush Reserve and Bridges Reserve.
- 20 play spaces, ranging from playgrounds in small open spaces such as the Soudan Street Reserve to playgrounds in larger spaces at Harmony Park.

Key open space challenges and key open space recommendations:

- Significant residential growth across Coburg, with apartments expected to account for 70 per cent of the new future housing, largely within the Coburg Activity Centre.

- Significant worker growth, especially with the Coburg Health and Community Services Precinct proceeds.
- Undertake land acquisition to create a new neighbourhood scale open space in the north-west of Coburg near O’Hea Street and in the west of Coburg near Munro Street.
- Undertake land acquisition to create a new local open space to the south of Reynard Street in the west of Coburg and to the south of Rennie Street in the east of Coburg to address identified open space gaps.
- Create new pocket parks in or near the Coburg Activity Centre around Moreland Road and Coburg Train Station to reduce pressure on existing open space and accommodate key population and worker increase.
- Continue upgrading and investing in existing open spaces and explore opportunities to increase existing open spaces to address the above gaps.

Further detail is contained in the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.



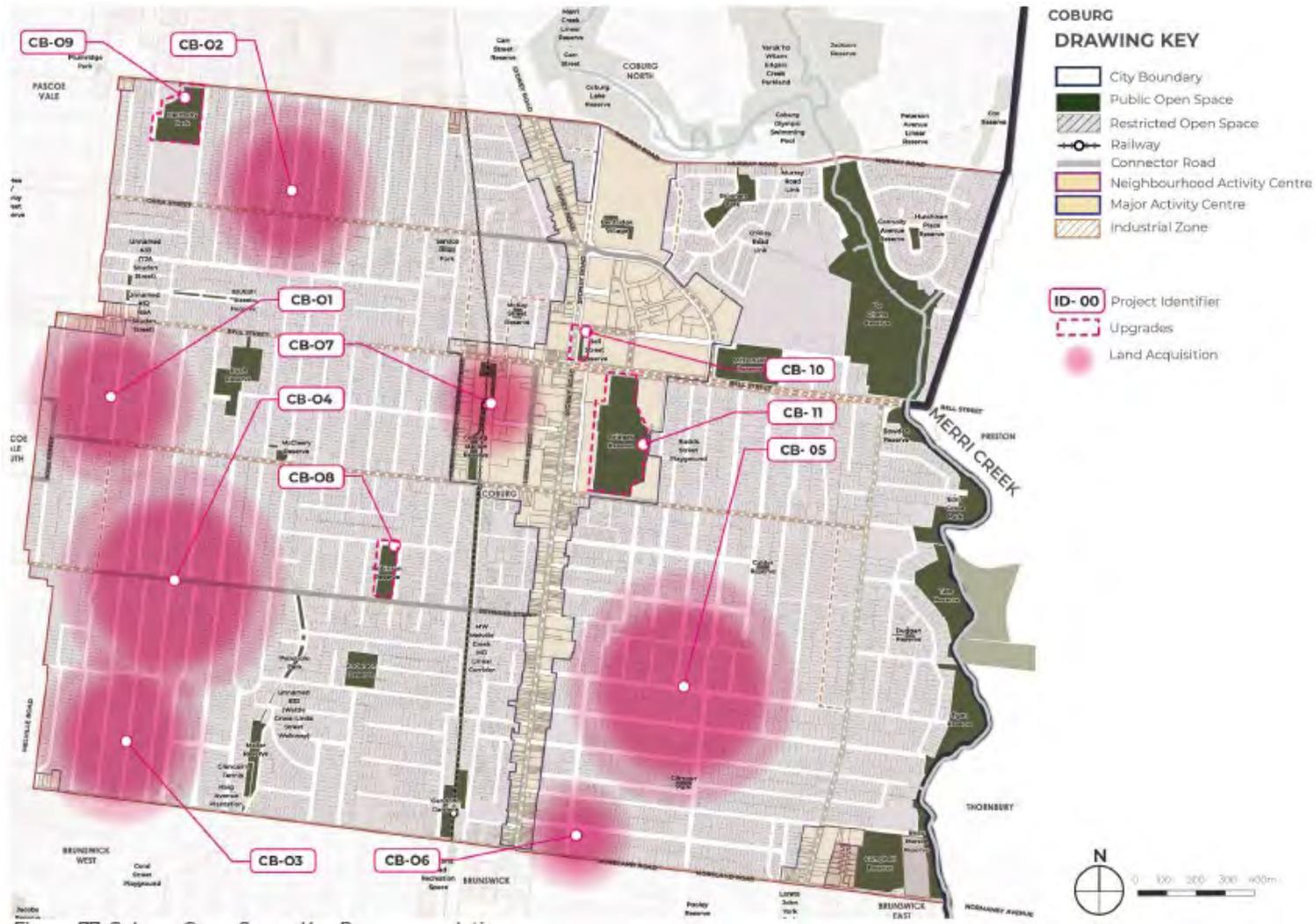


Figure 32: Key open space projects recommended in Coburg.

Coburg North

Coburg North is a 4.8 square kilometre suburb centrally located in Merri-bek. It adjoins Fawkner, Hadfield, Pascoe Vale and Coburg in Merri-bek and Preston and Reservoir in the City of Darebin.



Coburg North is irregularly shaped. To its west it is bounded by Merri Creek, Elizabeth Street and Murray Road, where it adjoins Darebin City Council. To the north it is bounded by Boundary Road, and to the south and west by Murray Road / Gaffney Street and Sussex Street. Key open spaces include Coburg Lake, a regional open space which is considered a destination space due to its Lake features and various functions including playgrounds and exercise equipment. The suburb also has part of the Edgars and Merri Creek corridors as well as the Yaruk'ho Wilam Edgars Creek Parklands where the Edgars and Merri Creeks converge. It also contains key areas of grasslands and creek escarpments.

Key open space figures for Coburg North include:

- A population of 9,182 residents in 2021, projected to increase by 45 per cent to 13,302 residents by 2041.
- A workforce of 7,889 individuals in 2021, expected to double to 15,779 workers by 2041.
- In 2021, there was the highest open space per resident in Merri-bek, of 110 square metres of open space per resident, which is expected to decrease to 76 square metres by 2041 if no additional land is acquired.
- 100 hectares (100,000 square metres) of open space, occupying 21 per cent of the suburb's total area.
- 5 formal sports reserves, including the Coburg Olympic Swimming Pool and Parker Reserve.
- Nine play spaces, including at Parker Reserve,

Key challenges and open space recommendations:

- Coburg North will experience significant population growth, with the majority of growth (55 per cent) predicted to be medium townhouse growth and single house dwellings declining due to densification. The worker population is expected to double, including within the established industrial and commercial areas along Newlands Road precinct.
- Whilst Coburg North has a large amount of public open space comparative to other suburbs such as Brunswick, much of the public open space is centred around the Creek corridors or large spaces such as Parker Reserve, Richards Reserve or Hosken Reserve.
- Explore locations for a dog park or dedicated dog infrastructure.

- Undertake land acquisitions / other changes to enhance linear open space, near the Anderson Linear Park and Sanger Reserve, and along the Merlynston Creek corridor, Hosken Reserve and Coburg Lake.
- Explore opportunistic land acquisitions to existing open spaces to increase usage by adding more facilities and land acquisitions to increase the sizes.
- Continue upgrading and enhancing existing open spaces, such as by adding new playgrounds and dog facilities.

Further detail is contained in the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.



Figure 33: Existing open space in Coburg North.

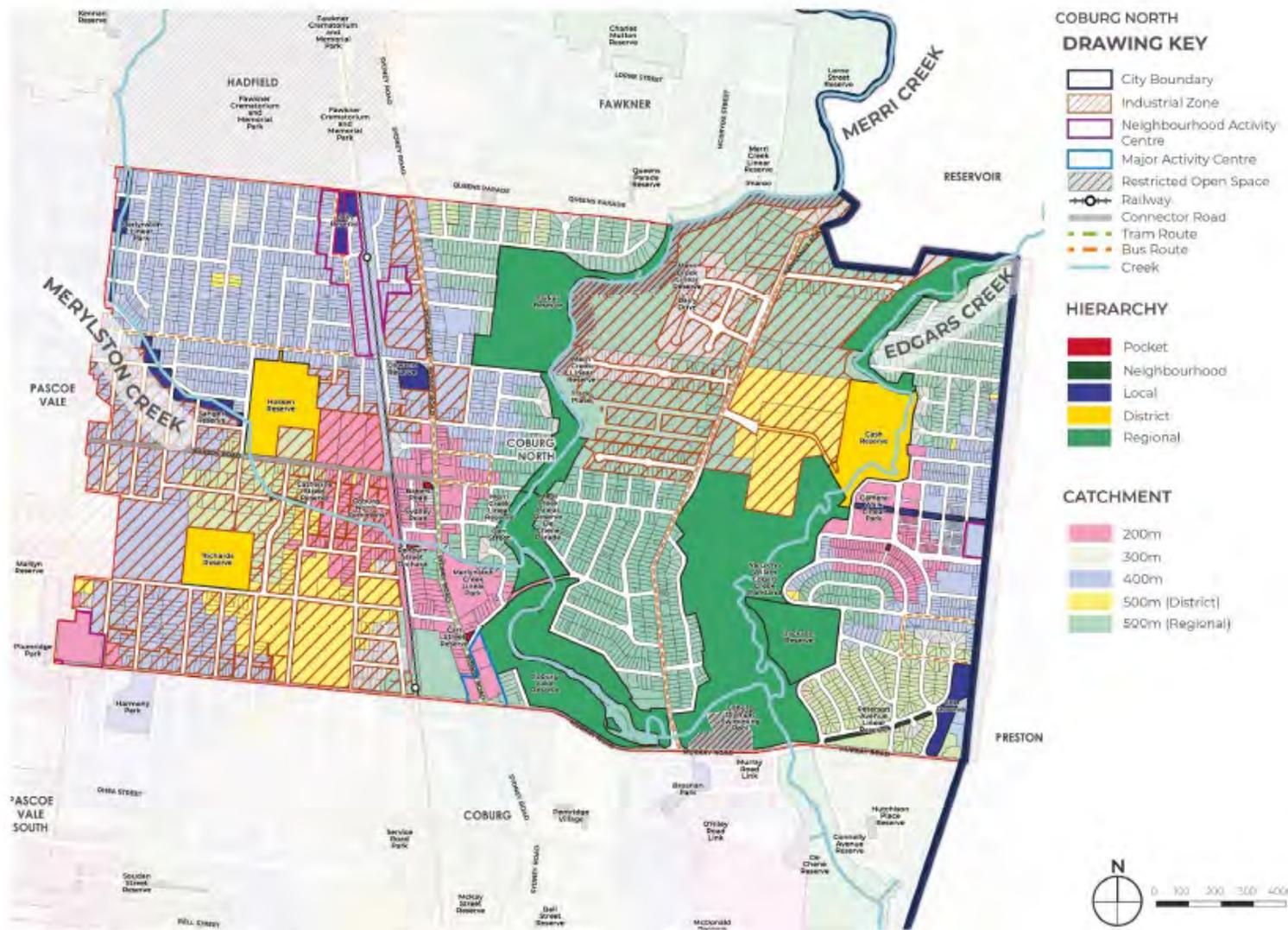


Figure 34: Analysis #2 and mapping of the open space hierarchies, their catchments and open space gaps, Coburg North.



Pascoe Vale South

Pascoe Vale South is a 3.1 square kilometre suburb. It adjoins the Merri-bek suburbs of Brunswick West, Pascoe Vale and Coburg, the suburbs Strathmore and Essendon in the City of Moonee Valley.



The Moonee Ponds Creeks abounds the western border of Pascoe Vale South, while to the north lies O’Hea Street, streets near Melville Road to the east and Moreland Road to the south.

Key open spaces include the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor and adjoining open spaces such as Kelvin Thompson Reserve. Key densification is expected along the Bell Street/ Melville Road Neighbourhood Activity Centre (NAC).

Key open space figures for Pascoe Vale South include:

- A population of 12,331 residents in 2021, projected to increase by 32 per cent to 16,286 residents by 2041.
- A workforce of 1,365 individuals in 2021, with a projected increase of 75 per cent to 2,391 workers by 2041.
- In 2021, there were 21.5 square metres of open space per resident, which is expected to decrease to 16.2 square metres by 2041 if no additional land is acquired.
- 26 hectares (260,000 square metres) of open space, occupying 9 per cent of the suburb’s total area.
- Three formal sports reserves, at Brearley, Morris and Shore Reserves.
- Five play spaces, including at Shore Reserve.

Key challenges and open space recommendations:

- Pascoe Vale South will continue to experience significant residential and worker population increases, including along the Bell Street/ Melville Road NAC. An anticipated 28 per cent of the residential growth is expected to be high-density apartments which represents a significant shift in Pascoe Vale South’s urban form. The remainder of residential growth will largely be townhouses.
- Undertaken land acquisitions to create two new neighbourhood scale open spaces, both to the north and south of Bell Street, to address densification occurring near and within this NAC as well as current insufficient open space.
- It is also recommended to undertake land acquisition to create a new pocket scale open space to address a gap area near Moreland and Melville Roads.
- Continue land acquisitions to improve access to the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor will be beneficial and help reduce pressure on open spaces such as Shore Reserve in the eastern side of Pascoe Vale South.

- Continue upgrading and enhancing existing open spaces and pursue opportunities land acquisitions to increase existing spaces.

Further detail is contained in the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.



Figure 38: Key recommended open space projects in Pascoe Vale South.

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Pascoe Vale

Pascoe Vale is a 4.9 square kilometre suburb adjoining the Merri-bek suburbs of Hadfield, Oak Park, Pascoe Vale South, Coburg and Coburg North. It is generally bound by O’Hea Street in the south, Sussex Street to the east, South Street in the north and the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor in the west.



Densification is expected to occur across the suburb, including key densification in the Snell Grove NAC and the Gaffney Street/Pascoe Vale train station NAC.

Key areas of open space features include the Westbreen Creek, which transgresses from the Northern Golf Course through various open spaces including H M Down Reserve, K W Joyce Reserve, Gavin Park, Austin Crescent, into the Moonee Ponds Creek.

Key open space figures for Pascoe Vale include:

- A population of 20,042 residents in 2021, projected to increase by 39 per cent to 27,801 residents by 2041.
- A workforce of 2,369 individuals in 2021, with a projected increase of 40 per cent to 3,323 workers by 2041.
- In 2021, there were 17.9 square metres of open space per resident, which is expected to decrease to 12.9 square metres by 2041 if no additional land is acquired.
- 49 hectares (49,000 square metres) open space, occupying 7 per cent of the suburb’s total area.
- Four formal sports reserve, such as Raeburn Reserve.
- 12 play spaces including playgrounds along the Moonee Ponds Creeks corridors such as Esslemont Reserve.

Key challenges and open space recommendations:

- Residential and worker population growth will continue to increase. Similar to Pascoe Vale South, 25 per cent of future residential growth is expected to be high-density apartments, also representing a shift in the urban form of this suburb. The remainder of densification will largely be townhouse developments.
- Undertake land acquisitions to create three new neighbourhood open spaces to address identified open space gaps near Derby Street/Kent Road, Derby Street/Gaffney Street and Gaffney Street/Cumberland Road.
- Explore ways to expand open space along the Westbreen Creek corridor and linking it to the Moonee Ponds Creek regional corridor.
- Continue upgrading and enhancing existing open spaces and pursue opportunities land acquisitions to increase existing spaces.

Further detail is contained in the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.

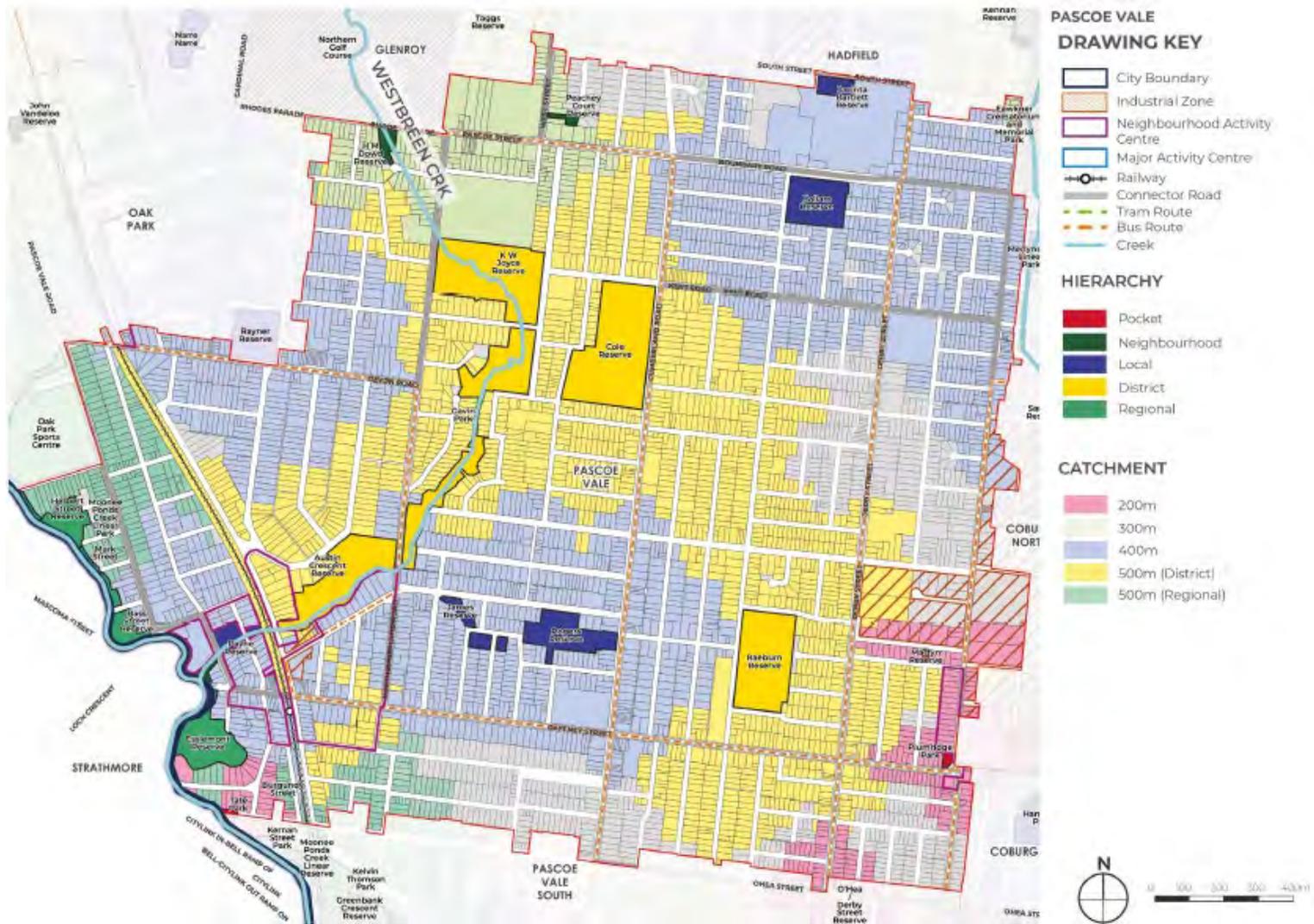


Figure 40: Analysis #2 and mapping of the open space hierarchies, their catchments and open space gaps, Pascoe Vale.



Figure 41: Recommended key open space projects for Pascoe Vale.

Oak Park

Oak Park is a 2 square kilometre suburbs which adjoins the Merri-bek suburbs of Glenroy and Pascoe Vale and Essendon Fields in the City of Moonee Valley. It is characterised by the Moonee Ponds Creek trail which extends along its western boundary and bounded by irregular roads to its remaining boundaries.



Key open spaces are largely located along the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor, in addition to the Oak Park Aquatic Centre and adjoining sports grounds and Raynor Reserve. Oak Park contains the Snell Grove Neighbourhood Activity Centre (NAC) as well as the smaller Winifred Local Activity Centre (LAC). In the north of Oak Park, there is a pedestrian bridge near Deveraux Street which provides access to the large Boeing Reserve open space in Moonee Valley City Council.

Key open space statistics for Oak Park include:

- A population of 7,610 residents in 2021, projected to increase by 13 per cent to 8,582 residents by 2041.
- A workforce of 639 individuals in 2021, with a projected decrease of 33 per cent to 428 workers by 2041.
- In 2021, there were 36.3 square metres of open space per resident, which is expected to decrease to 32.1 square metres by 2041 if no additional land is acquired.
- 27.6 hectares (276,000 square metres) of open space, occupying 13 per cent of the suburb's total area.
- Four formal sports reserves, including the Oak Park Aquatic Centre.
- Nine play spaces, including the Bryant Family Reserve playground.

Key challenges and open space recommendations:

- Undertake land acquisition to create a new neighbourhood scale open space to the north of Oak Park to address an identified open space gap.
- Undertake land acquisition to create a new pocket scale open space to the east of the Snell Grove NAC to improve open space land for population densification.
- Continue to enhance existing open spaces by adding new playgrounds, increase physical access to the Moonee Ponds Creek Corridor via land acquisition and enlarge existing open spaces by adjoining land acquisition.

Further detail is contained in the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.



Figure 42: Existing open space in Oak Park.



Figure 43: Analysis #2 and mapping of the open space hierarchies, their catchments and open space gaps, Oak Park.



Figure 44: Recommended key open space projects for Oak Park.

Glenroy

Glenroy is Merri-bek's largest suburb of 8.9 square kilometres. It adjoins the Merri-bek suburbs of Gowanbrae, Oak Park, Hadfield and Fawkner, and the City of Hume suburbs Broadmeadows, Jacana and Gladstone Park. It is bounded by the Western Ring Road along its northern boundary, and various roads and the Moonee Ponds Creek along its other boundaries. Glenroy is expected to continue to experience densification, including via the construction of townhouses on former single allotments and also higher density in the Glenroy Major Activity Centre around the Glenroy railway station.



Glenroy has a very diverse open space network. Key spaces include:

- Various parks along the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor
- Open space to the south of the Western Ring Road, including
- Three open spaces owned by Melbourne Water, being the Box Forest retarding basin, the Campbellfield Creek retarding basin and the Jack Roper Reserve (CSL) retarding basin. These three spaces are considered as restricted open spaces, where the public can enter and use them for relaxation, exercising and connection with nature.
- The Glenroy Memorial Park is publicly accessible and contains key Merri-bek nature and biodiversity and diverse open space experiences. The Merlynston Creek is partially drained and partially an accessible waterway, prior to entering the Box Forest retarding basin. This open space is considered to be encumbered / restricted open space, as it is owned and managed by the GMCT, which means whilst the public can access it for open space, it is limited in that activities such as formal sports, would not be possible.
- The Northern Golf Club also considered an encumbered/restricted open space, which contains key habitat and biodiversity as well as the start of the Westbreen Creek.
- Key open space linear spaces, including the Western Ring Road bike trail which connected the Merri Creek and the Moonee Ponds Creek to the southern of the Western Ring Road.

Key open space figures for Glenroy include:

- A population of 24,770 residents in 2021, projected to increase by 17 per cent to 29,096 residents by 2041. In 2041, it is expected that 48 per cent of this population will live in separate detached homes, 48 per cent in townhouses and 4 per cent in apartments (within the Glenroy Major Activity Centre).
- A workforce of 4,686 individuals in 2021, with a projected increase of 56 per cent to 7,320 workers by 2041.
- In 2021, there were 71.4 square metres of open space per resident, which is expected to decrease to 60.8 square metres by 2041 if no additional land is

acquired. Whilst this is some of the highest open space per resident in Merri-bek, much of this open space is not considered *public* open space as it is owned and managed by the Northern Golf Club and the Greater Melbourne Cemeteries Trust (GMCT) (and is therefore considered restricted or encumbered open space).

- 125 hectares (1,250,000 square metres) of open space, occupying 14 per cent of the total suburb's area.
- Five sports reserves, including ATC Cook Reserve.
- 16 play spaces, including at Wallace Reserve.
- Significant restricted and encumbered open spaces at the Northern Golf Club and Glenroy Memorial Park.

Key open space recommendations:

- Whilst Glenroy will continue to experience residential population increase, it will also experience almost a doubling of its worker population, largely due to its location as a Major Activity Centre in Merri-bek and the prominent commercial precinct around the Glenroy Train Station. This will continue to put pressure on existing open space (as well as gaps).
- Undertake land acquisition to create a new neighbourhood scale open space to address a gap near the north-east of the Glenroy Activity Centre and a smaller pocket scale open space further to the west near Hilton Street and Melbourne Avenue in central Glenroy.
- Continue to enhance existing open spaces by adding new playgrounds and enlarge existing open spaces by opportunistic adjoining land acquisition.
- Continue to explore public use of the restricted open spaces owned by the Northern Golf Club and GMCT.

Further detail is contained in the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.

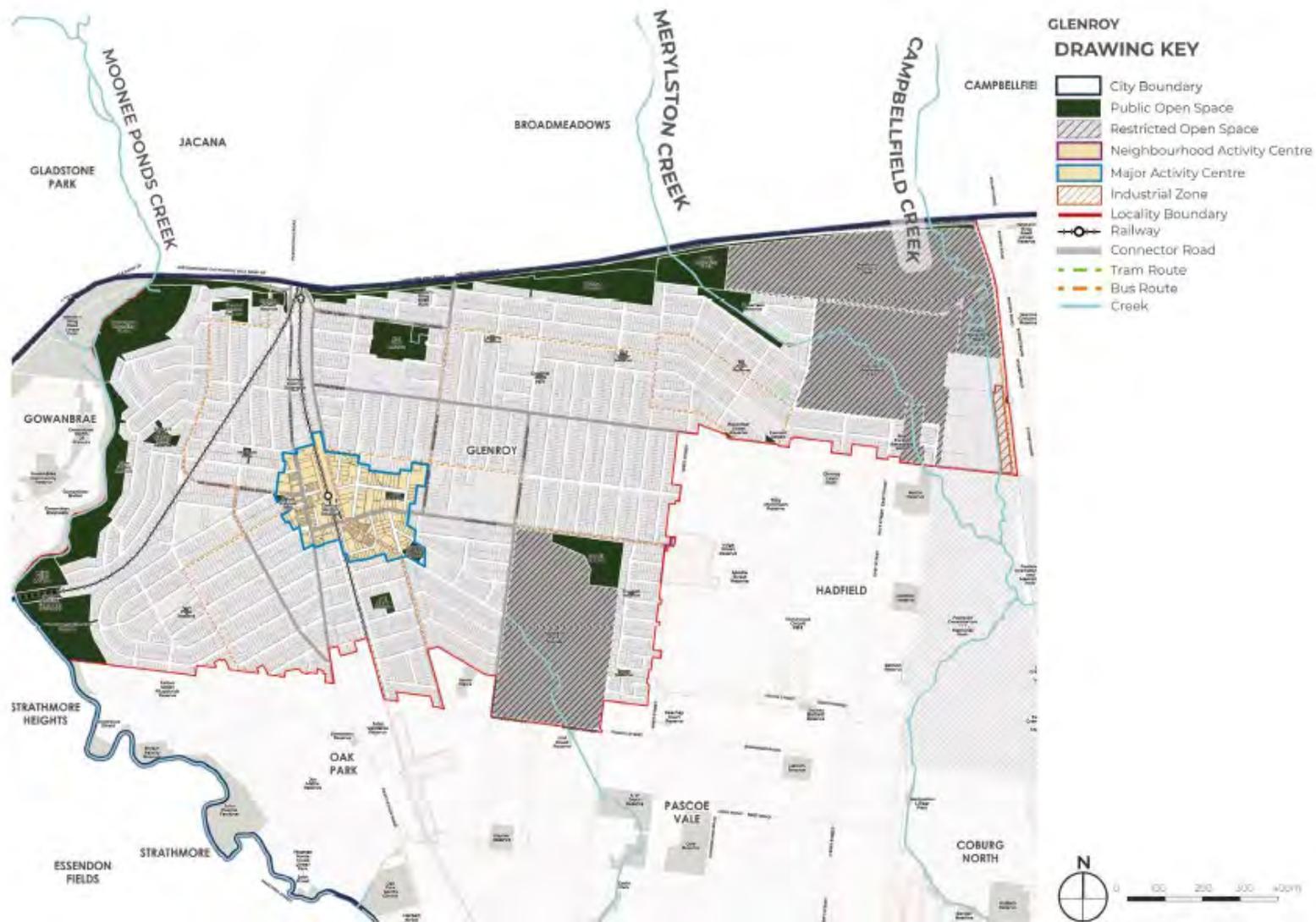


Figure 45: Existing open space in Glenroy. The grey hatched areas are Glenroy Golf Club and Glenroy Northern Memorial park.

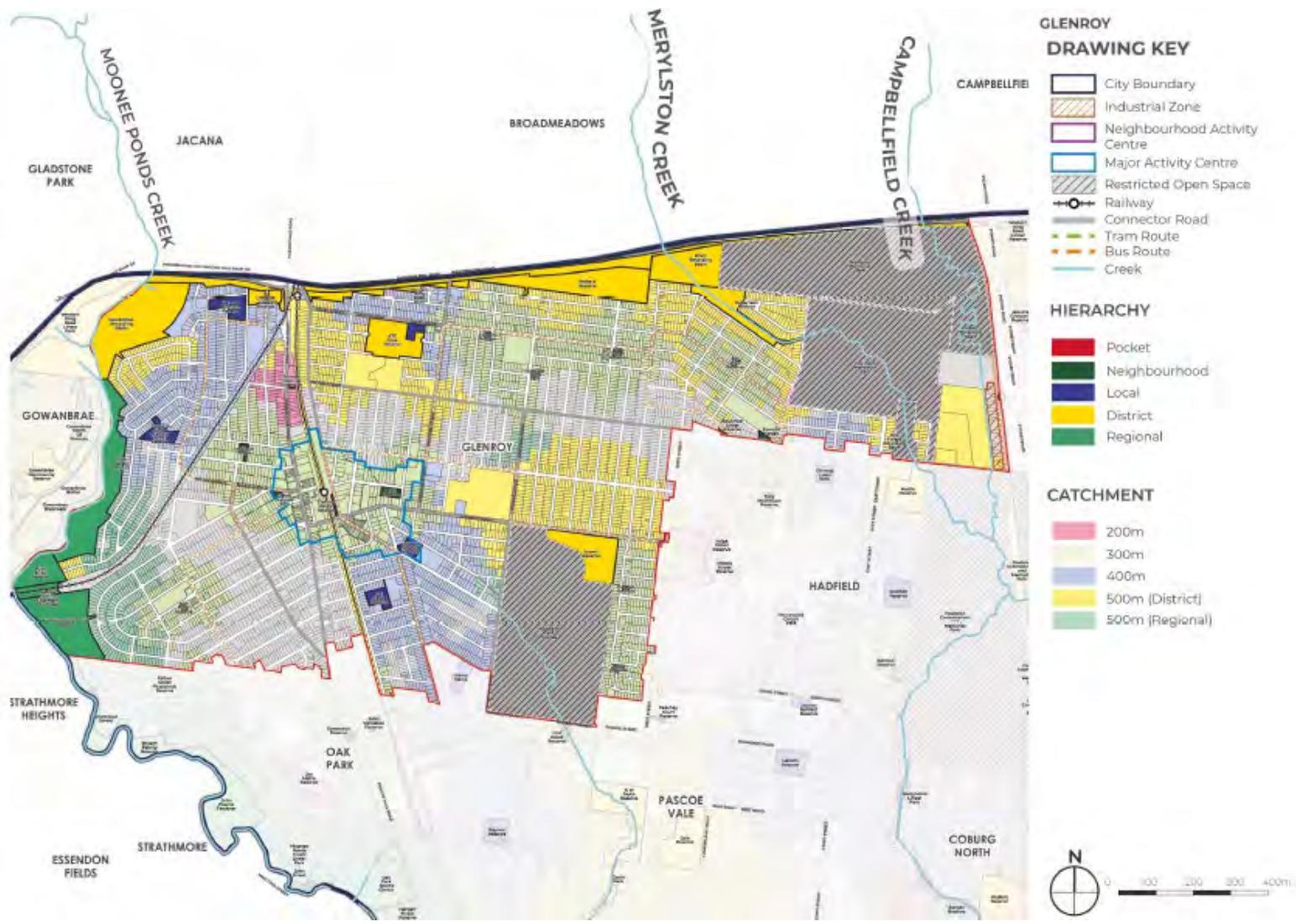


Figure 46: Analysis #2 and mapping of the open space hierarchies, their catchments and open space gaps, Glenroy.

Gowanbrae

Gowanbrae is a 1.4 square kilometre suburb in Merri-bek adjoining Glenroy and Oak Park in Merri-bek, and Gladstone Park, Tullamarine and Jacana in the City of Moonee Valley and Hume.



It is bordered by major roads including the Western Ring Road and the Tullamarine Freeway and the Moonee Ponds Creek.

Major open space features include the Moonee Ponds Creek trail corridor and large open space escarpments providing a buffer between the suburb and major roads.

Unlike the remainder of Merri-bek, Gowanbrae is expected to have a stable residential population and small worker population. This is due to the restrictions on growth in the suburb, due to the escarpments of the suburb and recent construction of its homes in the last 20 years.

Key open space statistics:

- A population of 3,179 residents in 2021, projects to decrease by 1 per cent to 3,149 persons in 2014.
- A workforce of 91 individuals in 2021, projected to double to 179 persons in 2041.
- In 2021, there were 92.3 square metres of open space per resident, which is expected to increase slightly to 93.5 due to anticipated population decrease (if no additional land is acquired).
- 29.4 hectares of public open space, occupying 20 per cent of the overall suburb.
- No formal sports reserves except for public tennis court at Elms Court.
- Five play spaces, including at Elms Court Reserve which has a playground and skate park.
- A dog park at Elms Court Reserve being currently designed.

Key challenges and open space recommendations:

- Significant open space in Gowanbrae to the north of the Elms Court Reserve / the Western Ring Road Linear Park, has large power transmission towers and lines which can restrict open space uses and infrastructure upgrades. This area is also difficult to access from much of Gowanbrae as this large open space corridor backs onto residential properties with limited entry points. Other open space areas in Gowanbrae also have steep escarpments, making them also restricted in use and function despite them being public open space.
- Create additional links to the existing open spaces by creating a walking loop around the entire suburb of Gowanbrae.
- Construct the Elms Court Reserve dog park.

- Continue enhancing and upgrading existing open spaces, such as the Balerno Circle playground.

Further detail is contained in the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.



Figure 47: Existing open space in Gowanbrae.

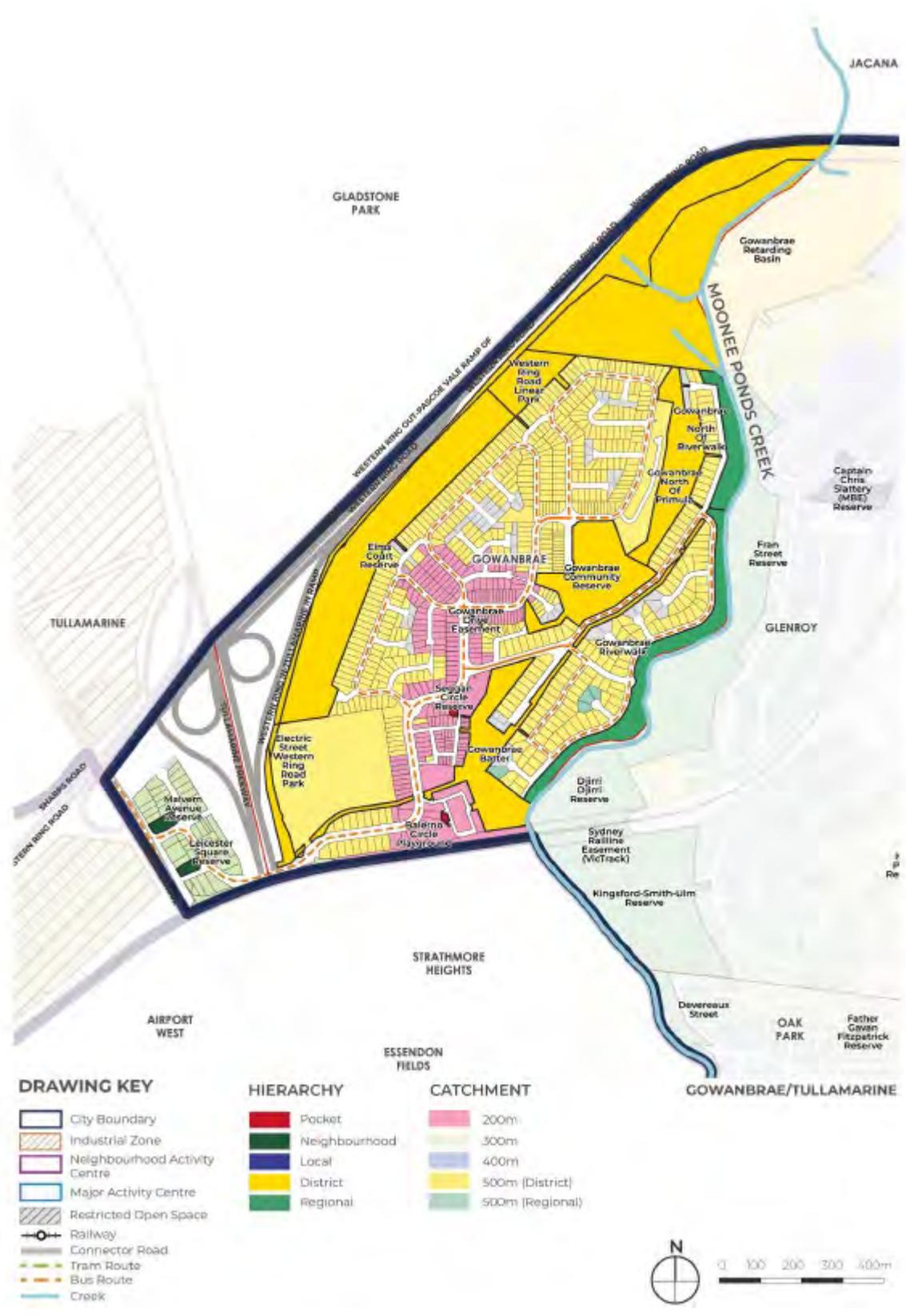


Figure 48: Analysis #2 and mapping of the open space hierarchies, their catchments and open space gaps, Gowanbrae.

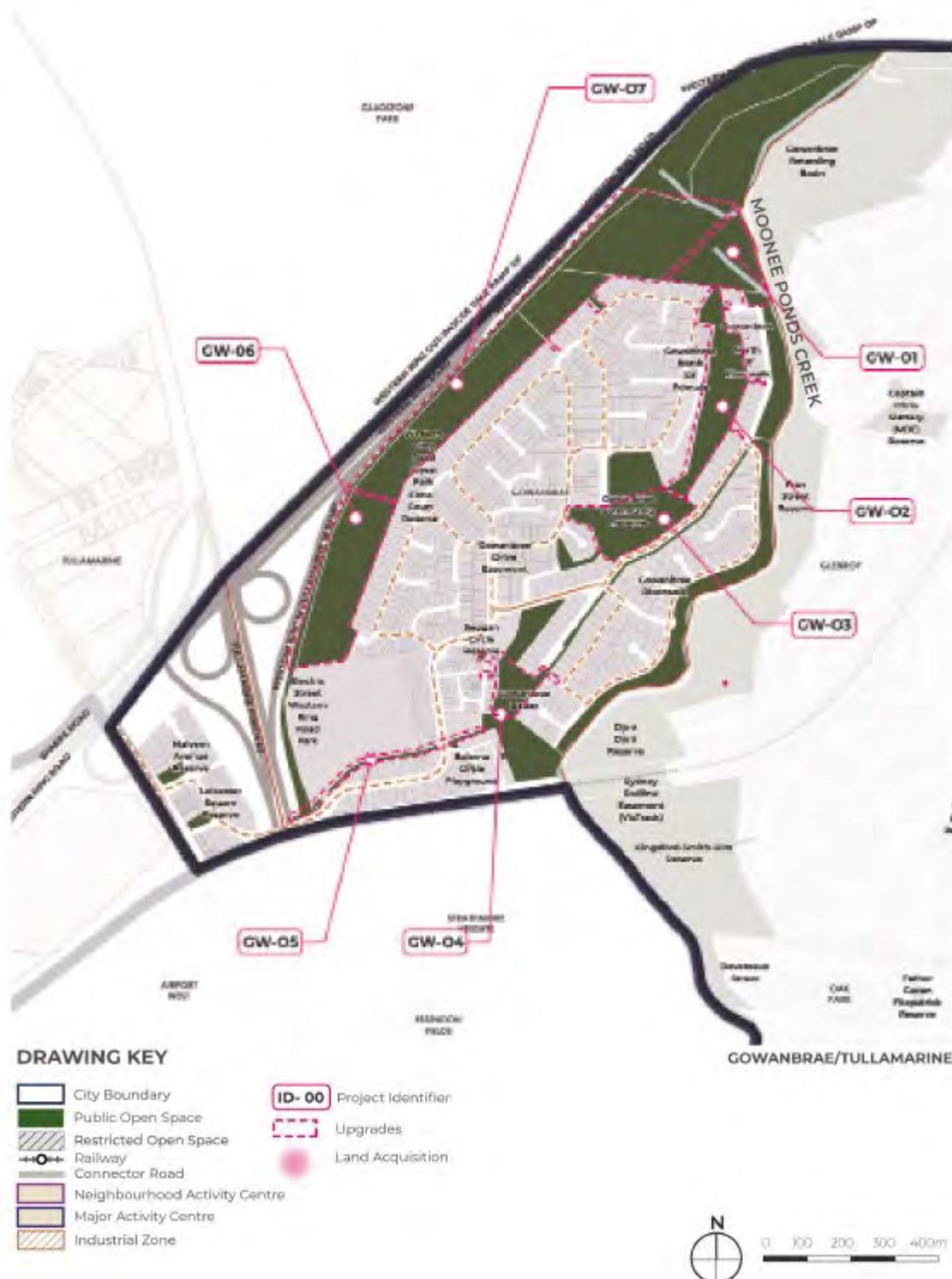


Figure 49: Key recommended open space projects in Gowanbrae.

Hadfield

Hadfield is a 3.1 square kilometre suburb which adjoins the Merri-bek suburbs of Glenroy, Fawkner, Pascoe Vale and Coburg North.



It is generally bounded by Hilton Street/Box Forest Road to the north, West Street to the West and Sydney Road to the east.

The prominent open space is the Fawkner Memorial Park, which is considered a restricted / encumbered open space as it is owned by the GMCT with the primary function as a cemetery and memorial park. Whilst it offers public access for nature, biodiversity and walking routes, other open space uses such as playgrounds and formal sports cannot occur there. Remaining public open spaces include the district Martin Reserve, which contains formal sports, playground and other facilities. These remaining 7 open spaces are smaller sized and largely distributed in the north of the suburb.

Key open space figures for Hadfield include:

- A population of 7,350 residents in 2021, projected to increase by 29 per cent to 9,488 residents by 2041.
- A workforce of 955 individuals in 2021, with a projected increase of 61 per cent to 1,536 workers by 2041.
- In 2021, there were 12.2 square metres of open space per resident, which is expected to decrease to 9.5 square metres by 2041 if no additional land is acquired.
- 8.9 hectares (89,000 square metres) of open space, occupying 3 per cent of the suburb (excluding the Fawkner Memorial Park).
- Three sports reserves at Reddish Reserve, Martin Reserve and Middle Street Reserve.
- Five play spaces.

Key open space challenges and key open space recommendations:

- Hadfield has a very large open space at the Fawkner Memorial Park, however as it is a restricted / encumbered open space, its primary purpose as a cemetery means only limited open space uses can be entertained. The Fawkner Memorial Park occupies approximately a third of the entire suburb of Hadfield. While it offers access for nature, biodiversity and walking tracks, it cannot provide for many of the open space uses that the community requires.
- Hadfield has otherwise a small amount of open space compared to other Merri-bek suburbs and many of these open spaces, such as Volga Street Reserve, Tony Mommsen Reserve and the Stonewood Circuit Park, are small local and neighbourhood sizes. The only public open space larger than a Neighbourhood space that is Martin Reserve.

- The hierarchy analysis as identified a significant open space gap through much of Hadfield – this means this area is deficient in open space as well as larger open spaces that can accommodate more activities.
- Undertake several land acquisitions to create a new local scale open space in the south-western corner of Hadfield to fill the above open space gap and a second neighbourhood scale open space gap in central Hadfield.
- Continue enhancing and upgrading existing open space and pursuing opportunistic land acquisition to enlarge existing open spaces, such as the Volga Street Reserve.
- Explore increasing public use of the Fawcner Memorial Park with the Greater Melbourne Cemeteries Trust.

Further detail is contained in the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.



Figure 50: Existing open space in Hadfield.

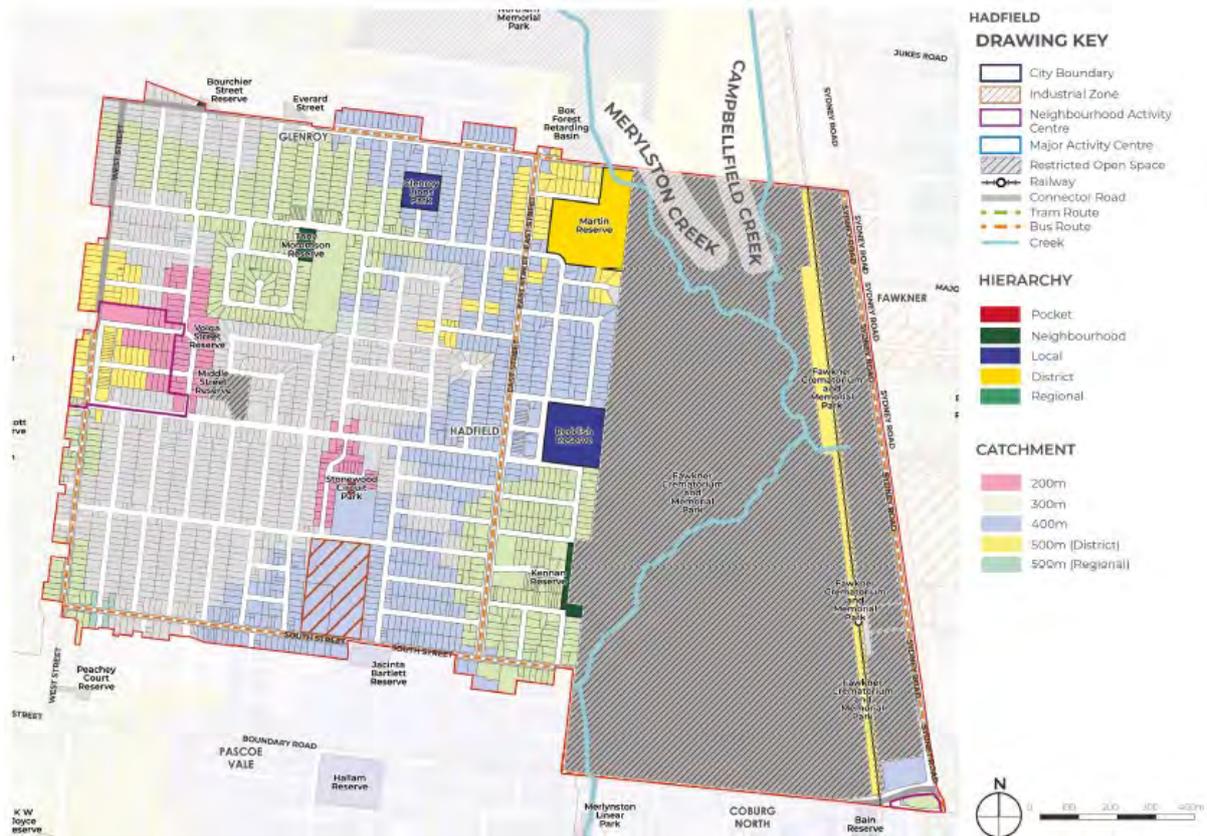


Figure 51: Analysis #2 and mapping of the open space hierarchies, their catchments and open space gaps, Hadfield.



Figure 52: Key recommended projects for Hadfield.

Fawkner

Fawkner is located in the north-west of Merri-bek, and border the Merri-bek suburbs of Coburg North, Glenroy, Hadfield, as well as Reservoir in the City of Darebin and Thomastown and Broadmeadows in the City of Hume.



Fawkner is bounded by the Merri Creek trail at its west, the Western Ring Road at its north, Sydney Road to its west and Boundary Road to its south.

Key open space figures for Fawkner include large open space areas along the Merri Creek trail, including Moomba Park, Bababi Djinanang and the Lorne Street Reserve. Council is in the process of enhancing this region via the Fawkner Merri Parklands Plan. Other key open spaces include C B Smith Reserve and Charles Mutton Reserve. Densification is predicted to occur across Fawkner, including in the Bonwick Street NAC.

- A population of 15,769 residents in 2021, projected to increase by 26 per cent to 19,925 residents by 2041.
- A workforce of 3,715 individuals in 2021, with a projected increase of 28 per cent to 4,772 workers by 2041.
- In 2021, there were 56 square metres of open space per resident, which is expected to decrease to 44 square metres by 2041 if no additional land is acquired.
- 88 hectares of public open space.
- The existence of 3 formal sports reserves at C B Smith Reserve, Charles Mutton Reserve and Moomba Park.
- Eleven playgrounds, including at C B Smith Reserve.
- Public open space occupying 17 per cent of the suburb's total area.

Key challenges and open space recommendations:

- Fawkner will continue to experience residential and worker growth, with the residential growth to be largely townhouse development.
- Open space gaps along the western side of Sydney Road in the north and south of Fawkner have been identified.
- Undertake land acquisition to create two new neighbourhood scale open spaces to address these gaps.
- Continue enhancing and upgrading existing open spaces, such as progressing the Fawkner Merri Parklands Plan.

Further detail is contained in the Merri-bek Open Space Background Technical Report.



Figure 53: Existing open space in Fawkner.

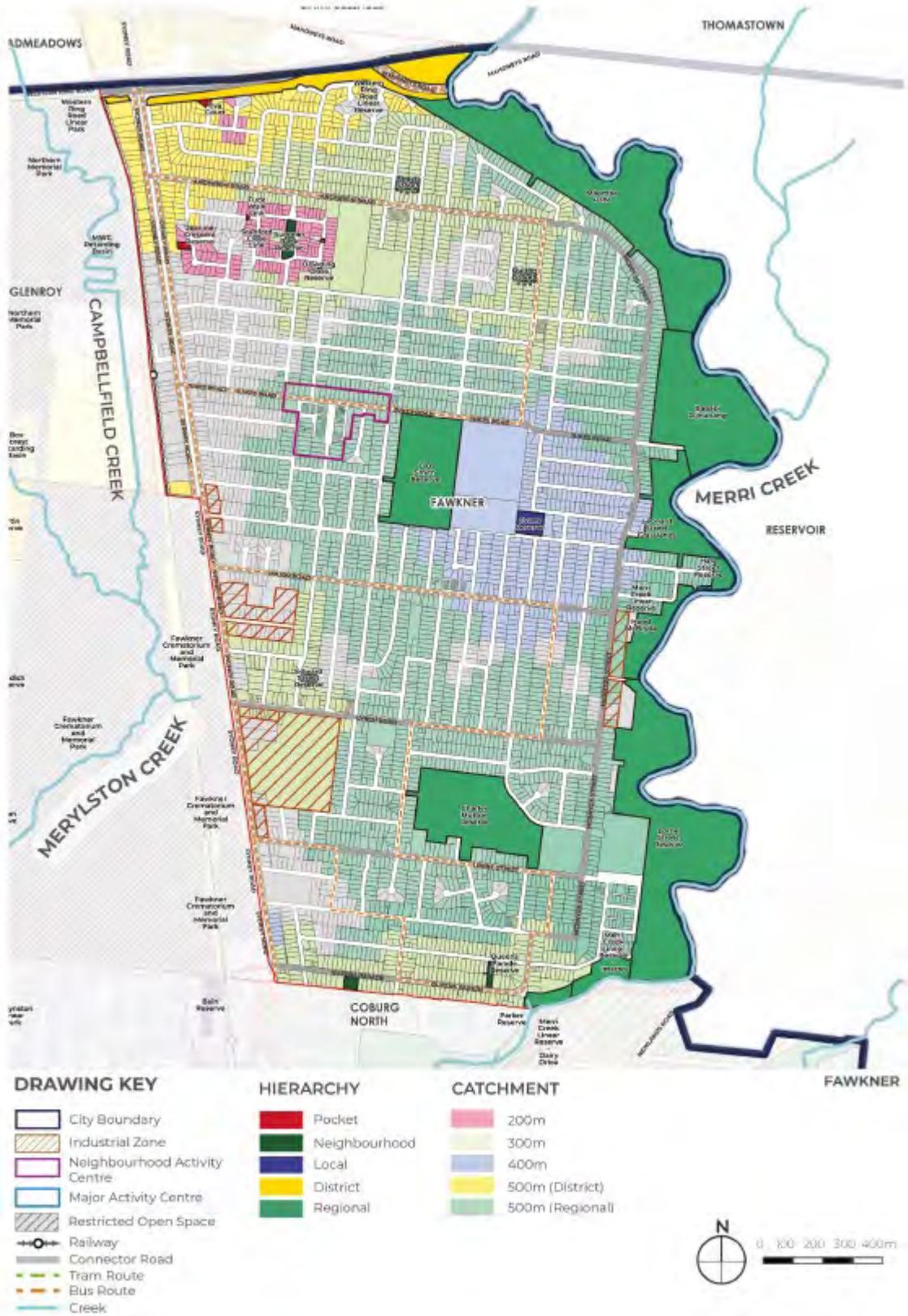


Figure 54: Analysis #2 and mapping of the open space hierarchies, their catchments and open space gaps, Fawkner.



Figure 55: Key open space recommendations for Fawkner.