



MERRI MERRI WAYI

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES REPORT

September 2022

CERES
CONSULTING

Table of Contents

<u>Acknowledgement</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>What is Merri Merri Wayi?</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Background</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Merri Creek & Surrounds Visioning Exercise</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Vision 2040 - Workshop 1 & 2</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Emerging Vision</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>Merri Merri Wayi Values - Workshop 3</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>A Thriving & Healthy Ecosystem</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Community Priorities - Workshop 4</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Place-based Planning</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>Appendix</u>	
1. <u>Merri Creek Coburg Safety Survey Report</u>	<u>18</u>
2. <u>Collective Impact</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>Contact</u>	<u>26</u>



Acknowledgement

The Merri Creek is an iconic and important ecosystem with more than 40,000 years of human interaction and Traditional Ecological Knowledge from the Wurundjeri peoples.

*This initiative acknowledges the past, present and future role **Traditional Owners** have on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples.*

*It also acknowledges the **thousands of people who volunteer and continue to work to protect Merri Creek**, notably the Friends of Merri Creek and the Merri Creek Management Committee.*



What is Merri Merri Wayi?

Merri Merri Wayi is a **community-led collaboration to enable our natural and urban worlds to thrive along the Merri Creek.**



Merri Merri Wayi - meaning **Merri Merri (and) Us** - is the Woi-wurrung language name granted to the collaboration by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elder Aunty Gail Smith and formally registered with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Council.

This report outlines:

-  the background to the initiative
-  insights from a series of community consultations reflecting what the community love about the creek
-  their vision for how it could be
-  and their priorities for the environmental, social and cultural values that contribute to a thriving and healthy ecosystem.



Background

The call for a **Merri Creek & Surrounds Visioning exercise** arose amongst a range of community organisations and community members, who came together following the attack on a woman along the creek in East Coburg in late 2019.

As a consequence of this terrible incident, Moreland City Council engaged Monash University's XYX Lab to conduct a women's safety survey of the Coburg section of the Merri Creek between Bell Street and Moreland Road. The response level demonstrated strong concern in the community and a willingness of women to reflect on their safety and offer solutions.

The **Merri Creek Coburg Safety Report** was an important response to this terrible incident, with recommendations that action be taken in the following three realms to improve the safety of the creek:



- Building communities
- Communication & engagement
- Infrastructure and maintenance

Importantly, community organisations and community members recognised the opportunity to build on existing work and action, as well as coming together to find new ones.

Further information on the Merri Creek Coburg Safety Report can be found in the [Appendix 1](#) in this report.

Moreland City Council resolved to provide a framework within which relevant community collaborations could flourish, that would be in line with the report and recognise the involvement of the community in determining goals, objectives and priorities for the future care, management and use of the Merri Creek & Surrounds.

It was proposed that the visioning exercise be focused on community consultation and engagement modelled on the [Collective Impact framework](#) in line with Council's Community Engagement Policy in the *Collaborate* and *Empower* range of the IAP2 public participation spectrum.

The council secured funds to engage an appropriately skilled consultant to undertake this exercise and **CERES Consulting** was appointed to be the Consultant on the Merri Creek & Surrounds Visioning exercise. As part of its approach, **CERES** engaged **Think Impact** as subject matter experts in the Collective Impact framework to collaborate on the facilitation and synthesis of community consultation workshops.

Further information on Collective Impact can be found in the [Appendix 2](#) in this report.





Merri Creek & Surrounds Visioning Exercise

Community workshops

Between May 2021 and May 2022 there were four community workshops. These were modelled on the Collective Impact framework where relevant and provided opportunities for a codesign approach with key stakeholders.

These workshops were designed to support community collaboration and empowerment and sought to answer these key questions:

-  **What vision does the community hold for Merri Creek and surrounds in 2040?**
-  **How would we know the Merri Creek is improving from an environmental values perspective?**
-  **How would we know the Merri Creek is improving from a social and cultural values perspective?**
-  **How can delivery of the community priorities* contribute to a thriving and healthy ecosystem?**

*Community priorities were identified from Workshops 1-3. See Community Priorities - page 13 for more details.



Vision 2040

Workshop 1 & 2 - What vision does the community hold for Merri Creek and surrounds in 2040?

Collective Impact Conditions: Common Agenda

To help explore a community vision, the workshop participants engaged in a future-casting exercise, placing themselves in 2040 and taking visitors for a walk along the creek. They were asked to describe what they experienced.

As there was some tension from prior discussions between the notion of “conservation” where non-human species are conserved by limiting human access, and “immersion” where people are given opportunity and access to convene with the natural landscape, this exercise was designed to understand what key aspects of the creek were cherished and loved and find common ground.

The following are community vision statements that were common across the exercise:

Merri Creek in 2040

A “tantalising” experience where interest is piqued at every turn. It is a place where there are opportunities to explore the creek and its tributaries. It is a non-competitive, inviting space for all.

The First Nations People’s experience is prominent and valued

Researchers from around the world come to Merri Creek and learning is a key component of its value.

The experience is information-rich and interference with natural ecology is minimised using technology (think VR headsets, QR codes, apps etc). It is a delightful, immersive sensory experience where new things about people and nature are learned along the way.

Wildlife is thriving. Frogs, microbats, native birds and myriad other species in evidence.

There is no litter and buildings are seen as glimpses only.

Interactions between bikes, walkers and wildlife are minimal and safe.

The complete length of the creek is connected with widespread collaboration between all local governments and other stakeholders. There are protected areas and these are supported with less-invasive infrastructure like overhead walkways and viewing platforms in preference to fences.

Platypus are commonly seen, as are people of all ages swimming in the water.

Bicycle transport is managed carefully and runs safely along the fringes.

The surrounds have expanded with numerous “pocket parks” integrated into the corridor. Wetlands have returned and are valued.

Redefinition of the “creek” by recognising the creek is not just the waterway, but the entire regenerative system included in the catchment. In this way the corridor is much wider than we commonly view it.

The city has no longer “turned its back” on the creek and dilapidated back fences are not seen. In fact, fences of all types are barely evident. The community is actively stewarding the space and care deeply about its welfare. It is peaceful and private and public space complement each other well.

Emerging Vision

From these two workshops emerged a shared vision where the **Merri Creek** is an exemplar of a place **where our natural and urban worlds enable each other to thrive.**

24 May 2021
Community Workshop 1
Working Together

14 July 2021
Community Workshop 2
Shaping the vision



The following infographic was created to show this emerging vision:

Towards a shared vision for the Merri Creek and surrounds

A living place for all to come together to nurture, learn, share and grow.

Balancing our social, cultural and environmental needs

Restoration and maintenance of wetlands, vegetation and biodiversity

Supporting active and passive recreation for all ages

Walking and bike paths for increased activation and conservation

Balancing safety needs with the natural environment



A creek that enables us to learn, share and grow

Where our natural and urban worlds enable each other to thrive

A creek we nurture

Recognition, learning from and celebrating First Nations history

Learning from each other: cross cultural, intergenerational and environmental

Meeting and learning spaces for all ages: bush kinder, community events

Merri Merri Wayi Values

Workshop 3 - How does this emerging vision improve the Merri Creek from an environmental values perspective?

Collective Impact Conditions: Shared Measurement

This continued to follow the Collective Impact Framework and aimed to find a shared measurement through aligned values, which would be used to measure progress towards success, and build shared accountability.

The following is a summary of the values that the community raised.



Environmental Value - a vital biodiversity corridor

The community universally regarded protection, restoration, and maintenance of the natural environment as an essential for the future of the creek and surrounds. Increased engagement, connection and care for nature was also an emphasis.

Key values identified were:

-  Protection and extension of biodiversity
-  Indigenous species restoration
-  Water quality
-  Climate change
-  Rewilding
-  Wetlands restoration
-  Identification and protection of significant vegetation
-  Wildlife corridor
-  Litter reduction/elimination
-  Rights of non-human species
-   Human connection, respect, and care for nature
-   Caring for Country with the Wurundjeri

Merri Merri Wayi Values

Workshop 3 - How does this emerging vision improve the Merri Creek from a social and cultural values perspective?

Collective Impact Conditions: Shared Measurement

The community expressed an opportunity to help each other and the creek thrive. The creek was seen as a place to come together to create a community of learning: where we learn about nature, where we learn about our history, and where we learn about each other.



Social & Cultural value - a place to nurture, learn, share & grow

Key values identified were:

-  Learning about and celebrating the First Nations living culture
-  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reparative justice
-  Cultural safety
-  Learning about nature (E.g. bush kinder, community events, interpretive tours etc)
-  Active and passive recreation
-  Immersive experiences (“smell the sassafras, taste the peppercorns, hear the wind and the birds...”)
-  Cross cultural & intergenerational learning
-  Opportunities for community connection (bridging and bonding capital)
-  A place that is shared, active and safe
-  Identifying the creek as a Connector
-  Activating the spaces to preserve them
-  Conferring legal status on the Creek
-  Growth of community groups, community events, and community collaboration

A thriving & healthy ecosystem

Workshop 3 - How are the environmental, social and cultural values contributing to the overarching goal of a thriving and healthy ecosystem?

Collective Impact Conditions: Shared Measurement



A thriving and healthy ecosystem

A thriving and healthy ecosystem emerged from the workshop as a **core community goal** that could be evidenced by environmental, social and cultural values identified.

To be a thriving and healthy ecosystem, it was also **crucial for it to be a place where people could spend time, connect with, and care for nature.**

24 March 2022
Community Workshop 3
Finding shared values



Key aspects of a thriving and healthy ecosystem identified by the community:



Biodiversity is thriving and native animals can be seen and heard along the creek as a result of increased indigenous plants and removal of invasive species.



Habitat features, logs, leaf litter, hollows are functioning and support connected ecosystems.



The Merri Creek is a clean natural environment free from litter and other pollution.



Merri Creek water quality is monitored and the data is used to inform the community on water quality improvement.



Native plant species are prosperous along the creek because of little to no weed competition.

Community Priorities

Workshop 4 - How can delivery of the community priorities contribute to a thriving and healthy ecosystem?

Collective Impact Conditions: Mutually Reinforcing Activities

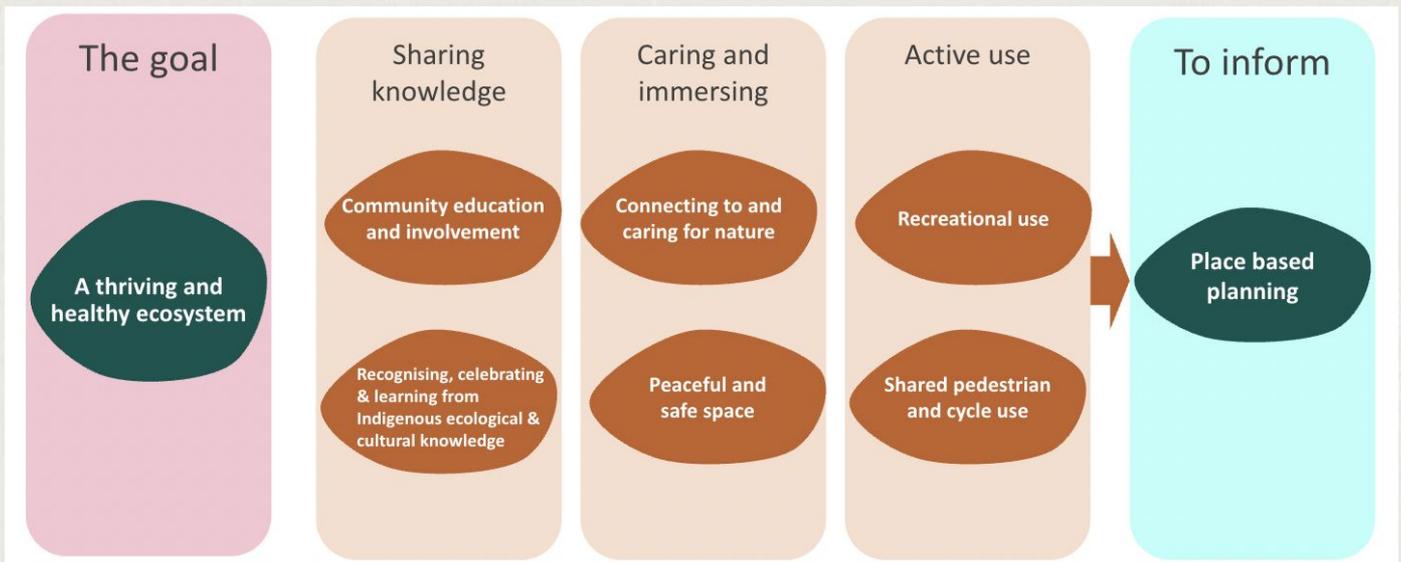
Six key common priorities were identified from the community statements and values gathered in Workshops 1-3.

A key focus of this fourth workshop was on finding “mutually reinforcing activities” as modelled from the Collective Impact framework. This meant identifying activities and actions under the six priorities that would contribute to the core goal of a **healthy and thriving ecosystem** and/or reinforce other priorities.

Community Priorities:

-  Community education and involvement
-  Indigenous ecological and cultural knowledge
-  Connecting to and caring for nature
-  Peaceful and safe space
-  Recreational use
-  Shared pedestrian and cycle use

The following infographic summarises the goal of a thriving and healthy ecosystem delivered by the interconnecting community priorities and how this can be used to inform place based planning.



Unpacking the community priorities

Hundreds of statements for each priority were recorded by participants in the workshops. The full summary of the priorities identified by the community can be found in the document library on the [Merri Merri Wayi](#) webpage.

The following pages are a summary of key statements for each of the 6 priority areas.

Community Education & Involvement

- Learning is cross cultural, intergenerational and nature based.
- Youth and culturally diverse communities are engaged in volunteering, leadership and management of the creek.
- There's more storytelling and wayfinding signage along the length of the creek.
- Smart technology that is accessible and engaging is used to promote education along the creek e.g. self guided walking tour.

- The community is more engaged and aware of the bigger picture through mapping of how local actions on streets are linked to the dynamics of the creek environment.
- There are more celebrations of women who are significant to the creek.
- The community are aware of the future plans for the creek and are involved in the decision-making processes.
- There is a Welcome to Country that is specific to the Merri Creek.



Image credit: [AWA Women's Walk 2021](#)



Indigenous ecological & cultural knowledge



- Recognising, celebrating and learning from Indigenous ecological and cultural knowledge.
- Caring for Country is at the forefront – through storytelling and the arts led by Indigenous people.
- There is support for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung language, knowledge and culture, including recognition of the six seasons in creek management and activities.
- Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung language relating to the environmental features of the creek is communicated to the community and used in describing indigenous flora and fauna.
- There is greater reflection of Indigenous values, knowledge and ways of interacting with the environment.
- Encourage and ensure non-indigenous people educate themselves about Wurundjeri history and cultural and ecological knowledge.
- Resource Wurundjeri people to care for and practice their culture on Country.



Image credit: [Wurundjeri Council](#)

Connecting to and caring for nature

- People protect, care for and connect to the unique biodiversity values of the Merri Creek.
- The community is actively engaged in initiatives and events about caring for Merri Creek and their contribution is acknowledged.
- There is evident community respect for the ecosystem and human roles within it, and enterprises and businesses along the creek comply with environmental, social and cultural policies e.g. waste and water management, cultural awareness.
- The community understands the interconnected nature of different parts of the creek.
- The non-Indigenous take responsibility in connecting and caring for Country and work alongside the Wurundjeri.



Peaceful and safe space



Image credit: [MCMC 2019](#)



- Safety is balanced with a thriving natural environment. All members of the community feel safe and can navigate easily to places or events easily when using the creek.
- People identify with the creek and interact with the natural space respectfully.
- Community engagement along the creek is increased as a result of individuals sharing positive experiences at the creek.
- Organised events by local community groups encourage the wider community to feel comfortable using the creek and be involved in its wellbeing e.g. cultural events, targeted walks.
- Climate change impacts are accounted for in planning to enhance resilience of the creek despite disruptive events.

Recreational use

- Active and passive recreation for all is inclusive and all people are respected.
- Merri Creek is accessible by all and there are accessibility features along the full length of the creek.
- There are recreational activities and events in allocated areas or existing places along the creek that are both fun and educational.
- There are nature-based and environmentally friendly play areas for kids.
- People who don't currently visit the creek feel more comfortable and welcome.
- There are resting places at suitable and safe locations that provide spaces for people to reflect, connect, value and learn about the waterway and appreciate nature (e.g. circular seating, meeting points, workers seating, interpretive signage).



Image credit: [Sharon Tickle 2013](#)



Image credit: [Merri-bek Council 2021](#)

Shared pedestrian and cycle use



Image credit: [David Taylor 2020](#)



- Walking and bike paths increase community activation to preserve nature.
- Pathways ensure safe use by pedestrians and cyclists including where possible separate pathways, speed caps and appropriate signage.
- There is harmony and respect amongst all Merri Creek users with a clear understanding of creek etiquette.
- Both pedestrians and cyclists feel comfortable and safe travelling along Merri Creek.

Place-based planning

Workshop 4 - How can delivery of the community priorities contribute to a thriving and healthy ecosystem?

Collective Impact Conditions: Mutually Reinforcing Activities

The six key common priorities identified from the community statements and values gathered in Workshops 1-3 were used in Workshop 4 to find “mutually reinforcing activities”; contribute to the overarching goal for a thriving and healthy ecosystem; and help **inform decisions in place-based planning**.

Place-based planning involves having an adaptive approach in community development, and focuses on delivery of services and infrastructure based on actual community needs.

24 May 2022
Community Workshop 4
Finding shared activities



Key aspects of place-based planning for Merri Creek identified by the community



A creek that enables us to learn, share and grow.



Planning at a local level.



Sensitive sites along the creek are respected and protected.



There is additional support for people to make sustainable choices when using the creek.



Merri Creek is seen as part of a natural network.



Rewilding areas of the creek are supported by local and state governments.



Local and state governments are proactive in making the creek a more welcoming space for all.

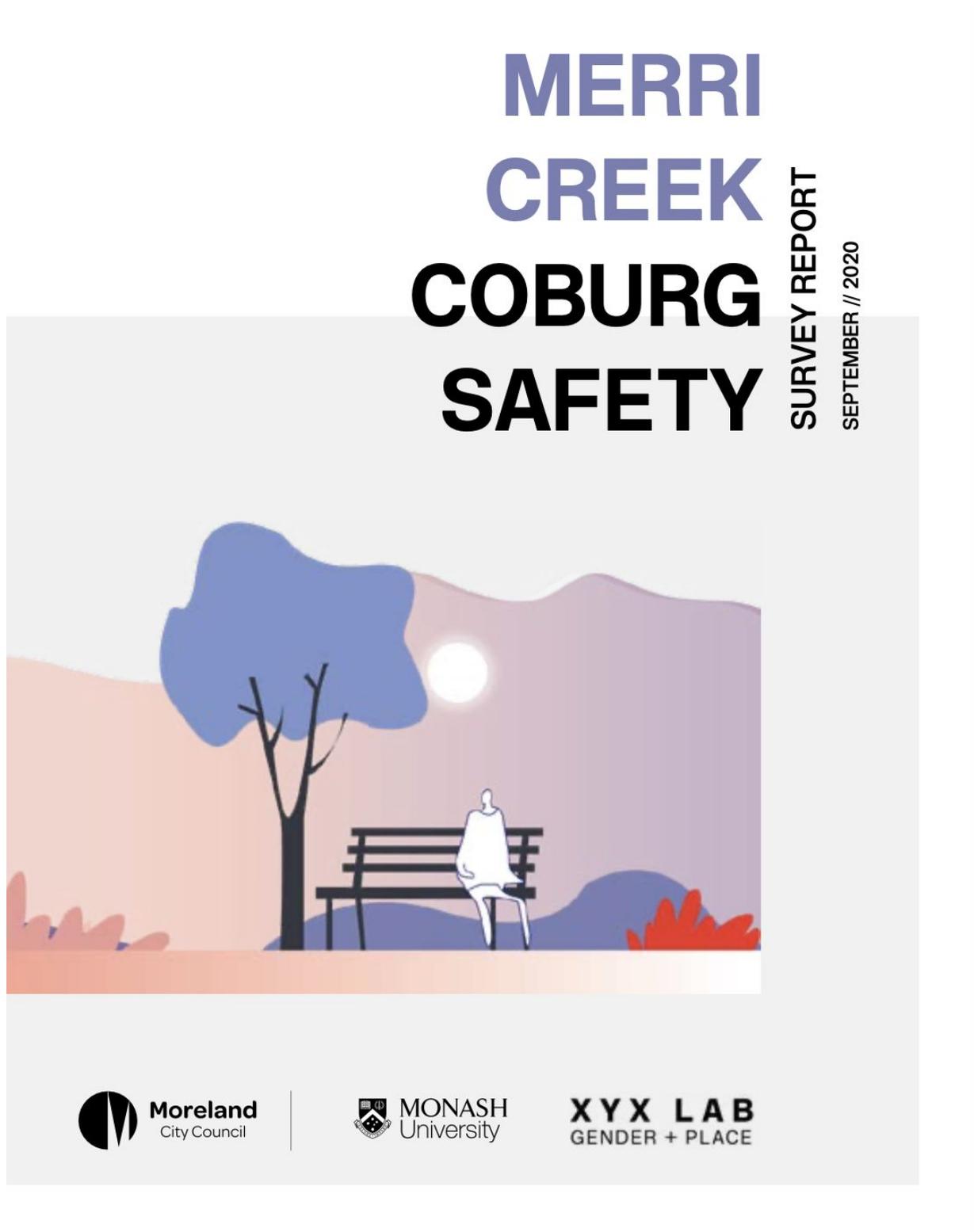


Areas of the creek are dedicated to human use, while others are more intended for biodiversity.

Appendix 1

Merri Creek (Coburg precinct) Safety Survey Report 2020 Executive Summary

You can read the full report [here](#).





Executive Summary

Merri Creek (Coburg precinct) Safety Survey Report // 2020

Moreland City Council engaged Monash University's XYX Lab to conduct a women's safety survey of the Coburg section of the Merri Creek between Bell Street and Moreland Road. The engagement followed a violent attack on a woman in December 2019.

The online survey drew over 800 responses from women. The response level demonstrates strong concern in the community and a willingness of women to reflect on their safety and offer solutions.

Safety for women in public spaces is complex because women experience such places differently to men and individual women experiences are coloured by their other identity factors and personal experiences. Women also 'read' the physical and social aspects of public spaces for clues around risk.

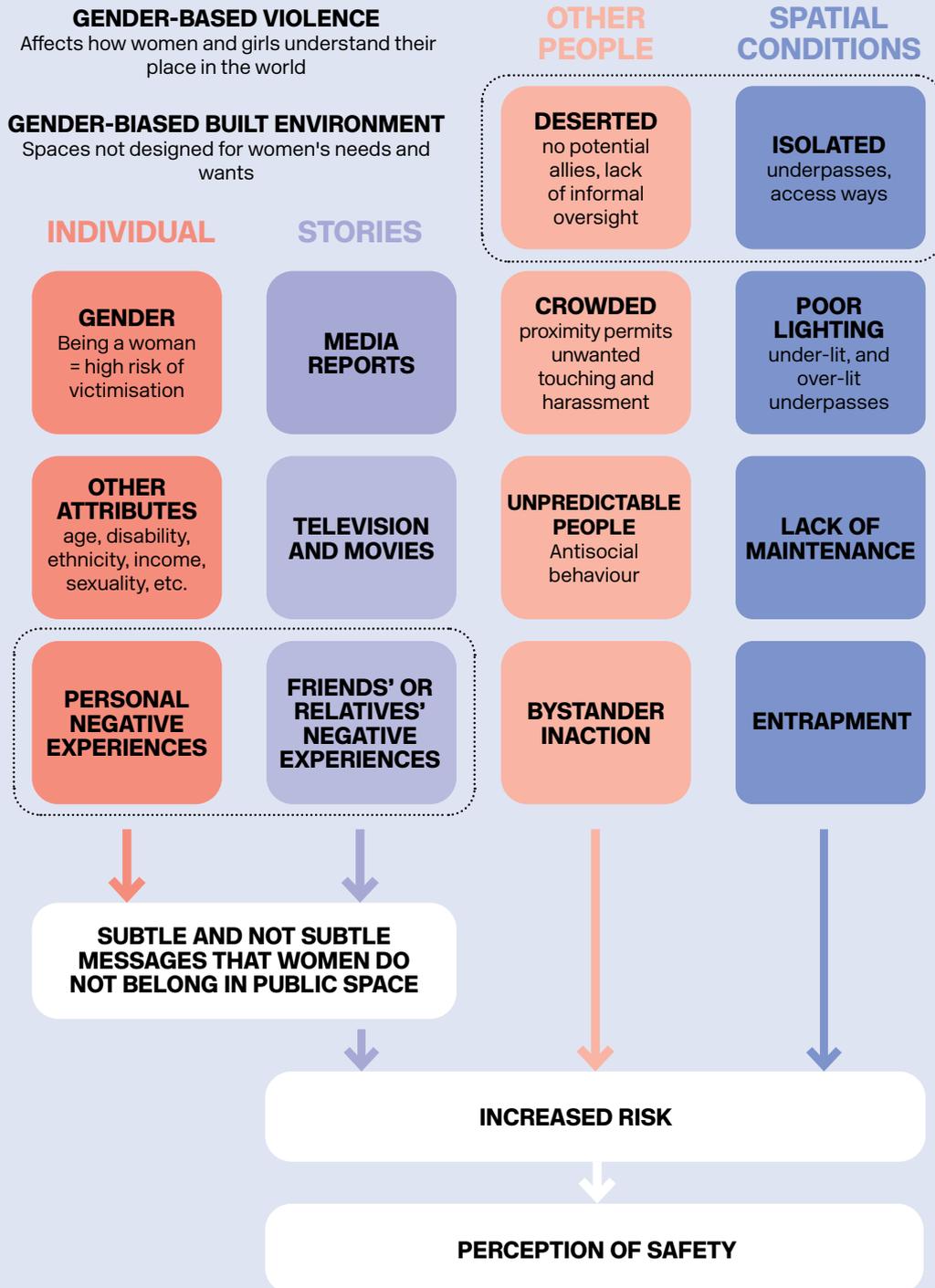


Figure 1:
Factors
impinging on
perceptions
of safety and
increased risk

In response to the threat of gender-based violence and compromised movement through gender-based built environments, women develop precautionary behaviours in order to keep themselves safe. In particular, women curtail their movements through and engagements with public spaces, and try to visually signal that they are on guard.

Merri Creek – the not-so good

It is relatively isolated. Because of this, it is a no-go zone after dark and even during the day some reported the area as unnerving. In the winter months, some women will not use it.

Since the attack, women have been absenting themselves from the Creek area either permanently, or at certain times of the day, or under certain conditions (only going there with someone else, or when they know it will be busy). Some paths in parts of the area are very narrow forcing women closer to strangers and can therefore feel entrapping.

Overwhelmingly, respondents' perceptions of safety in Merri creek are strongly affected by having heard stories of bad things happening there, rather than having necessarily experienced them directly. This suggests that the incidence of bad things is much less than media reports and rumours might claim.

Safety is not only about fear of attack, it is also about feeling welcome and accommodated for. Factors that negatively affect women's sense of belonging include:

- Poor path sharing behaviour by other users means that some women have experienced the area as unwelcoming and threatening.
- Parts of the creek are highly littered and/or smelly making it unpleasant to be in.
- Poor dog management by owners (uncontrolled dogs off leash and inadequate excrement removal) make parts of the Creek area unpleasant and frightening to visit.
- Lack of connectivity with surrounding streets means there are limited ways of accessing and exiting should there be trouble.
- Lack of orienting or wayfinding signage means that some women feel unsafe because they don't know where they are or how close help might be.

Merri Creek – the good

Close to nature. A good place for exercise: running, walking and cycling. Many also use it for leisure activities, such as picnics, dog walking, playing, and some even forage for edible plants. Communing with nature while involved in all these activities is key.

At the weekends in particular, it has a relaxed feel and is full of families and groups of friends.

Many respondents enjoyed walking their dogs and meeting and chatting with other dog walkers in the Coburg Merri Creek area.

It provides a way of avoiding very busy streets.

Joe's Garden near the Harding Street Bridge is very popular and its activities provide strong community cohesion.

Respondents' solutions

Respondents were cautious that too many or particular infrastructure additions and changes to improve safety could too easily be intrusive and destroy the natural qualities of the area.

Lighting: while commonly called for, the survey highlighted nuanced attitudes:

- 40% of the respondents said that more lighting would still not increase their night-time usage
- Lighting may only be useful at certain times of the year, at particular times of the day (dawn and dusk) and in limited locations (the Harding Street Bridge and the underpasses).

Further research would be necessary to determine whether Merri Creek is really a place that people want or need to use after dark, and if lighting would enhance that use.

Some infrastructure would make the area more pleasant to be in and so increase usage. This would also help reduce the isolation of the area.

Other respondents argued that the problem has nothing to do with Merri Creek as a place or its amenities, but with wider cultural gender inequities. They maintain that women will not be safe anywhere until men change their attitudes and behaviours. Proving this stance, the attack took place in daylight in one of the sites respondents thought was the safest.

Because safety is complex, multi-faceted and multi-scaled, solutions need to range from immediate changes to increase usage and foster community to longer timeframe strategies to counter violence against women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A Council committee is required to coordinate the multiple approaches required for the complex issue of safety for women in the Merri Creek area. We also note that good stories about the area will slowly grow as good things happen there.

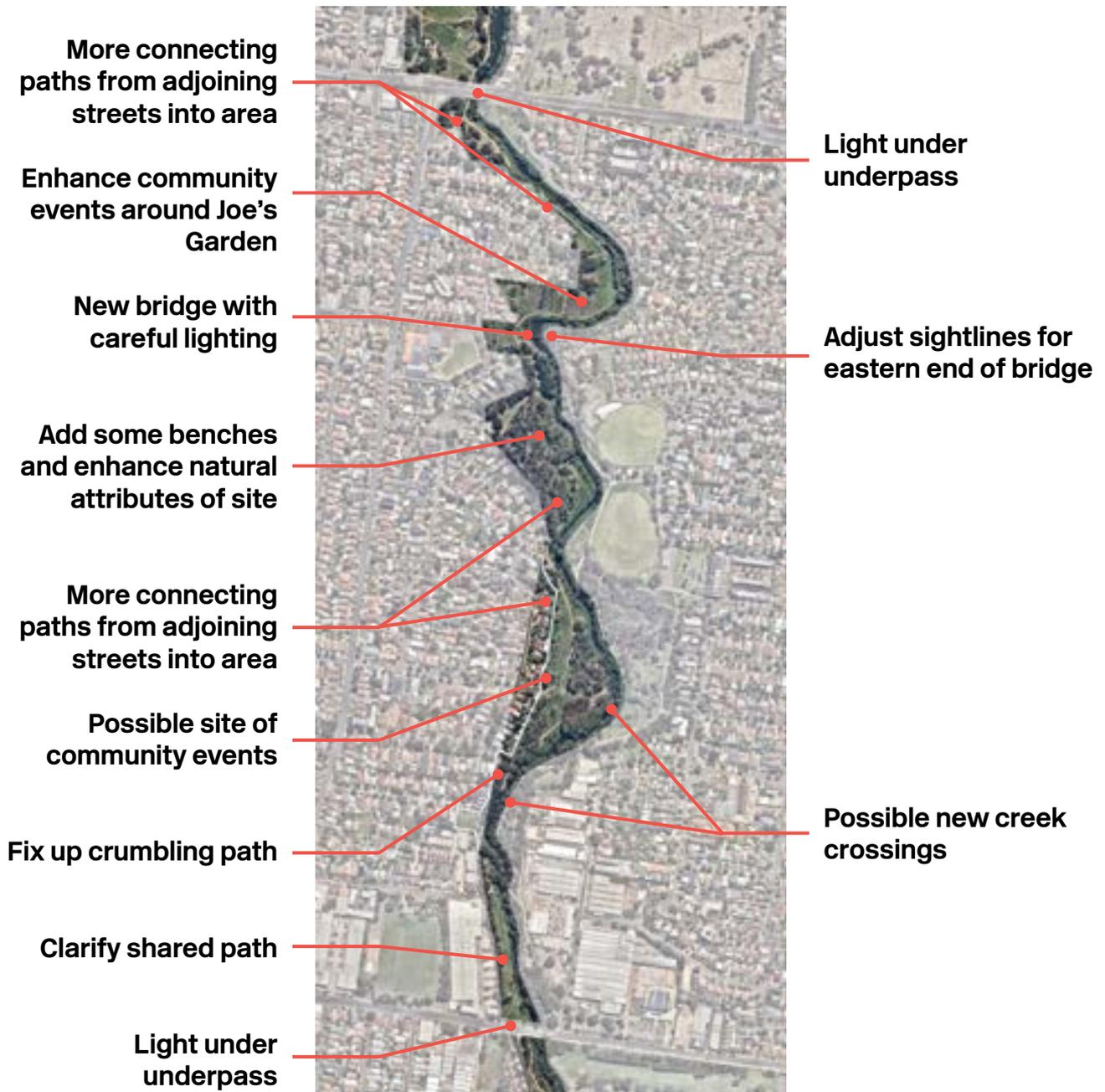


Figure 2: Recommendations Overview

Building Communities



Building resilience through community initiatives. Facilitate and support existing and new local groups to:

- co-design any community-building infrastructure,
- consult on any changes to the corridor's existing infrastructure,
- instigate and/or host community events,
- form support networks.
- support Joe's Garden to build on and broaden its current community connections and events.

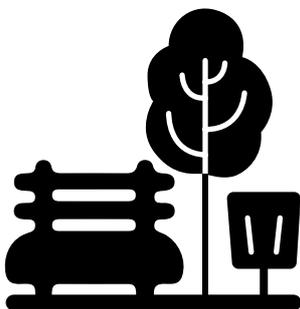
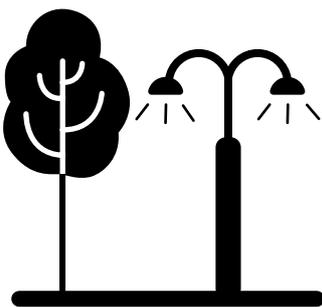
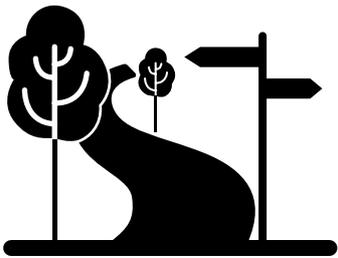
Communication and engagement



- Campaign(s) on the early outcomes of the Merri Creek Coburg Women's Safety Survey, emphasising participation rates.
- Intent to make changes across community engagement and infrastructure with timelines.
- Develop a regular mechanism to encourage feedback of experiences, good and bad.
- Seek responses to the report from key stakeholders (eg. Victoria Police, Merri Creek Management committee and Joe's Garden).
- Communication and engagement around shared path and environs behaviour. In particular, rights and obligations of cyclists, dog owners and general users.
- Align messaging with wider violence against women communication campaigns

Infrastructure and Maintenance

Nature is the key attraction of Merri Creek and any changes should be appropriate to the natural context of the Merri Creek corridor and in consultation with local women users. Appropriate infrastructure can increase usage and reduce the isolation of the Creek area



- Path etiquette – signage and/or paving changes to strongly indicate that this is a shared area to improve different user interactions.
- Increase wayfinding systems and signs so that users know where they are and what is nearby.
- Improve pathways – ensure existing paved paths are well maintained; clearer definition of existing desire paths in non-paved areas; rebuild parts of path north of Site F (note that this began in September 2020).
- Improve connectivity of paths with local street networks (for example Site A up to Nicholson Street).
- Develop more creek crossing options.
- Lighting – while often requested, there was also concern about the detrimental effects of light in such an area and doubt as to whether more lighting would actually increase usage. The exceptions are the key nodes of Harding Street Bridge and the underpasses. Note that better lighting does not mean more lighting.
- Harding Street Bridge – publish notice of maintenance checks; replace with a bridge more suitable to the volume and kind of traffic that traverses it and to improve sightlines at the eastern end of the bridge (note that design work is underway for this and we would strongly encourage engagement with local women in this process).
- More bins and creek maintenance – keeping the area clear of rubbish, flood debris and dog excrement.
- Possible changes to fences backing onto Creek area to improve passive surveillance from adjoining houses and businesses.
- Community-building infrastructure – benches to rest, meet or picnic; community events infrastructure; suitable play equipment; community-facilitated artworks; and possible toilets.

Appendix 2

What is Collective Impact?

Collective impact is a way of bringing together a network of community members, organisations, government agencies and others to address complex environmental and social challenges.

By applying the principles of Collective Impact we can help you align and integrate the actions of many groups and individuals to generate systems level change.

Collective impact is an energising approach which creates the five 'conditions', outlined below, with equity practices incorporated throughout.

The five conditions are a framework or guide, rather than a checklist or formula, and should be customized for the local context and the particular challenge you are seeking to address.

The 5 conditions of Collective Impact



It all starts by defining a Common Agenda

This means coming together to collectively define the challenge and to create a shared vision of how to solve it.



It establishes shared measurement

This means we find a shared way to define progress toward success and shared accountability for achieving it. It also allows for equitable access to continuous learning.



It fosters mutually reinforcing activities

That means working together, not separately towards the same general aim. Integrating the different activities of many participants will maximise the effectiveness of the whole!



It encourages continuous communication

This builds trust, strengthens relationships, enhances learning and keeps the participants on track.



And it has a strong backbone

This means having an appropriately resourced team dedicated to aligning and coordinating the work of the group.

Graphic from [Collective Impact Forum](#)



September 2022

Want to know more? Keep up to date at:

<http://www.conversations.moreland.vic.gov.au/merri-merri-wayi/>

This report was authored by CERES and Think Impact.

For further information, please contact:

Jane Burns

CERES Consulting Director

Mobile: 0408 485 585

Email: jane.burns@ceres.org.au

Ross Wyatt

Think Impact Managing Director

Email: ross@thinkimpact.com.au

CERES COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT PARK

Corner Roberts & Stewart Streets, Brunswick East 3057 VIC