

Open Space Strategy: phase 1 Community Consultation

Phase 1 Consultation summary report

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Merri-bek
City Council



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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, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities, who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

Open Space Strategy: Phase 1 Consultation summary report

Council is developing a new Open Space Strategy that will help inform how we plan, deliver and maintain open space in the City of Merri-bek. The current Open Space Strategy 2012 – 2022 has reached its final timeframe, and there have been many changes in open space in this time period. To help Council identify how to future manage open space in Merri-bek, we undertook an extensive community consultation program. The various activities and ways we engaged were designed with the purpose to hear from differing open space users, and remove barriers to participation from persons within our diverse and changing demographics of Merri-bek community. This report provides a summary of this engagement period.¹

1. Background

Council is developing a new Merri-bek Open Space Strategy to help inform how we plan, deliver and maintain open space across the City of Merri-bek (hereafter 'Merri-bek'). This new Open Space Strategy will explore how Merri-bek's existing open space is used and valued, and how we can better improve our open space to meet our community's expectations and needs. It will also explore changes occurring in our open space – including changing needs, increasing demand, our rising and densifying populations, and the impact of climate change.

To ensure we develop a new Open Space Strategy that is meeting the community expectations and needs, we wanted to hear directly from the people who use our open space in Merri-bek.

2. Engagement plan & key engagement aims and phases

The Open Space Strategy Engagement plan has 3 main phases:

a. Phase 1:

¹ This engagement period is known as the 'Phase 1 engagement' period. This engagement occurred prior to the creation of a draft new Merri-bek Open Space Strategy. Phase 2 community consultation will consult on the draft Strategy. Phase 3 will consult on the Final Strategy (in 2024).

Prior to writing a new draft Strategy, Council wanted to hear from our community about open space, including how they use open space, value open space, how they believe it could be improved and how Council could manage it in the future. This engagement phase engaged with our community at the level of 'Involve' on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum (see Appendix 6 for further information). This means we will work to ensure the community's concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the strategy and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

This report provides a summary of the Phase 1 engagement period.

b. Phase 2:

The draft new Merri-bek Open Space Strategy will be presented to Councillors and our community at the 6 December 2023 Council Meeting.

This phase will engage with the community at the level of 'Consult' on the IAP2 Spectrum. This means we will keep the community informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision.

c. Phase 3:

The final Strategy (and accompanying documents) will be presented to Councillors and the community at the 10 April 2024 Council² meeting. The Final engagement phase will inform the community of the Final Strategy. This phase will engage with the community at the level of 'Inform' on the IAP2 Spectrum, meaning we will keep our community informed on the outcomes with the final Strategy.

d. Phase 1 engagement aims

The Merri-bek Community Engagement Policy outlines our commitment to genuinely involving our community in decision making so we can deliver better quality outcomes. We wanted to hear from the community prior to drafting the new Strategy and Action Plan because we wanted the community to actively shape the new Strategy, such as the objectives of the Strategy, goals and ways to address challenges. To ensure the Strategy is

² Date to be confirmed.

appropriately representative, we aimed for this phase 1 engagement period to be diverse and thorough.

While we often hear from the general community regarding open space, we were mindful that this time we needed to hear from our diverse community members and open space users.

We therefore had the following aims for the phase 1 engagement period:

- Engage widely and across our diverse municipality
- Connect and engage with persons who have not traditionally engaged with Council about open space (or with Council in general)
- Engage in mixed method approaches and channels to reach diverse needs of our community and to remove barriers to participation (including dedicated in person events, focus groups, workshops, pop-ups, festivals, digital and in writing).
- Promote the strategy and the engagement widely (including written and online newsletters, multicultural leaders (Community Connectors) social media, signs, corflute posters, footpath decals and events).
- Acknowledge that Open Space Strategy engagement is not a 'clean slate', and that Council has heard from our community regularly about open space. This was further acknowledged by the release of a Discussion Paper when phase 1 engagement commenced.

e. Engage widely across our diverse population

Merri-bek is one of the most populous and diverse municipalities in Melbourne. It is made up of people from diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds, as well as people with diverse social identities and lived experiences, as seen in figure 1 below. These impact how open space is used, valued and needed. Our engagement plan therefore aimed for phase 1 to engage with our diverse community, including our culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, all ages and generations, and persons living in our diverse housing types.

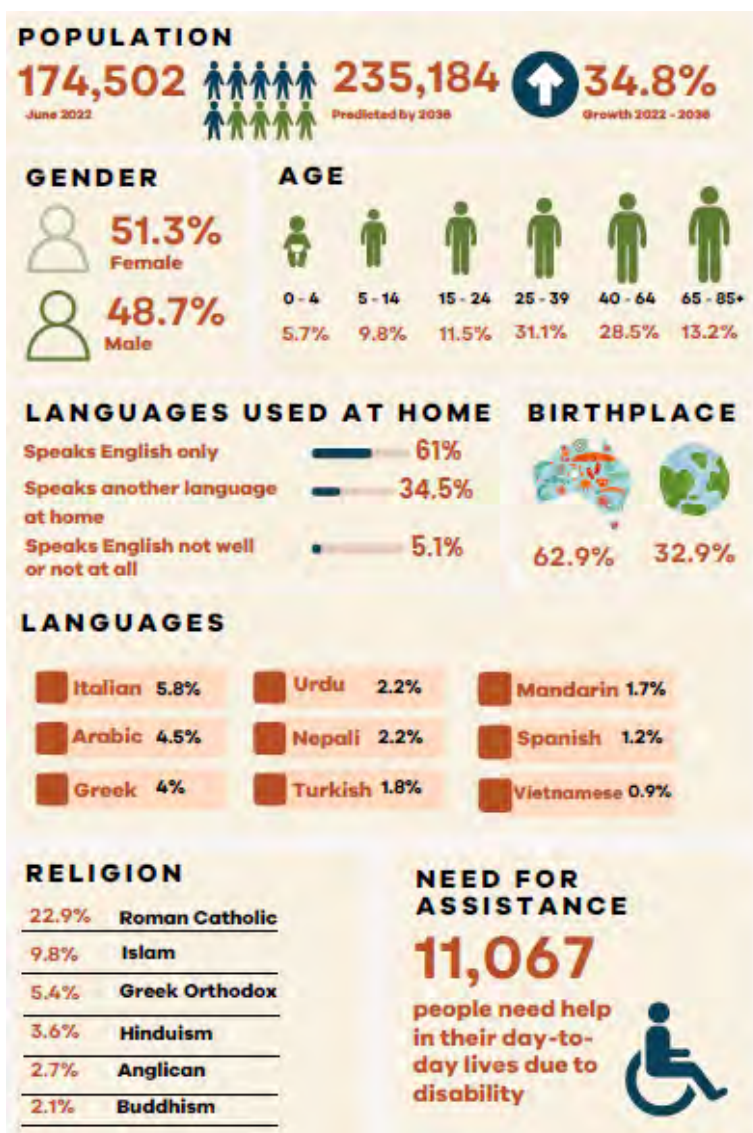


Figure 1: City of Merri-bek population and community statistics. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021.

f. Diversity of languages

Producing promotional material online and at events in English-only reduces the opportunities for our CALD community to engage with the material and provide feedback.

The engagement plan therefore aimed to translate all material into the 6 most widely spoken key languages in Merri-bek other than English, being: Arabic, Greek, Italian,

Nepalese, Turkish and Urdu. Council also sought the expertise of professional translators³ to ensure the wording and intent was properly translated. This included:

- The Open Space Survey and survey results being translated
- Signs displayed across the Merri-bek municipality (seen in figure 3) asking “how do you use open space?” in Arabic, Greek, Italian, Nepalese, Turkish and Urdu. These signs had 2 QR codes, one linking to an English version of the Conversations Merri-bek website and the second QR code linking to a website where the languages Arabic, Greek, Italian, Nepalese, Turkish and Urdu could be selected for a professionally translated website.
- Activities at the CALD workshops translated, including hard copy surveys and activity phrases, instructions and questions.
- Hard copy of translated surveys (Arabic, Greek, Italian, Nepalese, Turkish and Urdu) on the table at all pop-ups for community member to complete in language. This was to overcome the barrier of access to technology and digital literacy and skills.
- Advertising on Facebook in English and Arabic, Greek, Italian, Nepalese, Turkish and Urdu.

Council also used the Merri-bek Connectors Program to seek assistance from Merri-bek volunteers at our in-person events (known as ‘Connectors’). At our various pop-up’s around Merri-bek, Connectors attended events with Council staff to ensure diverse languages were appropriately represented. Connectors represented various languages at these events, including Arabic, Greek, Italian, Mandarin, Nepalese, Turkish and Urdu. (These activities are further discussed in section 3 below).

³ Feedback from the community has observed that services such as ‘Google Translate’ do not translate terms such as ‘open space’ accurately or as intended by Council. The company, Sylaba Translations <https://sylaba.com.au/>, was therefore engaged to assist.



Figure 2: Council staff and three Community Connectors at the Bonwick Street pop-up.



Figure 3: Example of a sign displayed in an open space, with a QR code for a link to 6 other languages and “how do you use open space?” translated in 6 languages.

g. Engage widely across our diverse households, employment and businesses:

Merri-bek is a unique municipality with respects to housing and businesses. As figure 4 below illustrates, Merri-bek has a mix of separate housing types, including detached separate homes, medium density townhouses and apartments. Our homes also range from lone persons, couples with or without children, one parent families, group households and other families. Furthermore, while our households and housing types greatly differ, so do economic and employment circumstances.

These differences all impact how open space is used, valued and needed. For example, a family living in an apartment with a dog may rely on open space differently to a family and dog living in a detached house with a large private backyard.

Our engagement plan therefore aimed to engage across our diverse household types by engaging across the Merri-bek municipality.

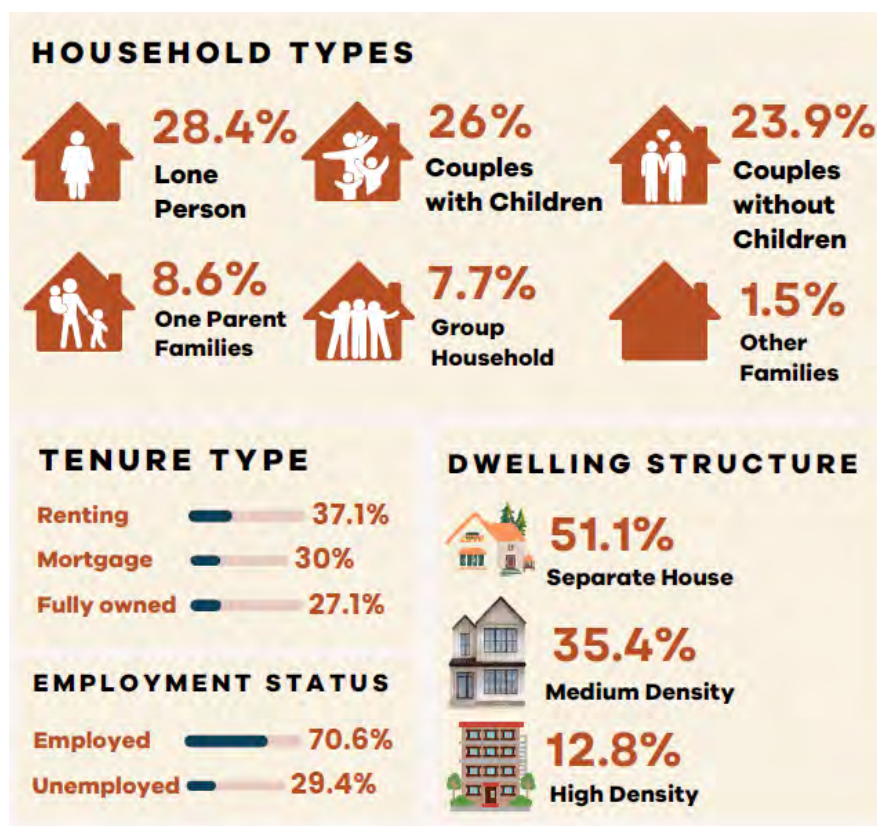


Figure 4: City of Merri-bek housing types, tenure, structure and employment status. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021.

h. Utilise Merri-bek City Council staff expertise

We recognise the value of undertaking engagement activities using Council staff expertise and experience. Having Council staff organise and run the events enabled staff to better answer questions community members had (including about open space and other aspects of Council) as well as advise on overall Council matters.

All the activities in phase 1, including the design of the pop-up park activities, CALD workshops and key stakeholders to engage with (such as the Youth workshop), were designed by the Open Space Design and Development Team, Community Engagement Team and Connectors Team. These Council Teams also created the Discussion Paper, the Open Space Surveys and the content and structure of the Conversations Merri-bek website.

The majority of the events in phase 1 were also run by Council staff. This includes the 6 pop-up's, the CALD workshops and discussions with stakeholders at advocacy groups. Council sought the assistance of an external engagement firm, *ChatterBox Projects*, to assist staff running the 4 deep dive workshops, the youth workshop and the persons with a disability workshop, due to staffing constraints. Council staff were still actively involved in the design and delivery of these events.

i. Key questions asked during activities

Phase 1's engagement activities were focussed around 4 key questions:

1. How do you use and value open space in Merri-bek?
2. What do you like about open space in Merri-bek?
3. What barriers or challenges do you face when using / accessing open space in Merri-bek?
4. What would you like to see change?

Having these over-arching 4 questions at all events meant that Council staff were able to ask the same questions throughout the various events. These questions prompted discussion for how our community values and uses open space, as well as assisting how we explore changes to improve open space access and use and address community concerns.

Additional questions and discussions were asked when meeting specific stakeholders. For example, when meeting persons who had recently migrated from countries other than Australia, Council staff observed how open space is experienced differently in Merri-bek and the wider area of Melbourne compared to other countries. For example, community members noted how open spaces in Merri-bek are often quiet at times compared to other open spaces where they are commonly busier with more activities.

3. Engagement activities - how did we engage and what did we discuss?

To achieve the aims of our Engagement Plan, the phase 1 period had various engagement events and forums. These were:

a. The Conversations Merri-bek website, Discussion Paper and Open Space Survey

We used our engagement website, Conversations Merri-bek, as an online landing platform for providing the community with information and collecting their feedback. A dedicated Open Space Strategy Conversations Merri-bek website page (hereafter the 'website') was created (<https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/open-space-strategy>) and will be used for the duration of the overall project.

The website included key information about the over-arching purpose of this project and a Discussion Paper that was circulated when the website was launched. It promoted events, such as the in-person events, the deep dive workshops and aimed to prompt an in-depth discussion about open space.

The Discussion Paper

The Discussion Paper was a way to consolidate and reiterate the great amount of feedback Council has heard in recent years about open space. It was also a way to acknowledge issues and challenges in open space, such as a densifying population and increasing pressure on open space. The themes discussed in the Discussion Paper were replicated on the website.

The Conversations Merri-bek website

The website explored the key themes from the Discussion Paper, including:

- Experiences of our open spaces
- The future of our spaces
- Access, facilities and safety
- Biodiversity and nature
- Dogs in our open spaces
- Playground, parks and reserves
- Sport

Each of these themes included additional information and discussion prompts. Key questions were asked about each theme based on the overarching 4 questions (outlined in section 2i above) and participants were invited to give feedback via digital engagement tools: online post-it notes, interactive maps, the Open Space Survey (see Appendix 2 for examples) or a dedicated strategy email address (openspacestrategy@merri-bek.vic.gov.au).

The Open Space Survey

An Open Space Survey was created as a way for Council to receive detailed feedback about the various identified themes relevant to the Strategy as well as explore uses and values of open space. The 4 key questions discussed in section 2i were central to this Open Space Survey.

The Survey also collected demographic data, so we were able to evaluate if the Survey had been completed by a representative section of our community (or if we needed to engage with particular persons / groups differently). The Survey and the results were translated into Arabic, Greek, Italian, Nepalese, Turkish and Urdu. A total of 227 surveys were completed in English and 115 surveys in languages across Arabic, Greek, Italian, Nepalese, Turkish and Urdu.

A copy of the Survey is seen in Appendix 7.

Business Open Space Survey

Council staff identified throughout phase 1 engagement that we had not heard from our Merri-bek business community widely (including business owners, operators and workers). We therefore created a separate Open Space Worker Survey on the website asking specific

open space questions tailored to this audience. This Survey was distributed to the Merri-bek Business community via the Merri-bek fortnightly newsletter, which was sent to 6,320 newsletter subscribers.

A copy of the Survey and newsletters is seen in Appendix 5.

b. Engagement events – park pop-up's

Council held six in-person place-based 'pop-up' events where Council staff (including Open Space staff, Engagement Staff and Customer Service Staff) and 2 Connectors engaged about the open space strategy. These six events were:

1. The Glenroy Music Festival, at the Glenroy Community Hub, Glenroy – 12:00pm – 3:00pm on Sunday 30 April 2023
2. Harmony Park, Coburg – 2:30pm – 5:30pm on Thursday 4 May 2023
3. Elms Court Reserve, Gowanbrae – 11:00am – 2:00pm on Saturday 13 May 2023
4. Barkly Square Shopping Centre, Brunswick – 3:00pm – 6:00pm on Thursday 18 May 2023
5. Bonwick Street shopping strip, Fawkner – 11:00am – 2:00pm on Saturday 3 June 2023.
6. Fleming Park, Brunswick East – 10:00am – 1:00pm on Saturday 27 May 2023

These 6 events were purposely chosen across different days of the week, times and locations throughout Merri-bek, to ensure we engaged with our diverse community. It was important to see equal representation across the North and South of the Merri-bek municipality to allow our community to participate in the Open Space Strategy engagement. Participants at the 6 events ranged from approx. 20 people to over 80 people.

How did we engage?

At each of the six pop-up's, we had 4 visual activities designed around the 4 questions explained in section 2i. We asked questions 1 and 2 ("How do you use open space in Merri-bek" and "what do you like about open space" in Merri-bek?) via a 'dotmocracy' activity, whereby participants are asked to vote 'yes' in support of an answer by putting a sticker on an image with different answers and options (see figures 5-7 below). The images and

available answers in these pop up activities were the replicated questions in the Open Space Survey (Appendix 7). For example, the question 1 was ““How do you use open space in Merri-bek”, the available answers and images for question 1 were:

- Play-team / club-based sport;
- Playing casual ball games / activities;
- Place for children to play;
- Exercising dogs;
- Cultural activities & events;
- Birthday parties & other celebrations;
- Meeting people / friends / fitness; health & wellbeing.

The third question used a map activity to ask the question “What barriers or challenges do you face when using / accessing open space (in Merri-bek)”? Participants participated by placing their comment on a map of Merri-bek. This allowed comments to be for the whole municipality or specific to a map location. As seen in figure 8, this enabled participants to provide feedback of barriers they experience to using open space for the whole municipality as well as specific locations.

The fourth question detailed in section 2i used an infinity wall activity asking the question “How can we improve and manage our open spaces over the next 10 years”, participants were invited to place post-it comments and suggestions on a poster (as seen in figure 9).



Figure 5: Pop-up Activity 1 - 'dotmocracy' of "how do you use open space in Merri-bek?" at the Bonwick Street pop-up.



Figure 6: Pop-up Activity 1 - 'dotmocracy' of "what do you like about open space?" at the Gowanbrae pop-up.



Figure 7: Close-up of figure 5 above.



Figure 8: Activity 4 which enabled participants to mark comments on a Merri-bek map.

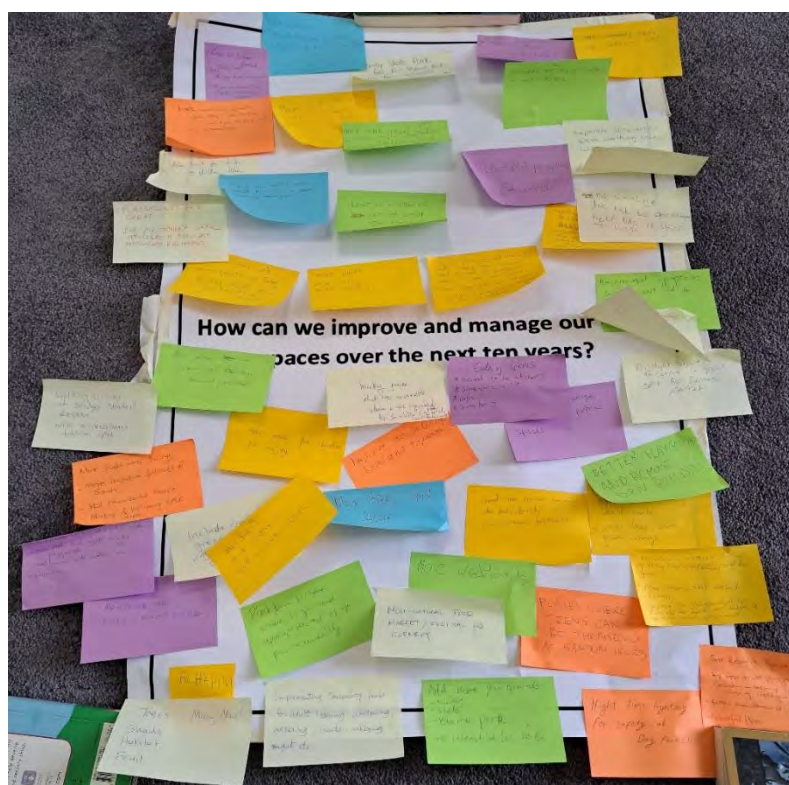


Figure 9: Activity 4, “How can we improve and manage our open spaces over the next ten years” aimed to explore what Council should look at changing in our open spaces.

c. Deep dive workshops

Council held four 'deep dive' workshops where we had a longer conversation about open space, including opportunities, challenges and ideas for the future. The overarching theme of the workshops was "how can we share our open space with all members of our community?".

The four workshops were held at:

1. Gowanbrae Community and Children's Centre, Gowanbrae - 6:00pm – 9:00pm on Tuesday 20 June 2023 (10 community participants)
2. Harry Atkinson Art Centre, Coburg North - 11:00am – 2:00pm on Wednesday 21 June 2023 (10 community participants)
3. Glenroy Community Hub – 10:00am – 1:00pm on Saturday 24 June 2023 (6 community participants)
4. Brunswick Town Hall – 1:00pm – 4:00pm on Sunday 25 June 2023 (14 community participants).

The four workshops were purposely chosen across different days of the week, times and locations across Merri-bek, to ensure we engaged with our diverse community. Council promoted the events widely and staggered the events so all four groups had a diverse group of attendees (with respects to identified open space interests, ages, gender and locations people lived and worked, etc), to promote a robust conversation.

Council staff and ChatterBox Projects staff asked key questions and activities in these events, including:

- After a presentation from Council staff which discussed the achievements from the current Open Space Strategy as well as challenges in open space, participants were asked to identify what they believed to be the key issues facing Council in Open Space.
- Participants were then broken into 2 groups where the 3 following questions were asked:
 - "What is working well in open space in Merri-bek?"
 - What are the challenges?

- What are your ideas to address these challenges?

d. Engaging with our First Nations persons

Merri-bek's open space exists on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, the Traditional Owners of the land and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. The creation of a new Open Space Strategy provides opportunity to demonstrate a greater level of respect for Country and explore how Council can increase integration of Traditional Owner knowledge into how we use, manage, plan, and maintain our open space.

Council therefore have aimed to work closely with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and First Nations people throughout the creation of our new Open Space Strategy and phase 1 engagement.

Council staff met Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders and persons from the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to discuss the new Strategy and aligning Council work. These discussions were held early in the engagement process to allow time and influence over the scope of the project based on meeting outcomes and advice received.

Council staff also discussed the Strategy with the Merri-bek First Nations Advisory Committee and acknowledged the role of particular sites, such as Ballerit Mooroop in Glenroy, which provides a unique opportunity to create a cultural hub and explore traditional landowner management.

e. Engaging across ages and identities

Council's Engagement Plan identified that our relationship with open space can change as we age, including our needs, values and challenges. For example, Council knows that young people use open space differently to many other open space users. The Plan and Discussion Paper also recognised that youths have not traditionally engaged with Council about our open space. We therefore with young persons during phase 1 via the following activities:

- The 4 engagement questions (section 2i) were discussed with Primary School children at the Merri-bek Children's Reference group and the Merri-bek Youth Ambassadors at a monthly meeting.

- Council staff met with Year 8 and 9 Mercy College (Coburg) students, as it was recognised that female young people often use open space differently to male young people.
- Council and ChatterBox Projects held a Young Persons Workshop (focussing on the 4 central questions) at the Merri-bek Oxygen Youth Centre.

Council's Engagement Plan also identified that older persons may use open space differently, such as grandparents who care for children and younger persons and the hours that open space is used (such as more throughout the day). The Open Space Survey included specific questions designed to understand how age impacts the way people use open space and what future design should prioritise. Council also met with the Merri-bek Age-Friendly Reference Group to further discuss.

Council is also aware that our person identity changes our open space experience. We spoke to the Merri-bek LGBTQIA+ Reference Group to discuss, including ways we could make all identifies feel safer and more welcome in our open spaces.

f. Workshop with persons with disability

Council's Engagement Plan identified that persons with a disability use open space differently to other users and frequently face considerable barriers to using or accessing open space. The Engagement Plan also identified that Council has not met with persons with a disability frequently to discuss open space across Merri-bek.

Council staff therefore met with the Merri-bek Disability Reference Group and discussed the 4 engagement questions. Council and ChatterBox Projects also held an in-depth workshop discussing open space and persons with a disability, which allowed more in-depth and lived experience conversations.

g. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) workshops and the Community Connectors Program

The Engagement Plan identified the need for specific activities focussing on our diverse CALD communities. Council released expressions of interest for two dedicated workshops and promoted these through the Community Connectors program. After discussions with

community members, one of the two workshops was changed to be a women's and children only event during the day and the second workshop was held in the evening and open for all genders and families. The workshops were held at:

- Glenroy Community Hub - 5:30pm – 7:00pm on Wednesday 31 May 2023 (34 community participants)
- Fawkner Community House – 10:30am – 12:00pm on Thursday 8 June 2023 (24 participants – a women's + children only event)

The activities at the workshop were the same activities as at the six pop-up's with the addition of the translated questions in six languages on each poster.

h. Key environmental stakeholders

Council met with key stakeholders who have had a long history of involvement in open space and environmental sustainability, including:

- The Chain of Ponds Collaboration
- Friends of Merri Creek and Merri Creek Management Committee
- Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek
- Representatives from Growing Farmer and Fawkner Food Bowls
- The Merri-bek Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee

Council also met with adjoining Councils, including Moonee Valley City Council, to discuss open spaces on shared boundaries (such as the Moonee Ponds Creek).

4 Promotion of the engagement activities

Council promoted the phase 1 engagement activities (including workshops, pop-up's, the surveys, etc) in various ways:

- a. Signs across Council's open spaces, including in our parks, playgrounds, libraries, etc. (See Appendix 1b).
- b. Decals displayed across Council's footpaths, outside libraries, etc. (See Appendix 1b).

- c. Alerts to persons who subscribe to the Conversations Merri-bek website (notifying subscribers of the new Open Space Conversations Merri-bek website).
- d. Word of mouth via Council staff and the Community Connectors program. (See Appendix 1c).
- e. Paid promotional advertisements across Instagram and Facebook in 7 languages
- f. Targeted promotions across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn for particular activities (the first promotions were promoting the pop-up's as these occurred earlier in phase 1; the later promotions promoted the workshops as these occurred later in phase 1). (See Appendix 1a and 1d).
- g. Promotional posters displayed at libraries, including the Glenroy Community Hub.

5. What did we hear?

The amount of feedback Council received in phase 1 engagement was extensive and in-depth, with over 900 submissions made across the various events and forums. Council greatly appreciates all persons engaging with Council during this process and for helping Council create our new Open Space Strategy.

Council acknowledges that Council staff may bring bias when reviewing engagement feedback; as such, to assist Council in synthesising, understanding and exploring the diverse feedback we heard in an unbiased, comprehensive way, we engaged the services of a specialist engagement and research firm. The firm, ASDF Research, was given copies of all the material and notes from the various activities and used this to create a comprehensive report to Council about the engagement findings.

a. What did we hear? How our open space is used

Key emerging uses of how our open space is used can be seen in figure 10 below, which aligns with the feedback heard about how people also value space. Our open space is used for a mix of passive and recreational activities (such as relaxing, reading a book, catching up with friends, experiencing nature) to more high-activity, intense activities (such as fitness, sport and exercising dogs). Our open spaces are also places for celebration and positivity – including parties, cultural events and meeting friends.

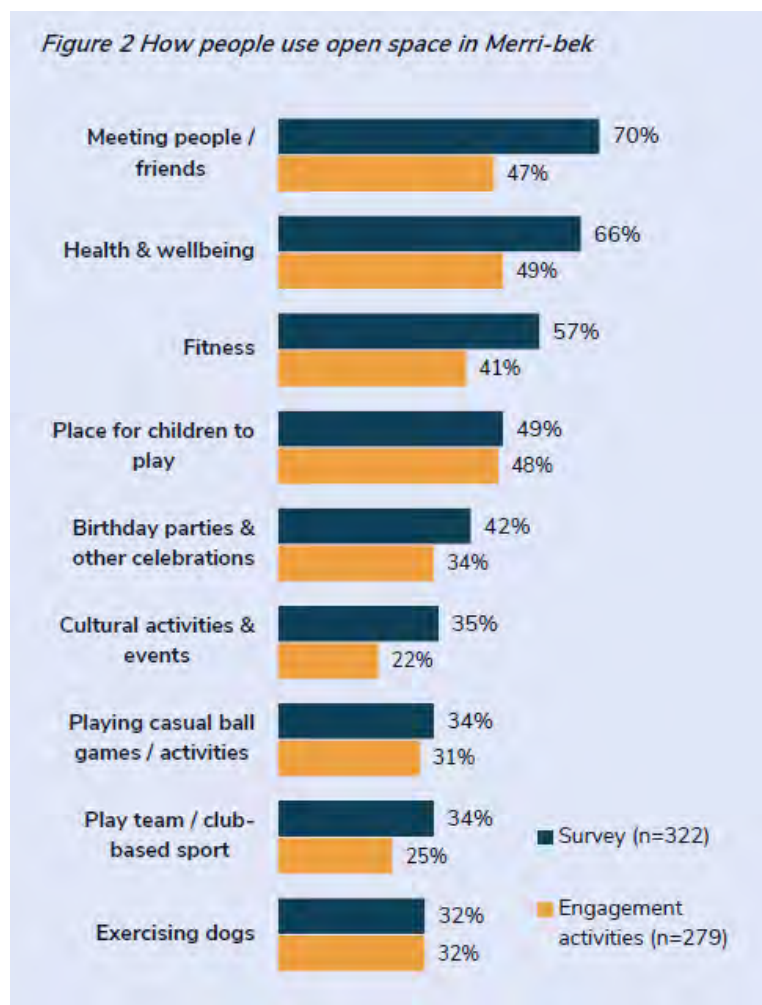


Figure 10: Taken from the ASDF report, page 5.

b. What did we hear? How our open space is valued

Open space was discussed as being valued quite differently across the Council depending on the engagement forum. Discussions with environmentally focussed groups such as the Friends of Merri Creek, Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek and the Merri Creek Management Committee, reinforced the importance of our open spaces and waterways for nature, habitat and biodiversity. Conversations with our CALD communities discussed the importance of open space for cultural and social activities, young people associated our open spaces as places for playing and hanging out with friends, and dog walkers championed the importance of open space for exercising dogs and socialising with other dog owners.

Key themes across all of these forums were consistently discussed, such as those shown in figure 11 which came from the pop-up's and Open Space Survey:

Figure 4 Things liked about open space in Merri-bek

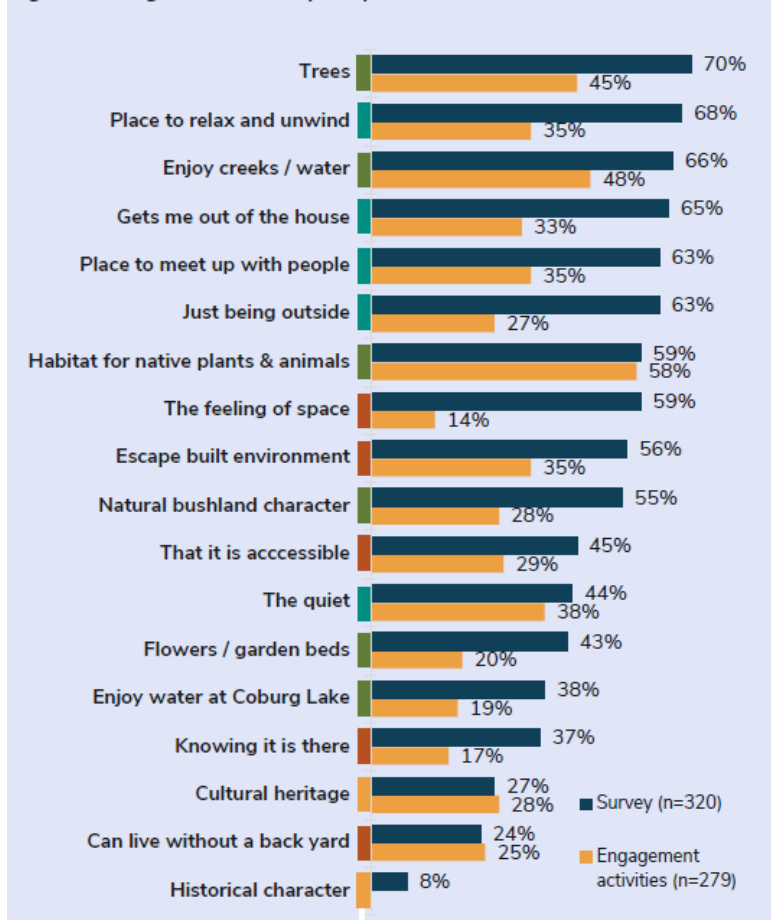


Figure 11: Taken from the ASDF report, page 8.

Figure 5 NET of things liked about open space in Merri-bek (survey)

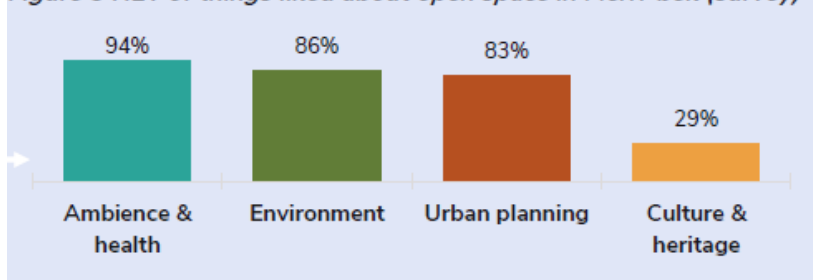


Figure 12: Taken from the ASDF report, page 8.

Some key messages include:

- The importance of open space enhancing and protecting the natural environment, habitat, biodiversity and bushland: Comments about these values related to a mature recognition of the important role open space plays in biodiversity and habitat and the need for it to inherently exist, to a recognition that people also use and value open

space as a way to experience nature, habitat and the natural environment. There were also detailed comments about the emerging challenge of climate change and threats to our natural environment and habitat.

- Open space for ambience and health: it was strongly commented that using open space is valued as a critical way to relax and unwind, get outside of our workplaces or homes, meet up with friends and generally relax. The importance of open space for mental and physical health was also clearly articulated and aligned with the above common uses of open space for meeting people and friends, using open space for fitness, areas to play and for informal and formal sport.
- The importance of public open space as our private outdoor areas in our homes are decreasing in size (i.e. smaller backyards / balconies) and as a way to 'escape' the dense urban environment.

c. What did we hear? Concerns people have about our open space and challenges / barriers people have in accessing and using open space

We heard many concerns from our community about barriers and challenges that they face in using or accessing open space, as well as concerns they have for our open space (now and into the future). The Open Space Survey results in figure 13 below were echoed in other forums, with key challenges including:

- Concerns about dogs: Many persons indicated that they are uncomfortable with dogs in open spaces – including dogs that are off-leash, in or near playgrounds or in areas that others believe are inappropriate (such as on sports fields)⁴. Conversely, dogs were highlighted in phase 1 engagement as being one of the most common reasons people use open space and value open space.
- Concerns about inadequate maintenance and facilities: Many persons indicated that they did not use open space due to a lack of maintenance or facilities, such as:
 - Lack of toilets/usable toilets. This was raised at all forums, and in particular at the person with a disability reference group, the Age-friendly reference group, by respondents who identified as being a carer or parent with young

⁴ Note: Many times dogs were off-leash or in playgrounds were scenarios which contravene Merri-bek's Local Laws about dogs.

children, and by CALD communities who expressed great use of open space for events and cultural activities.

- Facilities such as park shelters, shade clothes over playground, dog poo bags and bins, etc. Comments included lack of use of many of our open spaces for events and parties due to a lack of these facilities.
- Concerns about safety – for all persons, however particularly for women and our CALD communities: Concerns were raised for all open space across Merri-bek, however key hot spots were discussed, including the safety or our Creek Corridors (discussed in depth at our deep dive workshops) and a lack of lighting in our parks.
- Tensions with wanting to use the same open space at the same time: For example, there was commentary about using wanting to use open spaces when formal sports events occur, particularly from persons wanting to exercise their dogs; concurrently, many persons active in formal sporting clubs raised concerns about poor conditions of sports grounds and damage to grounds from dogs.

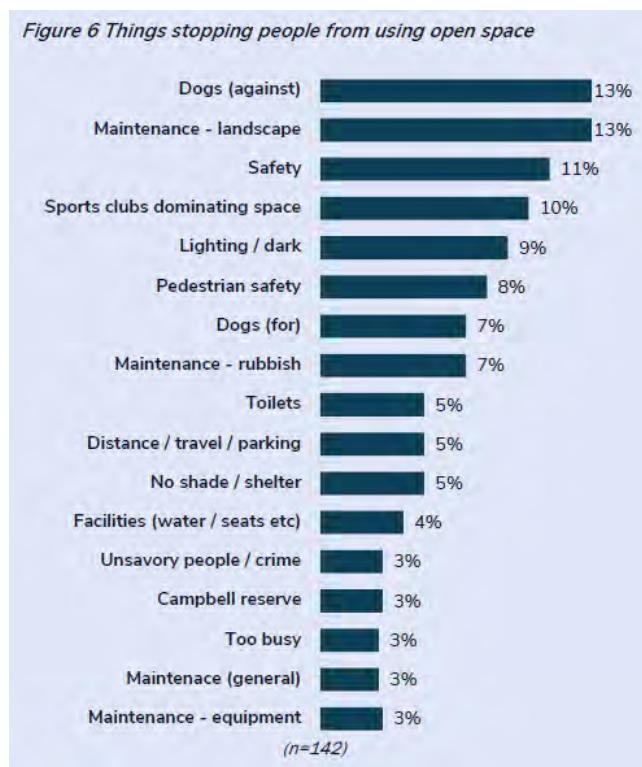


Figure 13: From the ASDF report, page 11 - this is results of the online Open Space Survey. Overall, 45% of survey respondents said that there is something stopping them using open space in Merri-bek.

- Concerns about reducing biodiversity and nature in our open space, and a recognition of the need to enhance these values in our open space.

d. What did we hear? Suggested ideas and changes Council should explore for improving our open space use and access).

Council heard many excellent and diverse suggestions for improving our open space, including short-term actions, immediate actions, to long-term strategic directions. Some of these include:

- Actions to improve biodiversity, nature, environmental values and climate resilience: such as more native planting, more trees, securing areas for nature, etc.
- More actual use of open space, such as: Increase events in open space, such as street and park libraries, special events such as festivals and film screenings, cultural festivals (for all our diverse cultures), yoga and other fitness classes, cafes and food trucks, etc.
- Increase facilities and maintenance to encourage more use of open space: including more bins and bin collection, increased lighting for more night-time use (especially in Winter), more park shelters and shade clothes (particularly in playgrounds), more and cleaner toilets, and exploration dog facilities.
- Feedback for dog facilities was mixed – some persons wanted reduced access for dogs, such as on sports fields (and enforcement of existing Local Laws), whilst others wanted more areas for dogs, including specific locations mentioning a need for enclosed dog parks (not parks shared with sports club however dedicated dog parks).
- A need to create more open space: such as making more parks, partnering with schools for opening up school grounds and reducing private development density (largely apartments and townhouses).
- A need to create more specific types open spaces, such as community gardens.
- A need to explore how our open spaces can be genuinely used by all – including persons with a disability, persons with reduced mobility, persons who have a caring role, etc.

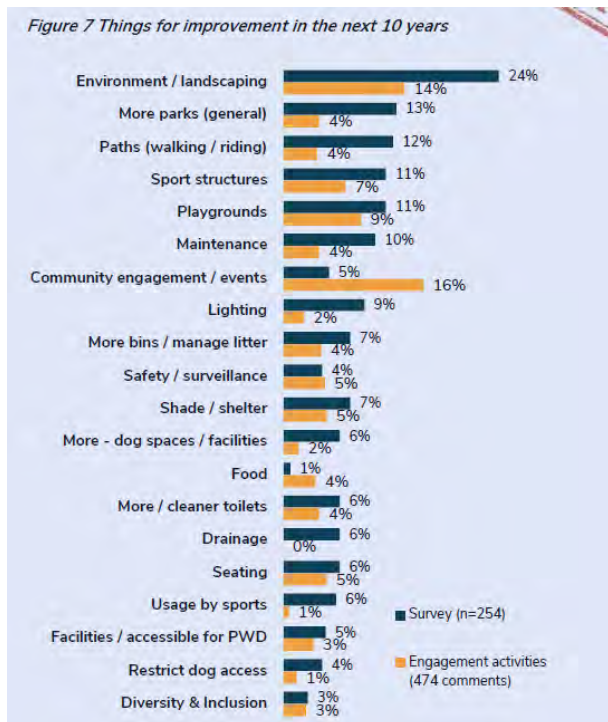


Figure 14: From the ASDF report, page 17.

A more detailed analysis of these 4 questions is included in the accompanying ASDF Research report (Appendix 9).

6. How will this feed into the new Open Space Strategy?

The ASDF report includes much additional detail about the engagement feedback as well as analysis of specific topics and themes (such as playgrounds, dogs, formal sports, informal sport, environment). The ASDF report also includes commentary from the various stakeholders we met with, such as from our various workshops and Advisory Group meetings.

Council will be using all information collected through the engagement to help create the draft new Open Space Strategy and an accompanying Action Plan (which will highlight the various actions Council needs to undertake to enact our new Strategy and our community's needs for our open space in Merri-bek). Council will also be exploring the open space needs identified in phase 1 as well as the open space needs for our growing and densifying population by creating an Open Space Technical Report. This Technical Report will explore the future infrastructure needs in open space across our next 20 years and create an accompanying 20-year Projects List to help guide Council of potential future projects.

7. Next steps and future community engagement

Council will progress the draft Open Space Strategy (and accompanying Action Plan, Technical Report and 20-year Projects List) and will be presenting these to Councillors and our community at the 6 December 2023 Council meeting. At this meeting, Council Officers will also request to commence the phase 2 engagement period.

Should Council approve proceeding to this next formal phase of engagement, Council Officers will formally seek feedback on these draft documents in the Phase 2 engagement period. The draft documents will be promoted and distributed widely, including on the Conversations Merri-bek website, hard copies in libraries and to persons who engaged previously in the Phase 1 consultation phase.

Comments about the draft documents will be reviewed and suitably incorporated. A Hearing of Submissions will be held on the 19 February 2024 to hear public feedback.

The Final Strategy and accompanying documents will be presented to Councillors and the community at a Council meetings in April 2024.

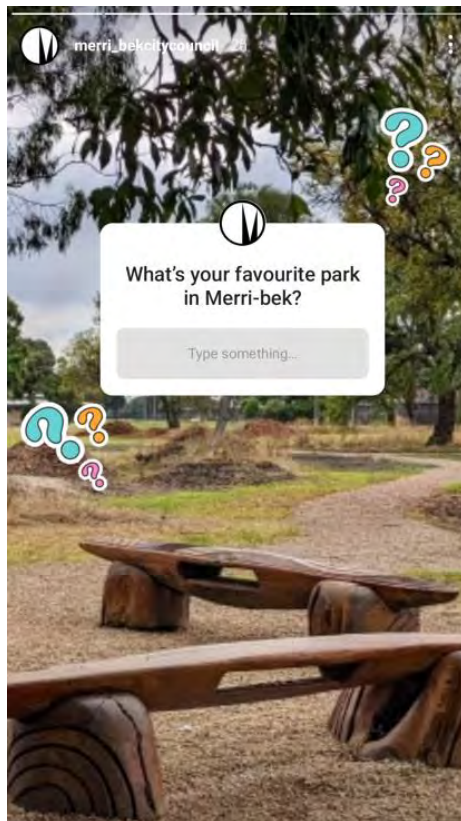
8. Further information

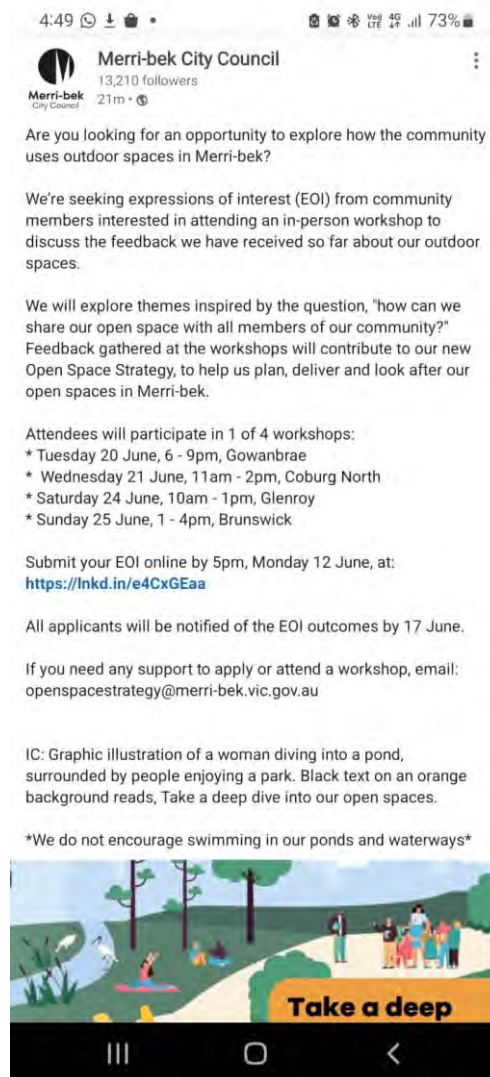
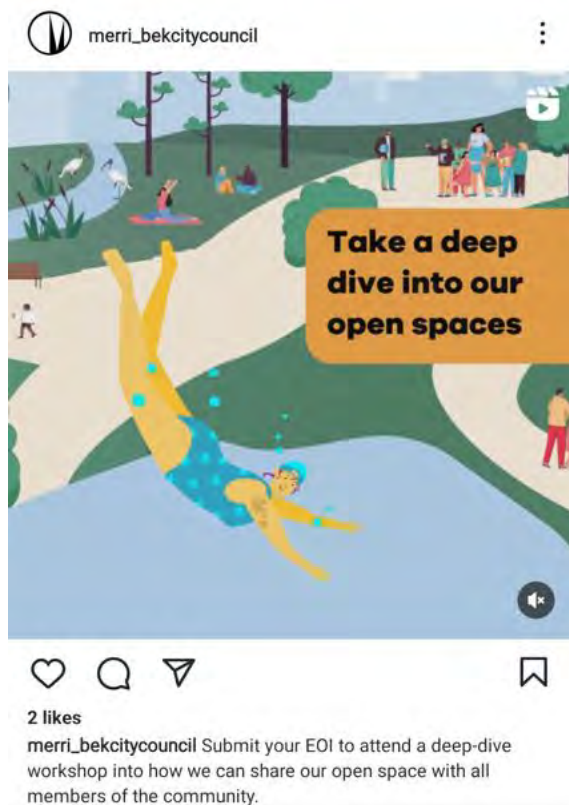
Any questions can be directed to Council's Open Space Design & Development Unit email openspace@merri-bek.vic.gov.au or directly to the Open Space Strategy Officer by emailing openspacestrategy@merri-bek.vic.gov.au .

Appendices

9. Appendix 1: Examples of promotional material prepared for phase 1 engagement

a. Sample of social media posts on Instagram





b. Signs and footpath decals promoting phase 1 engagement





c. Flyer promoting the CALD workshops

This flyer was sent out via email, WhatsApp messages, text messages and also displayed in Merri-bek libraries.



Multicultural Community Workshop

Are you interested in contributing to the development of open spaces in Merri-bek? Do you come from a culturally and linguistically diverse background?

This is your opportunity to share your ideas and insights and have your voice heard.

**31 May, 5:30-7:00 pm or
8 June, 10:30-12 pm**

 **GLENROY COMMUNITY HUB**
50 Wheatsheaf Rd, Glenroy VIC 3046

Each participant will receive a \$50 gift voucher for participating.

To register visit
<https://forms.office.com/r/dyMUU2BwCh> or
scan the QR code



d. In-language Facebook Ad's to promote the 6 Open Space popup's

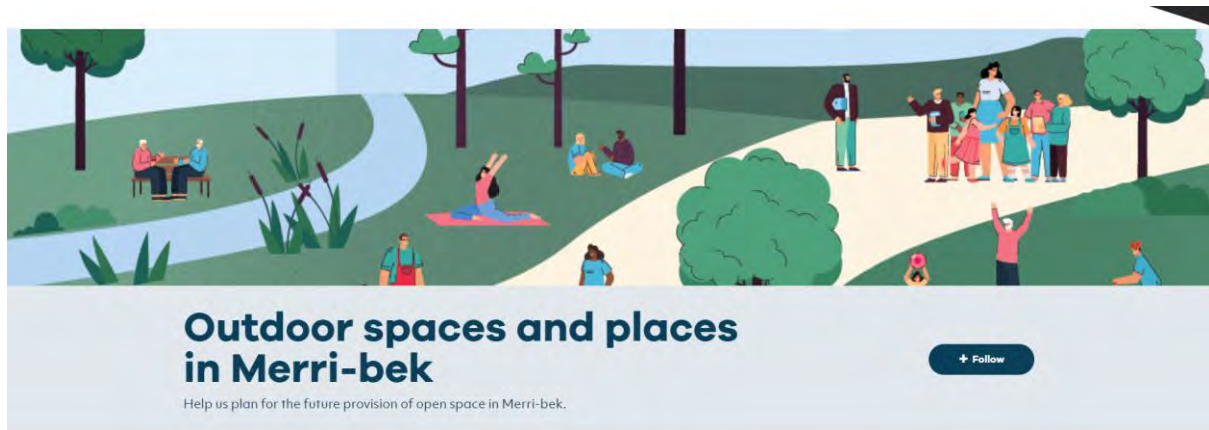
The advertisements were displayed in Arabic, Greek, Italian, Nepalese, Turkish and Urdu from 5 May to 3 June 2023:

In-language Facebook Ads to promote Open Space pop-ups (05/05-03/06) Italian, Greek, Arabic, Turkish, Nepali, Urdu



10. Appendix 2: Excerpts from the Conservations Merri-bek Open Space Strategy Consultation website

The website is found online at: <https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/open-space-strategy> .



[Home](#) > [Outdoor spaces and places in Merri-bek](#)

Phase 1 of engagement is now closed. Thank you to everyone who took the time to provide their feedback, either online, at one of our pop-ups, or at a workshop. Development of the draft Open Space Strategy is now underway, and it will be available for feedback later this year.

Timeline

- ✓ Open Space Discussion Paper presented
April 2023

We are developing a new Open Space Strategy that will inform how we plan, deliver and maintain open space in Merri-bek. We want to hear directly from the people who use the spaces and places around Merri-bek to make sure the city is livable, green and designed with future generations in mind.

We want to find out:

- How you use Merri-bek's open space.
- What you value about open space.
- How open spaces could be improved in Merri-bek.
- How you think Council can plan and manage open space into the future.

Project news



19 June 2023

Join the conversation at a workshop for people with disability

We're looking for people with a disability to attend an online-person workshop to share their thoughts on using outdoor spaces in Merri-bek and how we can improve them in the future.

[Learn more >](#)

What is Open Space?

When we talk about open space we are talking about land that is used by the community for outdoor recreation and leisure. Some ways people use open space include:

- playing
- relaxing
- walking or jogging
- dog walking
- organised sport or informal sports recreation
- active commuting.

In Merri-bek there are over 350 spaces managed by Council.

Examples of open space in Merri-bek



Land with nature and biodiversity



Parks and playgrounds



Non-Council land



Civic Spaces



Sports grounds



Linear parks and reserves



Outdoor spaces

Contact Us

Have questions or want to learn more about a project, contact us below:

Name Kathryn Skidmore

Phone 03 9240 1111

Email openspacestrategy@merri-bek.vic.gov.au

For this project we will be engaging our community at the level of 'Involve' on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum.

This means we will work to ensure the community's concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the strategy and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

Explore the Discussion Paper

Click on one of the key themes to learn more about them.



Experiences of our spaces

How people use open spaces in Merri-bek. What is valued and what barriers to access exist.



The future of our spaces

What is changing in Merri-bek and how will it impact the future of our open spaces?



Access, facilities and safety

Ensuring our parks are comfortable and enjoyable for all users.



Biodiversity and nature

We want to continue to protect and expand places in Merri-bek that are important for their unique natural features.



Dogs in our open spaces

We want to provide great places for dogs and their



Playgrounds parks and reserves

Our most recognisable open



Sport

Our sports grounds, skate parks, cycling facilities and parks get used by all kinds

Playgrounds, parks and reserves

We want to hear about how people use our playgrounds, parks and reserves. What is working and what would improve these spaces and places.

Home > Outdoor spaces and places in Merri-bek > Playgrounds, parks and reserves

Merri-bek Council manages over 350 open spaces. The majority of these are parks or reserves and include:

- Over 135 playgrounds
- 54 sports grounds
- Various wetlands, raingardens and stormwater harvesting systems
- Skate parks, pump tracks and similar BMX facilities
- Outdoor exercise equipment, walking and running tracks
- Park shelters, water fountains, barbecues and seating

Discussion points

These are the key discussion points and opportunities we have identified in our [discussion paper](#). Expand the headings to read more.

A park close to home



Ensuring open space can be used by all



Need for creative play / bush play



Promoting Arts and Culture in our open spaces



A park close to home



Merri-bek has proactively been creating new areas of open space via the [Park Close to Home](#) program since 2017. Through this program, we have built several new open spaces and several more are planned in the coming years. This has included the Bulleke-bek Park, Brunswick, a new 2,300sqm park in central Brunswick, and Citadel Park, Glenroy, which both provide much needed open space for residents of nearby houses and apartments.

Our community has been extremely positive about these new parks and the program. The new Open Space Strategy provides opportunity to harness this positive feedback for input into new open spaces.

Ensuring open space can be used by all



Council wants to increase open space usage and access to all persons within Merri-bek. We acknowledge however access to our open space, including specific facilities and locations, needs to be further explored and invested within. We have opportunity to ensure open space is more accessible for all when we create the new open space strategy, such as:

- Reviewing the condition of sports ground needed for formal sports, and other uses which may reduce the condition of these grounds.
- Exploring how we can increase access to our sports grounds, such as in the evening when a sports club has an allocation at a sports ground.
- Exploring how our playgrounds can cater to persons (children, parents, carers) who experience disability. This includes physical barriers that make open space difficult to access for persons with disabilities / mobility impairments including prams, such as: uneven terrain, stairs, lack of accessible parking, paths, and toilets.
- Explore how facilities in our open spaces can better cater for persons experiencing homelessness.
- Exploring how our open spaces can better include sensory considerations and provide for persons with sensory disabilities.

Need for creative play / bush play



Council recognises the need for children to have access to a variety of play experiences and creative play spaces in the outdoor, natural world. The [Merri-bek 2016-2020 Play Strategy](#) identified that play using natural materials (stone, soil, leaves, plants), waterways, shade as well as formal playgrounds, is important to for children's learning, health, and wellbeing. Whilst Merri-bek has an established network of playgrounds, it has been identified that creative play, such as play using natural materials (stone, soil, leaves, plants), may be lacking. The strategy will explore these facilities and our overall open space facilities for children, including our playgrounds.

Promoting Arts and Culture in our open spaces



Our open spaces are a great opportunity to promote our unique and thriving Merri-bek arts and culture. The Strategy will explore how we can better promote arts and culture in our open space – such as via opportunities for events, artwork, or other activities (such as the Brunswick Music Festival held recently at Gilpin Park, Brunswick, or the Glenroy Music Festival at the Glenroy Community Hub). The strategy will also explore how we can celebrate and promote our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Wurundjeri- Woi-wurrung history, including in future events and open space improvements / additions.

Key questions



What playgrounds, parks or reserves do you love in Merri-bek, and why?



What playgrounds do you and/or your family visit? How old are your children and what experiences do you have?



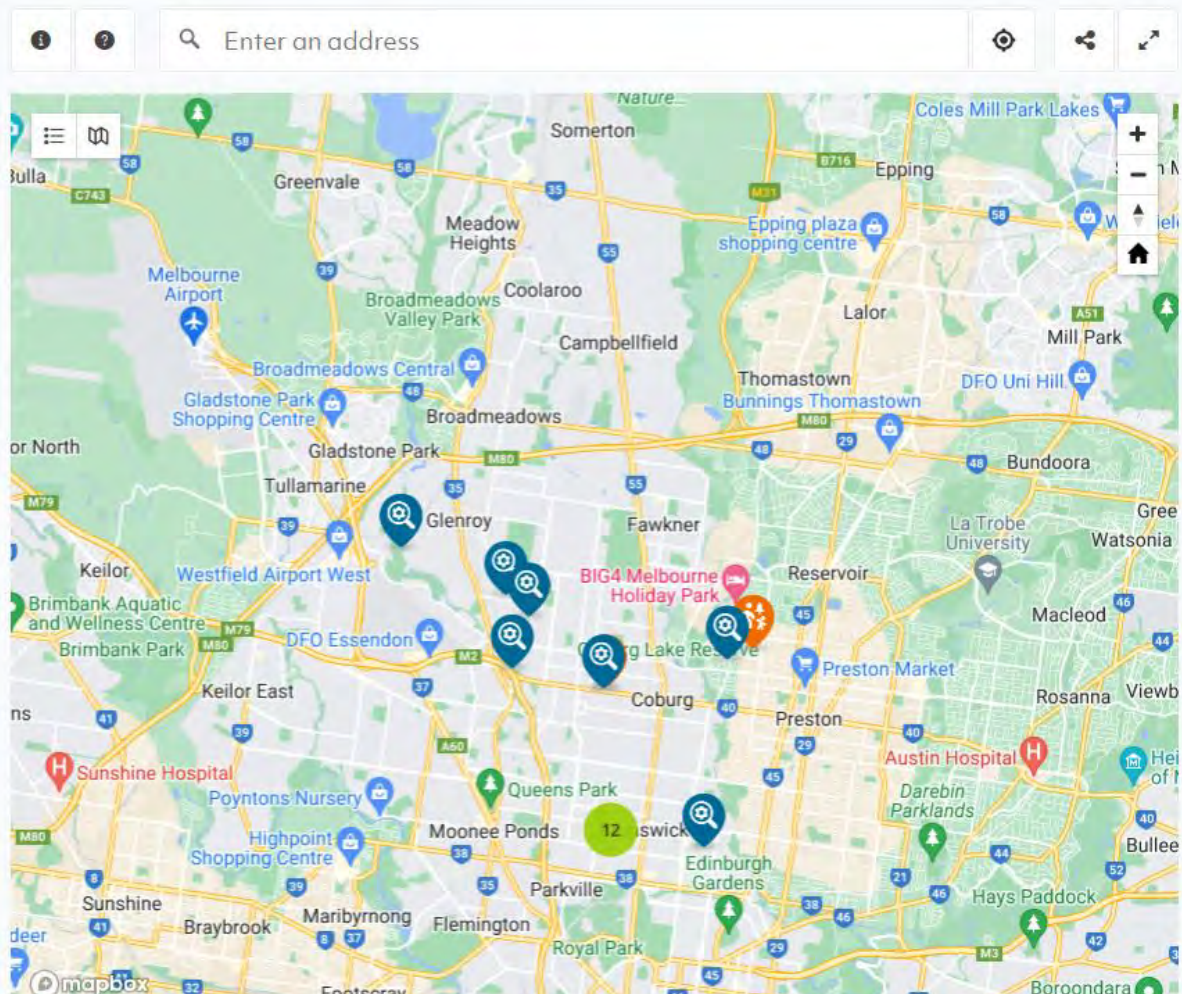
What could be improved or is there anything missing from our playgrounds parks or reserves?



What would you like to see in our playgrounds, parks and reserves in the next 10 years?

Pin a playground, park or reserve that you visit on the map and tell us your answer to one of our key questions.

21 contributions



Key questions



What are your favourite nature spots in Merri-bek and why?



Where in Merri-bek would you like to see more biodiversity or improved natural features?



What opportunities are there for bush play for children?



What opportunities are there to improve climate resilience in Merri-bek?



What would you like to see in the future?

11. Appendix 3: Photographs of 'pop-up' consultation events



Pop-up at Fleming Park, Brunswick East, Saturday 27th May 2023.



Pop-up at Elms Court Reserve, Gowanbrae, Saturday 13th May 2023.



Pop-up at Elms Court Reserve, Gowanbrae, Saturday 13th May 2023.

12. Appendix 4: Photographs of CALD workshops



Workshop at Glenroy Community Hub, Glenroy, Wednesday 31st May 2023.



Workshop at Glenroy Community Hub, Glenroy, Wednesday 31st May 2023.



Workshop at Fawkner Community House, Fawkner, Thursday 8th June 2023.

13. Appendix 5: Open Space Survey - Business and worker survey

a. The Business Merri-bek fortnight newsletter

This Survey was distributed via the Business Merri-bek fortnightly newsletter. The newsletter went to 6,320 subscribers. Council data indicates that 37% of subscribers opened the newsletter for this issue (2349 recipients).



Merri-bek is keen to hear how businesses use open space

Council is creating a new [Merri-bek Open Space Strategy](#). We know that some businesses, and many workers, use open spaces in some way (e.g. personal trainers working in open spaces, restaurants located adjacent parks, workers who use open space for work breaks or to walk and cycle through to get to work).

To help Council better provide for your open space needs, we want to know how you use open space and what we can improve.

If you are you a local business that uses public open space in some way, please complete our short survey (The password is: survey).

[Take the survey](#)

b. The Open Space Strategy – Business and Worker Survey

The Survey is found online at: <https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/open-space-strategy/open-space-strategy-business-and-worker-survey> . A copy of it is below:

Open Space Strategy

We are developing a new open space strategy that will inform how we plan, deliver and look after open space in Merri-bek. We want to hear directly from the people who use the outdoor areas around Merri-bek to make sure the city is liveable, green and designed with future generations in mind.

What is Open Space?

When we talk about open space, we are talking about land that is used by the community for outdoor recreation and leisure. Some examples of uses of open space include:

- Playing

- Relaxing
- Meeting friends for a barbecue / picnic
- Walking and jogging
- Dog walking
- Organised sport or informal sport and recreation
- Active commuting.

Through this survey we want to find out how you use and what you value about open space in Merri-bek, and what we can do to improve and manage open space now and in the future.

Which suburb do you work in? Required

- ☐ Brunswick
- ☐ Brunswick East
- ☐ Brunswick West
- ☐ Coburg
- ☐ Coburg North
- ☐ Fawkner
- ☐ Fitzroy North
- ☐ Glenroy
- ☐ Gowanbrae
- ☐ Hadfield
- ☐ Oak Park
- ☐ Pascoe Vale
- ☐ Pascoe Vale South
- ☐ Tullamarine

Which industry do you work in? Required

What open spaces near your workplace do you visit most often? Required

Please select the different reasons why you visit these open spaces. Required

- ☐ To be outdoors as a break from work
- ☐ To socialise / meet colleagues/ friends
- ☐ To eat breakfast / lunch / dinner
- ☐ To cycle / jog / walk to and from work via the open space network (rather than roads)
- ☐ As a place to relax and unwind
- ☐ For the feeling of space
- ☐ For the quiet
- ☐ Just being outside
- ☐ An escape from the built environment
- ☐ Because it is accessible
- ☐ For the natural bushland character
- ☐ To enjoy creeks / water
- ☐ To enjoy water at Coburg Lake
- ☐ For the trees
- ☐ For the flowers / garden beds
- ☐ For the habitat of native plants and animals

- ☐ For cultural heritage values / significance
- ☐ Gets me out of the workplace and into the fresh air
- ☐ Other (please specify)

How often do you typically visit open space near your workplace? Required

- ☐ Frequently (at least once a week)
- ☐ Infrequently (at least once every few months)
- ☐ Rarely (once or twice a year at most)
- ☐ Never

Is there anything that stops you from using open space in Merri-bek? Required

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you have any suggestions for improvements / issues with open spaces near your workplace? Required



How far do you have to travel to access the open space(s) you use from your workplace? Required

- ☐ Across the road
- ☐ Less than 1km
- ☐ More than 1km
- ☐ 3km+

How do you get to these open spaces from your workplace? (Select all that apply) Required

- ☐ Walk

- ☐ Cycle
- ☐ Drive
- ☐ Public transport
- ☐ Other (please specify)

About you

Please take a moment to complete these demographic questions to help us better understand the ways in which different people in our community use our open spaces.

How do you describe your gender? Required

- ☐ Man / male
- ☐ Woman / female
- ☐ Non-binary / genderqueer / gender-fluid
- ☐ I use a different term:
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

What is your age range? Required

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-39
- ☐ 40-59
- ☐ 60-69
- ☐ 70-84

☐ 85+

Do you identify as LGBTIQ+?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

Do you identify as a person with disability? Required

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

Are you a carer of a person with disability? Required

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

Do you identify as a person who is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait
Islander? Required

☐ Yes, I'm Aboriginal

☐ Yes, I'm a Torres Strait Islander

☐ Yes, I identify as both

☐ No

Do you speak a language other than English at home? Required

☐ Yes

☐ No

Were you born in Australia? Required

☐ Yes

☐ No

Would you like to stay updated about this project? Required

☐ Yes

☐ No

14. Appendix 6: IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement

Taken from the Merri-bek Community Engagement Policy 2023, page 8. The Policy is found online at https://hdp-au-prod-app-more-conversations-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/7616/8731/0416/Community_Engagement_Policy_-_2023.pdf.

Council's approach to community engagement

The IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement

Council's approach to community engagement is guided by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Engagement, which is an internationally recognised tool for best practice community engagement.

The IAP2 Spectrum identifies five levels of engagement with corresponding goals and actions. It makes clear the role of the community in decision-making at each level.

	Increasing impact on the decision >				
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the community with balanced and objective information to help them understand the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain community feedback on analysis, alternatives or decisions where opportunities for community input may be limited.	To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the community.
What we will do and examples of key messages that we will use.	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into decision-making to the maximum possible extent.	We will implement what you decide.
The role of our community in decision making	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Partner or lead

15. Appendix 7: The Open Space Survey

a. English version



We are developing a new open space strategy that will inform how we plan, deliver and look after open space in Merri-bek. We want to hear directly from the people who use the outdoor areas around Merri-bek to make sure the city is liveable, green and designed with future generations in mind.

What is Open Space?

When we talk about open space, we are talking about land that is used by the community for outdoor recreation and leisure. Some examples of uses of open space include:

- Playing
- Relaxing
- Meeting friends for a barbecue / picnic
- Walking and jogging
- Dog walking
- Organised sport or informal sport and recreation
- Active commuting

Through this survey we want to find out how you use and what you value about open space in Merri-bek, and what we can do to improve and manage open space now and in the future.

1. How do you use open space in Merri-bek? (Select all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play team / club-based sport | <input type="checkbox"/> Birthday parties & other celebrations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Playing casual ball games / activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting people / friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Place for children to play | <input type="checkbox"/> Fitness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exercising dogs | <input type="checkbox"/> Health and wellbeing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural activities and events | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):
_____ |

2. What do you like about open space in Merri-bek? (Select all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A place to relax and unwind | <input type="checkbox"/> Flowers / garden beds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The feeling of space | <input type="checkbox"/> Habitat for native plants & animals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The quiet | <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural heritage values / significance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Just being outside | <input type="checkbox"/> A public place to meet up with people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Knowing that it is there | <input type="checkbox"/> It means I can live without a back yard |
| <input type="checkbox"/> An escape from the built environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Gets me out of the house & into fresh air |
| <input type="checkbox"/> That it is accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):
_____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Natural bushland character | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy creeks / water | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy water at Coburg Lake | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trees | |

3. Is there anything that stops you from using open space in Merri-bek?

☐ Yes (please specify): _____

☐ No

4. How can we improve our open spaces over the next 10 years?

5.

6. How do you get to your local park / reserve? (Select all that apply)

☐ Walk

☐ Public transport

☐ Cycle

☐ Other (please specify):

☐ Drive

Facilities

7. What facilities do you use / value in open space? (select all that apply)

☐ Outdoor fitness equipment (adults / seniors)

☐ Playgrounds

☐ BMX / Skate / Mountain bike tracks / parks

☐ Dog parks with agility equipment & fenced areas for small dogs & large dogs

☐ Informal recreation areas such as running routes & linear corridors

☐ Shade, seating, drinking fountains & barbecue equipment

- ☐ Bins & public toilets
- ☐ Specific sport facilities, such as soccer & football pitches, hockey fields etc
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____
- ☐ None (skip to the next question)

8. Are there any facilities missing that you would like us to consider in our future planning?

9. Is there anything that prevents you from accessing these facilities?

- ☐ Yes (please specify): _____
- ☐ No

Children and playgrounds

10. Do you have any children / regularly care for children?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (skip to the question 12)

11. What is their age range? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ 0-3 years
- ☐ 4-7 years
- ☐ 8-13 years
- ☐ 14-17 years

12. What facilities / play elements would you like to see included in our playgrounds?

(Select all that apply)

- ☐ Creative / bush play using natural materials such as stones, leaves, plants
- ☐ Accessible equipment e.g., a basket swing, accessible carousel or accessible sandpit.
- ☐ More equipment for children under 5 e.g., cubby houses & small climbing frames
- ☐ More equipment for children over 8 e.g., park warrior courses & bouldering
- ☐ More sporting elements e.g., basketball half-court, kick up wall
- ☐ More BMX / skate elements
- ☐ More waterplay
- ☐ More shade
- ☐ More seating
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

13. Is there anything else we can do to improve our playgrounds for all children?

- ☐ Yes (please specify): _____
- ☐ No

Dogs

14. Do you own a dog(s)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (skip to question 18)

15. Do you take your dog to an off-leash dog park / area?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (skip to questions 18)

16. Which off-leash dog park / area do you use?

17. Are you satisfied with these facilities?

☐ Yes

☐ No. Why not? _____

18. Do you have any other comments regarding dogs and dog parks in Merri-bek?

Formal & Informal Sport

19. Do you participate in formal sport?

☐ Yes

☐ No (skip to question 23)

20. Which sport(s) do you participate in? (Select all that apply)

☐ Soccer

☐ Tennis

☐ AFL / AFLW

☐ Cricket

☐ Hockey

☐ Athletics / track & field

☐ Cycling

☐ Baseball

☐ Basketball

☐ Netball

☐ Softball

☐ Other (please specify): _____

21. Which sporting fields / facilities (such as change rooms) do you do these activities on in Merri-bek?

22. Are you satisfied with the facilities provided?

☐ Yes

☐ No. Why not? _____

23. Do you participate in informal sport in Merri-bek?

☐ Yes. Which sports? _____

☐ No (skip to question 26)

24. Which open space areas do you do these activities on in Merri-bek?

25. Are you satisfied with the informal recreation open space provided?

☐ Yes

☐ No. Why not? _____

26. Do you have any other comments regarding formal and informal sport in Merri-bek?

About you

Merri-bek is a diverse community and we want our community engagement to reflect that.

By telling us how you identify you are helping us understand who we are hearing from.

This information helps us to meet our legislative obligations and improve our processes. We want our decisions to benefit as many of the diverse people living, working and playing in Merri-bek as possible.

Your information will not be used for any other purpose.

For details on how Merri-bek City Council collects and protects your personal information, refer to our [Privacy Policy](#).

27. How do you describe your gender?

- ☐ Man / male
- ☐ Woman / female
- ☐ Non-binary / genderqueer / gender-fluid
- ☐ I use a different term: _____
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

28. Which suburb do you live in?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brunswick | <input type="checkbox"/> Fawkner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brunswick East | <input type="checkbox"/> Oak Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brunswick West | <input type="checkbox"/> Glenroy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coburg | <input type="checkbox"/> Hadfield |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coburg North | <input type="checkbox"/> Gowanbrae |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pascoe Vale | <input type="checkbox"/> Tullamarine |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pascoe Vale South | <input type="checkbox"/> Fitzroy North |

29. What is your age range?

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> 40-59 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 60-69 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> 70-84 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 35-39 | <input type="checkbox"/> 85+ |

30. Do you identify as LGBTQIA+?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

31. Do you identify as a person with disability?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

32. Are you a carer of someone with disability?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

33. Do you identify as a person who is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?

- ☐ Yes, I'm Aboriginal
- ☐ Yes, I'm a Torres Strait Islander
- ☐ Yes, I identify as both
- ☐ No

34. Do you speak a language(s) other than English at home?

- ☐ Yes (please specify): _____
- ☐ No

35. Were you born in Australia?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No. Which country were you born in? _____

36. Would you like to stay updated about this project?

- ☐ Yes. My email is: _____

b. Example of translated Open Space Survey – in Turkish:

Halka Açık Alanların Kullanımı – Toplum Anketi

Merri-bek Belediyesinde halka açık alanların kullanımını geliştirmek için bir plan yapıyoruz. Kentin yeşil, keyifli ve gelecek nesiller için tasarlanmış olmasını sağlamak için bu alanları kullanan halka, yani siz toplum bireylerine kulak vermemiz gerekiyor.

Halka Açık Alan Nedir?

Halka açık alan, toplumun açık havada eğlenmek ve rahatlamak için kullandığı yerdir. Halka açık alan kullanımlarına bazı örnekler şunlardır:

- Oyun Oynamak
- Dinlenmek
- Mangal / piknik için arkadaşlarla buluşma
- Yürüyüş ve koşu
- Köpek yürütmek
- Spor faaliyetleri
- İşe gidip gelme

Bilmek istediklerimiz:

- Merri-bek Belediyesinde halka açık alanları nasıl kullandığınız
- Bu konuda neleri sevdiğiniz
- Şimdi ve gelecekte halka açık alanları daha iyi hale getirmek için neler yapabiliriz

Sorular

1. Merri-bek Belediyesinde halka açık alanları nasıl kullanıyorsunuz? (Geçerli olanların tümünü seçin)

- ☐ Spor faaliyetleri yapmak
- ☐ Futbol, basketbol gibi gündelik top oyunları oynamak.
- ☐ Çocukların oynayabileceği yer
- ☐ Köpeklere egzersiz yaptırma
- ☐ Kültürel faaliyetler ve etkinlikler
- ☐ Doğum günü partileri ve diğer kutlamalar
- ☐ İnsanlarla / arkadaşlarla buluşma
- ☐ Egzersiz yapmak
- ☐ Fiziksel ve ruhsal sağlık

Diğer (lütfen belirtin): _____

2. Merri-bek Belediyesinde halka açık alanlar ile ilgili neleri seviyorsunuz? (Geçerli olanların tümünü seçin)

- ☐ Dinlenme yeri
- ☐ Binalarla kuşatılmış olmama hissi
- ☐ Sessizlik
- ☐ Sadece dışarıda olmak

- Orada olduğunu bilmeniz
- Yapılarla dolu bir çevreden kaçış
- Erişilebilir olması
- Doğal ormanlık alan
- Derelerin / suyun tadını çıkarma
- Coburg Gölü'nün tadını çıkarma
- Ağaçlar
- Çiçekler ve bostanlar
- Yerli bitkiler ve hayvanlar için yaşam ortamı
- Tarihsel karakter (örneğin Avrupa mirası)
- Kültürel miras değerleri / önemi
- İnsanlarla buluşmak için halka açık bir yer
- Bu, arka bahçem olmadan yaşayabileceğim anlamına geliyor
- Beni evden temiz havaya çıkarır
- Diğer (lütfen belirtin): _____

3. Merri-bek Belediyesinde halka açık alanları kullanmanızı engelleyen bir şey var mı?

Evet (lütfen belirtin): _____

Hayır

4. Önümüzdeki 10 yıl içinde halka açık alanlarımızı nasıl geliştirebiliriz?

5. Yerel parkınıza / açık alanınıza ulaşmak için ne kadar yol gitmeniz gerekiyor?

- Yolum hemen karşısında
- 1 km'den az
- 1 km'den fazla
- 3 km +

6. Yerel parkınıza / açık alanınıza nasıl ulaşırsınız? (Geçerli olanların tümünü seçin)

- Yürüyerek
- Bisikletle
- Araba kullanarak
- Toplu taşıma ile
- Diğer (lütfen belirtin): _____

Tesisler

7. Açık alanda hangi tesisleri kullanıyorsunuz / seviyorsunuz? (Geçerli olanların tümünü seçin)

- Egzersiz aletlerini (yetişkinler / yaşlılar için)
- Oyun Parkları
- BMX / Paten / Dağ bisikleti parkurları / parklar
- Köpek parkları ve küçük köpekler ve büyük köpekler için
- çitle çevrili alanlar
- Koşu rotaları
- Gölgelekler, oturma yerleri, su içme çeşmeleri ve mangal yeri
- Çöp kutuları & genel tuvaletler

- ☐ Futbol, 'rugby' ve hokey vb. oynama sahaları gibi belirli spor tesisleri
- ☐ Diğer (lütfen belirtin): _____
- ☐ Hiçbiri

8. Mevcut durumda parklarda olmayan ancak olmasını istediğiniz başka bir şey var mı?

9. Merri-bek Belediyesinde halka açık alana erişmenizi engelleyen bir neden var mı?

- ☐ Evet (lütfen belirtin): _____
- ☐ Hayır

Çocuklar ve oyun için alanlar

10. Çocuğunuz var mı veya düzenli olarak çocuk bakıyor musunuz?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ Hayır

11. Çocukların yaş aralıkları nedir? (Geçerli olanların tümünü seçin)

- ☐ 0-3 yaş arası
- ☐ 4-7 yaş arası
- ☐ 8-13 yaş arası
- ☐ 14-17 yaş arası

12. Oyun alanlarımızda neler görmek istersiniz?(Geçerli olanların tümünü seçin)

- ☐ Taşlar, yapraklar, bitkiler gibi doğal malzemeler kullanarak yaratıcı oyunlar / orman oyunları
- ☐ Salıncak, atlıkarınca veya kum havuzu gibi aktiviteler
- ☐ 5 yaşın altındaki çocuklar için daha fazla oyun alanı, örneğin çocuk oyun evleri ve küçük tırmanma duvarları
- ☐ 8 yaşından büyük çocuklar için daha fazla oyun alanı
- ☐ Daha fazla sportif unsurlar, örneğin yarım saha basketbol alanı, amuda kalkma duvarı
- ☐ Daha fazla BMX / paten çevreleri
- ☐ Daha fazla su oyunları
- ☐ Daha fazla gölgelikler
- ☐ Daha fazla oturma yerleri
- ☐ Diğer (lütfen belirtin): _____

13. Oyun alanlarımızı tüm çocuklar için geliştirmek üzere yapabileceğimiz başka bir şey var mı?

- ☐ Evet (lütfen belirtin): _____
- ☐ No

Köpekler

14. Bir köpeğiniz var mı?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ Hayır

15. Köpeğinizi tasmasız bir köpek parkına / alanına götürüyor musunuz?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ Hayır

16. Hangi tasmasız köpek parkını/alanını kullanıyorsunuz?

17. Bu olanaklardan memnun musunuz?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ Hayır. Neden? _____

18. Merri-bek Belediyesindeki köpek parkları ile ilgili başka yorumlarınız var mı?

Spor

19. Spor aktivitelerine katılıyor musunuz?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ Hayır

20. Hangi sporları yapıyorsunuz? (Geçerli olanların tümünü seçin)

- ☐ Futbol
- ☐ Tenis
- ☐ AFL / AFLW
- ☐ Kriket
- ☐ Hokey
- ☐ Atletizm
- ☐ Bisiklete binme
- ☐ Beyzbol
- ☐ Basketbol
- ☐ Netbol
- ☐ Yumuşak topla oynanan oyunları
- ☐ Diğer (lütfen belirtin): _____

21. Merri-bek'te bu aktiviteleri hangi spor alanlarında/tesislerinde yapıyorsunuz?

22. Sağlanan tesislerden memnun musunuz?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ Hayır. Neden? _____

23. Merri-bek Belediyesinde arkadaşlarınızla spor aktiviteleri yapıyor musunuz?

- ☐ Evet. Hangi sporlar?

- ☐ Hayır

24. Merri-bek Belediyesinde bu etkinlikleri hangi açık alanlarda yapıyorsunuz?

25. Merri-bek Belediyesinin spor için sunduğu açık alanlardan memnun musunuz?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ Hayır. Neden? _____

26. Merri-bek belediyesindeki spor aktiviteleri alanları ile ilgili başka yorumlarınız var mı?

Hakkınızda

Merri-bek çok kültürlü bir toplumdur ve bu ankete farklı toplumlardan herkesin katılmasını istiyoruz.

Merri-bek Belediyesi sakinlerinin saygı duyulduğunu hissettiğinden emin olmak istiyoruz. Bize kendinizden bahsederseniz, sizleri daha iyi tanımamıza yardımcı olursunuz. Böylece herkesi bu önemli ankete dahil ettiğimizden emin olabiliriz.

Kişisel bilgilerinizi başka hiçbir şey için kullanmayacağız.

Merri-bek Belediyesinin kişisel bilgilerinizi nasıl topladığı ve koruduğu hakkında ayrıntılı bilgi için [Gizlilik İlkelerimiz](#)'e bakın.

27. Cinsiyetiniz nedir?

- ☐ Erkek
 - ☐ Kadın
 - ☐ Farklı bir terim kullanıyorum:
-
- ☐ Cevap vermemeyi tercih ediyorum

28. Hangi semtte yaşıyorsunuz?

- ☐ Brunswick
- ☐ Brunswick Doğu
- ☐ Brunswick Batı
- ☐ Coburg
- ☐ Coburg Kuzey
- ☐ Pascoe Vale
- ☐ Pascoe Vale Güney
- ☐ Fawkner
- ☐ Oak Park
- ☐ Glenroy
- ☐ Hadfield
- ☐ Gowanbrae
- ☐ Tullamarine
- ☐ Fitzroy Kuzey

29. Kaç yaşındasınız?

- ☐ 18 yaşından küçük
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-39
- ☐ 40-59
- ☐ 60-69
- ☐ 70-84
- ☐ 85+

30. Kendinizi LGBTQIA+ olarak tanımlıyor musunuz?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ Hayır
- ☐ Söylememeyi tercih ederim

31. Kendinizi engelli bir kişi olarak tanımlıyor musunuz?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ No
- ☐ Söylememeyi tercih ederim

32. Engelli birinin bakıcısı mısınız?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ No
- ☐ Söylememeyi tercih ederim

33. Kendinizi Aborijin ve/veya Torres Strait Adaları halklarından bir kişi olarak tanımlıyor musunuz?

- ☐ Evet, ben Aborijin halkıdanım
- ☐ Evet, ben Torres Strait Adaları halkıdanım
- ☐ Evet, kendimi her ikisi olarak da tanımlıyorum
- ☐ No

34. Evde İngilizce dışında dil konuşuyor musunuz?

- ☐ Evet (lütfeñ belirtin): _____
- ☐ No

35. Avustralya'da mı doğdunuz?

- ☐ Evet
- ☐ Hayır. Hangi ülkede doğdunuz?

36. Bu proje hakkında sizi bilgilendirmeye devam etmemizi ister misiniz?

- ☐ Evet. Mail adresim _____
- ☐ No

c. Appendix 8: The Discussion Paper

d. Appendix 9: Engagement review report from ASDF

Open Space Strategy

Discussion Paper



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.

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1. Purpose of this Discussion paper

Council's current Open Space Strategy 2012 – 2022 is being reviewed, and we will create a new Merri-bek Open Space Strategy. This is important because as Merri-bek's population continues to grow, we need to have a strategy that guides how Council manages open space. This will help make sure our residents and workers have access to quality public open space that meets their needs - for now and into the future.

This discussion paper is a summary of opportunities and challenges related to open space. It intends to help with the discussion we want to have with our community about our open space, and how we can better provide open space for our diverse and growing Merri-bek community.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the community for feedback about open space that we have already received in recent years. This has included feedback received during consultation for our Nature Plan in 2020; during the creation of our 2021-2031 Community Vision; when we have designed specific parks and open spaces with our local community, such as the recent upgrades to Kingsford Smith Ulm Reserve; and during recent and current engagement for projects in open space, such as the Brunswick Velodrome pump track.

We also thank the community for the emails, phone calls and email enquiries about open space. This has helped us improve the maintenance and condition of our open spaces as well as help us confirm some of the things that a new Open Space Strategy should address.

We also thank the community for many difficult conversations we have had, including when discussing safety and the continuation of devastating events, including events along our Creek corridors. We will continue to explore these with the community and build upon the Merri Merri Wayi work and ways that we can help make our open space safer.

When we create our new Open Space Strategy, we want to ensure that we hear from all parts of our community and how they use and value open space. This Discussion Paper intends to start this conversation to help create our new Strategy and together plan for our future open space needs.

What is open space?

Open space is the term used to describe land used by the community for outdoor recreation and leisure, such as for: playing, relaxing, walking, jogging, dog walking, organised sport, informal sports recreation, and active commuting. It also includes land which has biodiversity and nature value, such as our Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Corridors. Open Space also refers to land within private ownership, such as schools, golf courses and cemeteries, which the public may have restricted access to.

The City of Merri-bek has many unique and wonderful open spaces and nature experiences. Our Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek corridors provide excellent walking and running paths, nature experiences and bush play, while our urban and suburban parks, playgrounds and sport fields provide opportunity for more formal play and sporting and recreational activities.

Council manages a diverse portfolio of over 350 open spaces, including:

- Sports facilities, grounds, and pavilions, including allocations to specific sports club for specific uses and sports
- Over 135 playgrounds of differing sizes and equipment types
- 54 sports grounds
- Various wetlands, raingardens and stormwater harvesting systems
- Skate parks, pump tracks and similar BMX facilities
- Exercise equipment in parks
- Park shelters, water fountains, rubbish bins, etc.

Council is also proactively creating new open space via the Park Close to Home program and is creating new urban parks, which is helping ensure our residents have access to open space within 300m (high density) or 500m of their home. This has successfully seen Council create new parks across the municipality in recent years, such as the Bulleke-bek Park in Brunswick and Citadel Park in Glenroy.



Figure 1: A pop-up playground in Coburg.

What is Council's role and why are we doing this?

The current Merri-bek Open Space Strategy focussed on the time period of 2012 – 2022. There have been many changes in open space in recent years that we need to ensure we are managing. Impacts such as the COVID-19 pandemic, population increase, and housing densification have seen the usage and demand for our open space increase. Our open space is also seeing the impact of climate change – from our waterways experiencing greater flooding events, to our open spaces experiencing increasingly warm summers and heat waves.

Council needs to ensure we are adequately providing open space for our residents' needs, as well as continue to enhance our biodiversity and nature in open space. The creation of a new Open Space Strategy will assist Council in providing open space for now and into the future. We will investigate population growth and housing densification and explore where access to open space needs to be improved.

We will explore where we need to create new open space, such as new playgrounds, new information sports spaces and new BMS / skate parks / pump tracks, or a combination of different uses. We will also explore how open spaces can support multiple values and multiple uses and how we can accommodate these.

Many open spaces support multiple values and uses and need to be planned and managed as such.

The new Open Space Strategy will ultimately be incorporated as a reference document in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme. It will provide the key strategic direction for the planning, acquisition, management, and development of public open space. It will also inform a review of the Public Open Space contribution rate in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.

2. Timeline

Council is aiming to prepare the Final Open Space Strategy for Council endorsement in December 2023. This will include the following:

- A new Merri-bek Open Space Strategy
- A background technical report exploring population growth, needs and open space gap areas
- A 15-year open space project list, which will inform the required investment and land acquisition needs to fulfil community and Council needs identified in the new Open Space Strategy.

3. A future Merri-bek

Population growth and densification

Through the period of the current Open Space Strategy 2012 – 2022, Merri-bek's population has greatly increased. Between the years of 2016 and 2021 specifically, our overall population increased by approximately 5.4%. ¹ Population forecasts estimate that our population will continue to increase which will have an influence on the quantity and type of housing that Merri-bek needs today and in the future. The share of people living alone in medium and high density housing is also growing which will lead to smaller homes (with smaller backyards).

The new Open Space Strategy will take future population growth and housing densification into account. Population and densification forecasting is being explored now as this Strategy is being created. The creation of the new Strategy will therefore explore our Merri-bek future and what new (and type of) open space is needed.

Objectives for Council – what is our vision?

The new Open Space Strategy will guide the future strategic direction for open space in Merri-bek. It will also align and enhance related open space objectives within the Victorian State Government 'Open Space for Everyone' metropolitan Melbourne-wide strategy, which has the following vision:

"Melbourne is a city in nature with a flourishing and valued network of public open space that is shared and accessible by everyone." ²

The new Open Space Strategy will also build upon the Merri-bek Community Vision 2021 – 2031, which is a guiding platform for our municipality. The Community Vision is that:

¹ In 2016, the Merri-bek population was 162,561 persons and in 2021 was 171,351 persons:

<https://atlas.id.com.au/merri-bek>.

² Victoria State Government: Open Space Strategy for Metropolitan Melbourne 2021 – 'Open Space for everyone'.

“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 vision includes the following Themes:

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”.

Open space is precious, and our open space is integrally woven to the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung people, the Traditional Owners of the land and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. Open space has an important role in environmental stewardship and protection. This ranges from our nature and biodiversity within and along our creek corridors (Merri Creek, Moonee Ponds Creek, Merlynston Creek, Westbreen Creek and Edgars Creek), to ensuring we enhance our tree canopy and native grasslands. Our new Open Space Strategy will progress this Theme and its focus on 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 – such as promoting safe transport when integrating cycling corridors with open space. Council has also been working closely with stakeholders when trying to improve safety in our open space. The new Open Space Strategy will explore how we can further progress this work and this theme.

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.

Moreland has reliable housing, 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 to our diverse community. "

No one is lost between the cracks".

We acknowledge the important role open space has in promoting a healthy and caring community. The new Open Space Strategy will explore this Theme, including ways we can promote greater use of open space and ways we can improve our open space to ensure it meets all of our community needs.

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 for 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 Moreland, the council and community support the development of vibrant hubs of arts, businesses and recreation".

Open Space has an important role to play in making our spaces and places enjoyable and accessible. The creation of our new strategy will include an engagement phase which aims to hear from a wide range of our diverse community, to ensure we are including all of our community in the new strategy.

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".

Council wants to understand how the community sees the vision of open space in Merri-bek and how we can ensure that the vision appropriately represents all community members.

Council wants to know:

How do you use and value our open space?

What makes your proud / not proud of open space in Merri-bek?

What would make it easier for you to access open space?



Figure 2: Cycling along the Upfield Corridor.

4. Opportunities

There are many opportunities for Merri-bek in managing and enhancing our open space, including:

Increased use of open space during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID 19 pandemic has changed the way people live, work, and get around. It has also changed how we value and rely on our open space. Anecdotal stories from residents have included residents using open space more and in different ways than before the pandemic. This includes discovering new local parklands and using creek corridors they had not previously used. This was particularly highlighted in Merri-bek during several periods of 5km radius lockdowns when our community members were confined to their 5km locale. It has ultimately increased focus and attention to the importance of local and varied open space.

Concurrently, the pandemic also increased pressure upon our open space due to unprecedented use.

Before the pandemic and during lockdowns, our Merri-bek residents communicated the need for better quality open space. This includes the need for better formal sports facilities, providing safer informal open spaces, creating more dog parks, and enhancing our playgrounds.

This new appreciation of our open space provides an ideal and unique opportunity to reflect on how we use our spaces and how we can better provide for our residents and users in the future.

A Park Close to Home

Merri-bek has proactively been creating new areas of open space via the Park Close to Home program since 2017. Through this program, we have built several new open spaces and several more are planned in the coming years. This has included the Bulleke-bek Park, Brunswick, a new 2,300sqm park in central Brunswick, and Citadel Park, Glenroy, which both provide much needed open space for residents of nearby houses and apartments.

Our community has been extremely positive about these new parks and the program. The new Open Space Strategy provides opportunity to harness this positive feedback for input into new open spaces.



Figure 3: Citadel Park, Glenroy, created through the Park Close to home program.

Acknowledging Traditional Owners

Our open space exists on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, the Traditional Owners of the land and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. The creation of a new Open Space Strategy is a fantastic opportunity to demonstrate a greater level of respect for country and our open space. The new Open Space Strategy will explore how Council can increase integration of Traditional Owner philosophies and perspectives into how we use, manage, plan, and maintain our open space. We will build upon existing actions and discussions, such as the renaming of Council to Merri-bek City Council and the recent Merri Creek Parklands discussions³. We will aim to work closely with the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation throughout the creation of our new Open Space Strategy.

³ <https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/what-your-vision-fawkner-merri-parklands>

Gaps in our open space network and quality of our open space

Gaps in our open space network

The Park Close to Home framework aims to ensure all residents are within either 300m (if within high density zoning) or 500m of open space. To create open space in areas outside of these 300m and 500m distances, Council has been buying land on the mainstream property market and creating new parks. Council has created several new parks via this program, including:

- Bulleke-bek Park, Brunswick
- Garrong Park, Brunswick
- Citadel Park, Glenroy

Several parks are also in the planning and construction phase, including future parks at:

- 14 Frith Street, Brunswick
- 260 Sydney Road, Brunswick
- 498-508 Bell Street & 33 Westgate Street, Pascoe Vale South
- 41 – 43 Service Street, Coburg.

These new open spaces have been specifically developed to reduce the open space gaps identified in the Park Close to Home framework and improve community access to open space. There are however remaining gaps in our open space network which will require several new parks to be created.

Quality of our open space

Whilst we have also heard from our community that we need more open space overall, we have also heard about the need for specific types of open space and a need to improve the quality and maintenance of our existing open space. This includes specific requests for:

- Dog parks and dog park facilities (i.e., dog agility equipment, separate fenced areas, 'small dog' areas and 'large dog' areas)
- Creation or improvement of specific sport facilities (such as a hockey ground, more soccer pitches, and more football fields)
- Upgraded and additional playgrounds, and playgrounds with different focus
- BMX / mountain bike / cyclocross facilities
- Greater informal recreation spaces (such as running routes and linear corridors)
- Improved safety in our open spaces, including lighting, seating, improved view lines, etc
- Greater shade, drinking fountains, bins, seating, and BBQ facilities
- Overall improved maintenance across the entire open space portfolio in Merri-bek.

Demand for open space and access to open space

Our open spaces serve many functions, often at the same time. For example, a sports field can serve a function as a formal sports club ground, whilst also servicing a function as open space outside of playing hours for informal sport and recreation, and dog walking. Similarly, a playground can be a space for children to play as well as a congregation space for adults, as well as a space for nature and biodiversity habitat.

An emerging challenge is the increasing pressure and demand for our open space to serve many functions. This is further intensified by increased demand due to increasing population and urban

densification. The strategy will explore this increasing pressure and demand and aim to provide a rationale for how Council will tackle these challenges.

Ensuring open space can be used by all

Council wants to increase open space usage and access to all persons within Merri-bek. We acknowledge however access to our open space, including specific facilities and locations, needs to be further explored and invested within. We have opportunity to ensure open space is more accessible for all when we create the new open space strategy, such as:

- Reviewing the condition of sports ground needed for formal sports, and other uses which may reduce the condition of these grounds.
- Exploring how we can increase access to our sports grounds, such as in the evening when a sports club has an allocation at a sports ground.
- Exploring how our playgrounds can cater to persons (children, parents, carers) who experience disability. This includes physical barriers that make open space difficult to access for persons with disabilities / mobility impairments including prams, such as: uneven terrain, stairs, lack of accessible parking, paths, and toilets.
- Explore how facilities in our open spaces can better cater for persons experiencing homelessness.
- Exploring how our open spaces can better include sensory considerations and provide for persons with sensory disabilities.

We want to hear from you:

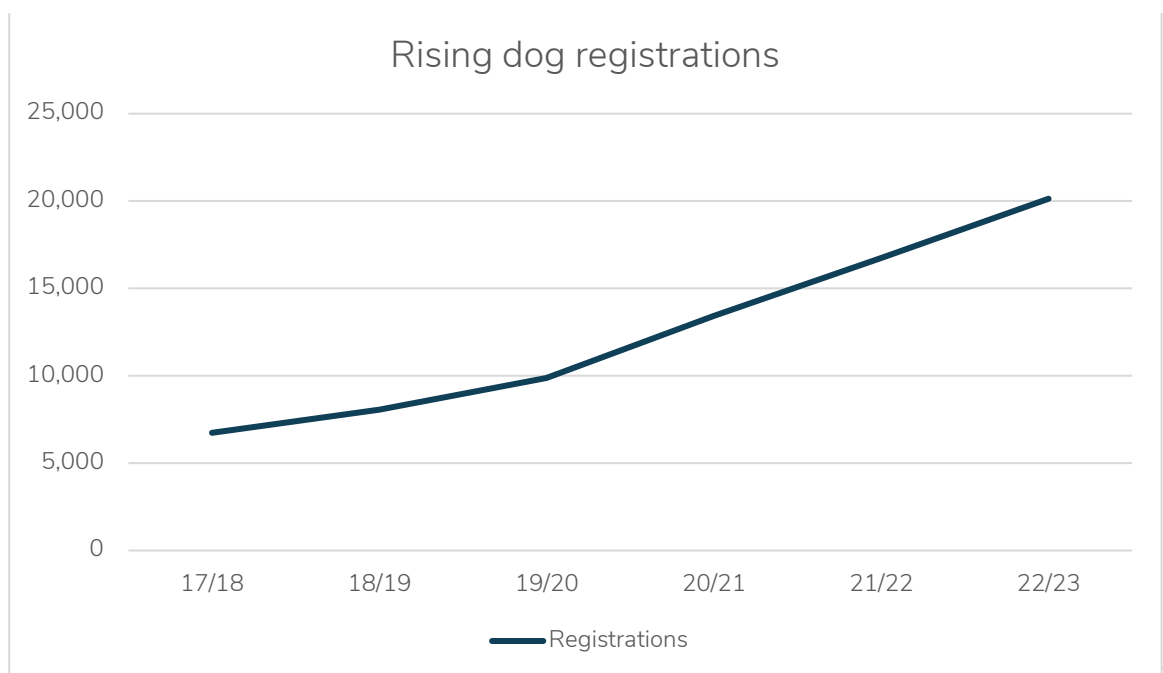
What would make open space easier for you to access?

What facilities do you use in your open space?

What can Council do to make our parks more engaging for all genders?

Rising dog ownership

Merri-bek's dog ownership has greatly increased in the last decade and is expected to continue to increase. Below is a graph showing registration of dogs in Merri-bek from 2017/2018 to 2022/2023 showing that dog ownership in the last 6 years has tripled. Furthermore, we know that dog ownership in high-density spaces is increasing, creating additional need for dog facilities within open space.



4

We have heard from some parts of our community that there are opportunities to improve facilities for dogs in our open space. The strategy will explore how we can better share open space for both dog walkers and other open spaces uses (such as formal sports).

Sharing our Open Space

Our open space areas often serve many functions and support a diversity of uses and users concurrently. Such an example is an open space sports field which has a formal allocation for use of a sports grounds in evenings and on the weekend for a formal sports group. This open space can also be an important open space for dog walkers, being a designated off-leash dog area, as well as providing space for informal recreation and informal sport.

Council officers, community members and sports groups have reported that at times, our open space has not been appropriately shared between users. Council will explore how we can enhance the sharing of our open space for diverse uses and users and how these spaces can co-exist harmoniously.

Council will also explore commercial leases in open space and opportunities to promote use of open space (such as cafes, yoga, personal training, etc).

We want to hear from you:

Do you want more dog parks / dog facilities – and what type? Fenced / non-fenced?
Do you want less dog off-leash areas and more on-leash areas?

⁴ Data is from Active Registrations with Merri-bek City Council.



Figure 4: Open space for people and dogs.

Facilities for BMX and mountain bikes, cyclocross and skateboarding/scooters

BMX and mountain biking, cyclocross, skateboarding and scooters are increasingly popular activities in Merri-bek and surrounding Councils. Residents have contacted Council seeking the establishment of higher quality outdoor recreational facilities that include a BMX track / pump tracks/mountain bike paths/cyclocross/skateboarding/scooter facilities.

Council has heard this feedback from our community and is already building two facilities: one at the Brunswick Velodrome (in design phase for a pump track) and a second pump track at Richards Reserve next to the Coburg Velodrome, which has recently been completed.

We want to hear from you:

Do you think we need more BMX / mountain bikes facilities, and where?

The new Open Space Strategy will further explore the need for additional BMX / mountain bike / cyclocross/ skate/scooter facilities, including collaborating with adjoining Councils to create shared facilities. It will also balance the location of these facilities with other open space values such as biodiversity, including:

Need for creative play / bush play

Council recognises the need for children to have access to a variety of play and creative play spaces in the outdoor, natural world. The Merri-bek 2016-2020 Play Strategy⁵ identified that play using natural materials (stone, soil, leaves, plants), waterways, shade as well as formal playgrounds, is important to for children's learning, health, and wellbeing. Whilst Merri-bek has an established network of playgrounds, it has been identified that creative play, such as play using natural materials (stone, soil, leaves, plants), may be lacking. The strategy will explore these facilities and our overall open space facilities for children, including our playgrounds.



Figure 5: Merri-bek Nature Explorer Passport.

Promoting Arts and Culture in our open spaces

Our open spaces are a great opportunity to promote our unique and thriving Merri-bek arts and culture. The Strategy will explore how we can better promote arts and culture in our open space – such as via opportunities for events, artwork, or other activities (such as the Brunswick Music Festival held recently at Gilpin Park, Brunswick, or the Glenroy Music Festival at the Glenroy Community Hub). The strategy will also explore how we can celebrate and promote our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Wurundjeri- Woi-wurrung history, including in future events and open space improvements / additions.

⁵ <https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/globalassets/key-docs/policy-strategy-plan/merri-bek-play-strategy-2016-2020- web.pdf>



Figure 6: Brunswick Music Festival at Gilpin Park, 2022



Figure 7: Mural at Charles Mutton Reserve.

Improving and enhancing our local nature, biodiversity, and waterways, and responding to climate change.

The Merri-bek Nature Plan, Merri-bek Urban Forest and Merri-bek Integrated Water Management (IWM) Strategies, together recognise the importance of protecting and enhancing nature, biodiversity, and our waterways in Merri-bek. These strategies greatly align with planning and enhancing our open space, as our waterways and key biodiversity and nature is largely within open spaces areas.

Council has undertaken key open space improvements along our waterways (in collaboration with agencies such as Melbourne Water, Moonee Valley City Council, Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek, Friends of Merri Creek, Friends of Edgars Creek and Merri Creek Management Committee). These projects have far-ranging benefits, such as improved creek health and biodiversity as well as improving the quality of our open space. An example is the Reimagining Moonee Ponds Creek Project, whereby concrete parts of Moonee Ponds Creek are being reimaged to create a more appealing Creek environment, improved waterway quality and much improved open space.

Council is also proactively increasing shade, tree coverage and biodiversity in the municipality via the Merri-bek Urban Forest Strategy and Nature Plan. The Urban Forest Strategy has a vision to transform Merri-bek into a municipality where healthy trees and vegetation are a core part of our urban environment. It aims to double tree canopy cover across Merri-bek. Concurrently, the Nature Plan provides strategic direction to enhance biodiversity and celebrate nature in our municipality. This includes projects such as community planting days, supporting Bush Kinder and early years nature engagement programs, and space for wildlife in the private and Council realm.

The Merri-bek Climate Risk Strategy describes how Council will proactively plan for and respond to the inevitable impacts of climate change. Our Merri-bek Climate Risk Vision is that, by 2030:

Council competently, accountably, and responsively manages climate risk, and
Merri-bek is climate-resilient, leafy, and liveable; with –
A climate-ready and resilient community with no one left behind.

We need to ensure our open space is resilient in the face of climate change and climate risk. This includes our parks being resilient during the la Niña wet weather patterns which typically have increased rainfall and flooding events, as well as being resilient during El Niño periods which typically have lower rainfall and potential drought. Furthermore, we recognise that our open space serves as a place of respite during events such as heat waves.

The new Open Space Strategy will explore how our open spaces align and promote this vision. This may include specific exploration of actions such as how can our open spaces are responding to climate change and specific climate risks, and how our open spaces continue to provide ecosystem services such as shade, water retention and cool transit corridors.

We want to hear from you:

How can we better promote nature play / bush play for our children and families?
How can we better promote arts and culture in our open space?
How can our open space be more resilience in the face of a changing climate?

The new open space strategy will continue to align our focus on nature and waterways with, and within, our open spaces. The strategy will also explore both Council owned and maintained land as well as privately owned and managed lands (such as the Northern Golf Course, Fawkner Memorial Park and schools) and their important role in promoting and enhancing local nature and biodiversity in our private open spaces.



Figure 8: A wetland constructed to help improve Merri Creek.

Funding for open space

Rising costs

Funding for Merri-bek open space comes from various incomes streams: Council rates, external grants, and the Public Open Space Planning Scheme Contribution (Levy) (funds collected from subdivision of land). Council also collaborates with key partners, including Memorandums of Understanding and Committees of Management, which assist in establishing and maintaining open space.

A key, emerging challenge in providing open space for our growing municipality is the substantial rising cost of open space management and creation of new open space. To meet the open space demands created by an increasing population, Council purchases land on the mainstream property market to create new open spaces. An increasing issue is the increasing cost of land acquisition. In the years from 2018 to 2022, Council spent over \$54,000,000 purely on land acquisition to create new parks.⁶ The design and construction of the park and playgrounds, seating and landscaping, was additional to this amount. Council has also purchased many other properties to create and enhance future linear open space corridors, retain parkland along our Creek corridors and improve biodiversity. From 2013 to 2019, multiple properties for these purposes have cost over \$39,000,000.

Open Space Maintenance

Concurrently, the cost of upgrading and construction of open space is also rising, such as playground equipment and materials. In recent years, Council has experienced cost increases of 30% - 70%⁷.

Furthermore, whilst Council is increasing our open spaces via the creation of new parks, our space portfolio maintenance portfolio is also increasing. Council has a portfolio of over 350 open spaces inclusive of 135 playgrounds, 54 sports grounds, various wetlands, creek corridors and stormwater harvesting systems, skate parks, pumps tracks and park shelters, which all require renewal and maintenance. We have many ageing playgrounds that require upgrading as they have not been upgraded for over 20 years. We are also seeing our open space and maintenance impacted by climate change – such as flooding in 2022 that made it difficult (and more costly) to maintain our open space.

Funding review

Council has a long-term asset planning approach that sets the strategic direction for asset construction, renewal and maintenance. This program can also be applied to our open spaces and future open space projects. The new Open Space Strategy will explore future open space projects, including projects in the short, medium and long-term timeframes. This is similar to other metropolitan Melbourne Councils, which are looking at open space in a 15 - 20 year project timeframe. This approach also has the potential to better inform the contribution land developers make toward the city's open space needs.

The Open Space Strategy refresh will continue to explore issues around funding and seek to make recommendations to address key funding issues and shortfalls. One funding mechanism which will

⁶ This was to create the parks at: West & Breese Streets, Brunswick; 55-61 Tinning Street, Brunswick; 260 Sydney Road, Brunswick; 14 Frith Street, Brunswick; 132-134 Cardinal Road, Glenroy; 41 – 43 Service Street, Coburg; and 498-508 Bell & 33 Westgate Street, Pascoe Vale South.

⁷ Costs obtained when comparing pre-covid costs and post covid costs. For example, a typical park seat increased from \$860 to 1,280; installation of a typical drinking fountain increased from \$7,8000 to \$10,500.

be investigated is a review of the Public Open Space contribution for land developers, which is part of the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.

The Public Open Space contribution is a statutory funding mechanism for land developers to make a financial contribution to the city's open space provision when they subdivide land and put more houses on an existing lot. For example, a piece of land that formerly had one home is developed and subdivided to have two or more homes. This mechanism requires developers to make a financial contribution towards Merri-bek's public open space improvements / acquisition of land, that are required to cater for the needs of the increased residential population resulting from the development and subdivision.

Council currently has some specified contribution rates in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme. By following guidance in a Victorian Government Practice Note and adhering to recommendations made by Planning Panels for other councils who are refreshing their Open Space Strategies, there is an opportunity for Council to review open space contribution rates in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme. This opportunity would ensure land developers make an appropriate contribution to the demand for the city's open spaces.

We want to hear from you:

Should we explore ways for the Merri-bek Planning Scheme to include refreshed contribution rates, for land developers to financially contribute to the city's changing open space needs?

What ideas do you have so we can better fund and allocate resources for our open spaces?



Figure 9: Netball facilities at Raeburn Reserve.

5. Council would like to hear from

Council would like to hear how you use and value our open space; what facilities you use; what you do not use and why; and any other feedback about our open space. We want to sure we are meeting the current and future open space needs of our community.

Council wants to ensure that we can factor in how our open space is used and valued for future decision making. Specifically, we want to hear from people to help Council:

- Prioritise the open space projects in the next 10 years and beyond in the best locations
- Create an indicative future project list for open space projects
- Understand how our space is used and valued
- Ensure all voices in our community are heard.

Council is seeking input from our diverse community about how our open space is used and valued,
and what aspects are working and what are not.

This will help us create new open space,
identify where to acquire new land for future open space,
and confirm what actions need to occur across Council to further enhance our open space
for now and for the future.



Figure 10: Football in open space.

Next steps

Council will be having key engagement activities, including events in our Merri-bek parks, an open space survey and workshops. Please stay updated by looking at conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/open-space-strategy.

Key Reference Documents and Legislation

Below are the key documents that have, and will be, used to consider the context of the new Merri-bek Open Space Strategy.

Key Reference Documents

Victoria State Government

- Open Space for Everyone
- Plan Melbourne

Key Legislation

- Merri-bek City Council General Local Laws 2018
- Merri-bek Planning Scheme
- Planning and Environment Act 1987 and Subdivision Act 1988
- The Local Government Act

Merri-bek City Council documents

- Allocation and use of sporting facilities, grounds, and pavilions
- Climate risk strategy
- Community infrastructure plan 2022 – 2032.
- Disability Action Plan
- Draft Arts and Culture Strategy
- Edgar's creek conservation and development plan
- Housing Capacity Study
- Integrated Transport Strategy
- Integrated water management strategy 2040 – towards a water sensitive city
- Merlynston linear park plan
- Moonee ponds creek chain of ponds
- Merri creek environs strategy
- Merri-bek children, young people and families plan 2021 – 2025
- Nature Plan
- Park close to home framework
- Play Strategy 2016 – 2022
- Sport and active recreation strategy 2020
- Urban Forest Strategy 2017-2027
- Urban heat island effect action plan & cooling the upfield corridor action plan
- Westbreen creek conservation and development plan
- Zero carbon 2040 framework

Merri-bek Open Space Consultation

Summary Report
September 2023



Acknowledgement of Country

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

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Prepared by ASDF Research using data and information collected by Merri-bek Council and Chatterbox Projects.

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September 2023

Executive Summary

From April to July 2023 Merri-bek City Council ('Council') undertook a broad range of community consultation activities to inform the development of a new Merri-bek Open Space Strategy. ASDF Research was engaged by Merri-bek City Council to assist with providing an unbiased, independent analysis of the feedback heard during the community consultation for the new Merri-bek Open Space Strategy.

Activities included an online survey (n=227), translated surveys amongst the CALD community (n=96), a survey distributed to Merri-bek's business community (n=4), consultation modules on the Merri-bek conversations page (43 contributors), 2 focus groups (26 participants), 4 deep dive workshops (40 participants), 6 pop-ups (~240 participants), 11 committee conversations (167 participants), 2 CALD workshops (39 participants), and over 28 written/email submissions. Overall, there were over 900 individual contributions across all activities.

This report presents a summary of all of the information collected through these activities. It is understood that Council project officers will read and review each individual submission to this project in addition to this summary.

The key themes throughout the consultation contributions can be summarised as follows:

- **More space** needed – it is recognised that with a growing population more quality green space is needed.
- **Sharing** – there are safety challenges with pedestrians and cyclists using the same paths (there's a call for them to be

separated), as well as issues with general park users and professional sport competing for the same space.

- **Dogs** – dog owners want more fenced off-lead spaces, whilst there are also concerns about dogs in playgrounds, dogs off-leash, and uncollected dog poo. There are also some who are not comfortable with dogs / scared of dogs and fear accessing open space due to the dogs.
- **Seating and shade** – there is a need for more seating and shade / shelter from the sun and rain, both over playgrounds as well as for other park users (picnic and rest areas).
- **Safety** – residents want better lighting to improve safety when walking the dog at night and exercising in winter.
- **Maintenance** – primarily of ground surfaces so that sports activities don't need to be cancelled due to poor drainage / surface. Also maintenance of public toilets.
- **Environment** – there is a desire for more trees, more natural planting (indigenous / native plants) to improve biodiversity and provide natural play space, and community food gardens.
- **Playgrounds** – there is widespread desire for more nature play options for playgrounds, shade over playgrounds, and more variety of equipment.
- **Inclusion** – there are a range of facilities that could help improve inclusiveness of open space, such as prayer rooms, ablution taps, safe women's only spaces, and better path / playground surfaces for people with a disability. Better quality and quantity of toilets and better cleaning was also raised as a way to make open spaces more inclusive.

1. Background

1.1 Introduction

Merri-bek City Council (Council) is developing a new Open Space Strategy to replace the existing 2012-2022 Strategy. The aim of the Strategy is to ensure residents and workers have access to quality public open space that meets their needs – now and into the future.

Open space is the term used to describe land used by the community for outdoor recreation and leisure, such as for: playing, relaxing, walking, jogging, dog walking, organised sport, informal sports recreation, and active commuting. It also includes land which has value in regards to biodiversity and nature, such as our Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Corridors. Open space also refers to land within private ownership, such as schools, golf courses and cemeteries, which the public may have restricted access to.

This report presents a high level summary of the feedback received from the community, through a comprehensive community engagement program. Engagement opportunities were communicated through over 250 signs in parks and open spaces, as well as social media posts across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

ASDF Research was engaged by Merri-bek City Council to assist with providing an unbiased, independent analysis of the feedback heard during the community consultation for the new Merri-bek Open Space Strategy.

1.2 Methodology

An extensive community consultation was undertaken which included:

- **Online Survey** through the Merri-bek Conversations page. This survey was open from the 28 April to 30 June 2023 (n=227 responses).
- **Survey** translated into **languages other than English**: Turkish (n=27), Italian (n=22), Arabic (n=19), Urdu (n=16), Greek (n=6), and Nepali (n=6).
- **Survey of businesses** (n=4, from an email-out of 6,320).
- **Consultation modules** on the Merri-bek Conversations page, to collect targeted feedback on key topics (43 contributors).
- **4 deep dive workshops** conducted by Council staff and ChatterBox Projects in Gowanbrae, Coburg North, Glenroy and Brunswick (40 participants).
- **2 focus groups** conducted by Council staff and Chatterbox Projects with people with a disability and cares (n=6) and young people (n=20, Oxygen Youth Space drop-in, Coburg).
- **11 committee conversations, 2 CALD workshops, and 6 pop-ups run by Council** throughout April to June 2023. These events were focused on covering a broad range of stakeholders and community locations and are listed in Appendix 1 (460 participants).
- Over **28 emails** and **2 written submissions** received by Council.

1.3 Notes on analysis

Survey results: It should be noted that whilst a broad range of methods were used to distribute the survey, the methodology used for survey distribution (social media, newspaper promotion and signs) did not involve any randomised sampling, and therefore cannot be interpreted as representing all-of-community views. Instead, the survey results provide insights into the views and experiences of those who are users of open space, and have an interest in the topic.

Not all survey questions were answered by all respondents.

The map below shows the suburb distribution for region analysis.



1.4 Glossary

CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse (defined as those who speak a language other than English at home and/or born overseas).
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual.
LOE	Language other than English.
n=	The number of respondents who contributed to the reported percentages (base number).
Participant	Those who participated in engagement activities.
Respondent	Those who completed in the survey.
Sample size	The number of people who provided an answer to a question.
Statistically significant	Highlights a phenomenon / variation in the data that one can be 95% confident is reflective of the entire target population.
Thematic analysis	Grouping of written comments into themes to assist in analysis.

2. Coverage

The community consultation activities aimed to provide extensive coverage of the broader community, as well as key stakeholders. This was achieved as follows:

General Population

- Pop-ups (~240 participants).
- Survey (n=324 respondents):

Survey demographics	Women	n=189	Dog owners	n=106
	Men	n=109	People with children	n=165
	Under 18 year olds	n=2	People who play sport	n=140
	18-39 year olds	n=104		
	40-59 year olds	n=158		
	60+ year olds	n=47		

Culturally Diverse

- Community survey (n=177 who were born overseas and/or speak a language other than English at home, including translated surveys).
- CALD workshops (x2, n=39 participants).

First Nations

- Community survey (n=1).
- Meeting with First Nations Advisory Committee (12 attendees).

LGBTIQA+

- Community survey (n=34).
- Meeting with LGBTIQA+ reference group (7 attendees).

Young people

- Community survey (n=2 under the age of 18).
- Meeting with Mercy College students (~100 attendees).
- Meeting with Children's Reference Group (11 attendees).
- Focus group (20 attendees).

Older adults

- Community survey (n=47 aged 60 years or over).
- Meeting with Merri-bek Age Friendly Reference Group (12 attendees).

People with a disability

- Community survey (n=15 people with a disability and n=29 carers for a person with a disability).
- Meeting with Merri-bek Age-friendly Disability Group (10 attendees).
- Meeting with Disability Reference Group (7 attendees).
- Focus group (6 attendees).

Community groups

- Meeting with Chain of Ponds program manager (1 attendee).
- Meeting with Friends of Merri Creek Management Committee (4 attendees).
- Meeting with Growing Farmers & Fawcner Food Bowls (3 attendees).
- A range of Advisory Committees as listed in Appendix 1.

3. How open space is used and valued

Most of those who participated in the consultation survey said that they travel less than 1km to reach their local park or reserve. Parks in close proximity are more common amongst residents in the North-East and South regions of Merri-bek, with the North-West not as well serviced with close-proximity parks.

As a result, North-West residents are more reliant on their car to travel to their local park. Cycling to travel to the local park is particularly common in the North-East and South regions.

CALD respondents show a high instance of traveling 3+km to access their local park (16%, compared to 5% other areas) and as a consequence, driving to reach the park (43%, compared to 31% non-CALD). When analysing this finding by location it is evident that CALD respondents in the North-West more often travel more than 3km to a park (26%) than their non-CALD neighbours.

Other notable variations in traveling to local parks were:

- Young people (under 35 year olds) more often use public transport (19%).
- LGBTIQ+ residents drive less often (18%), when compared to non-LGBTIQ+ (40%).

Figure 1 Travel to local park/reserve – distance and mode

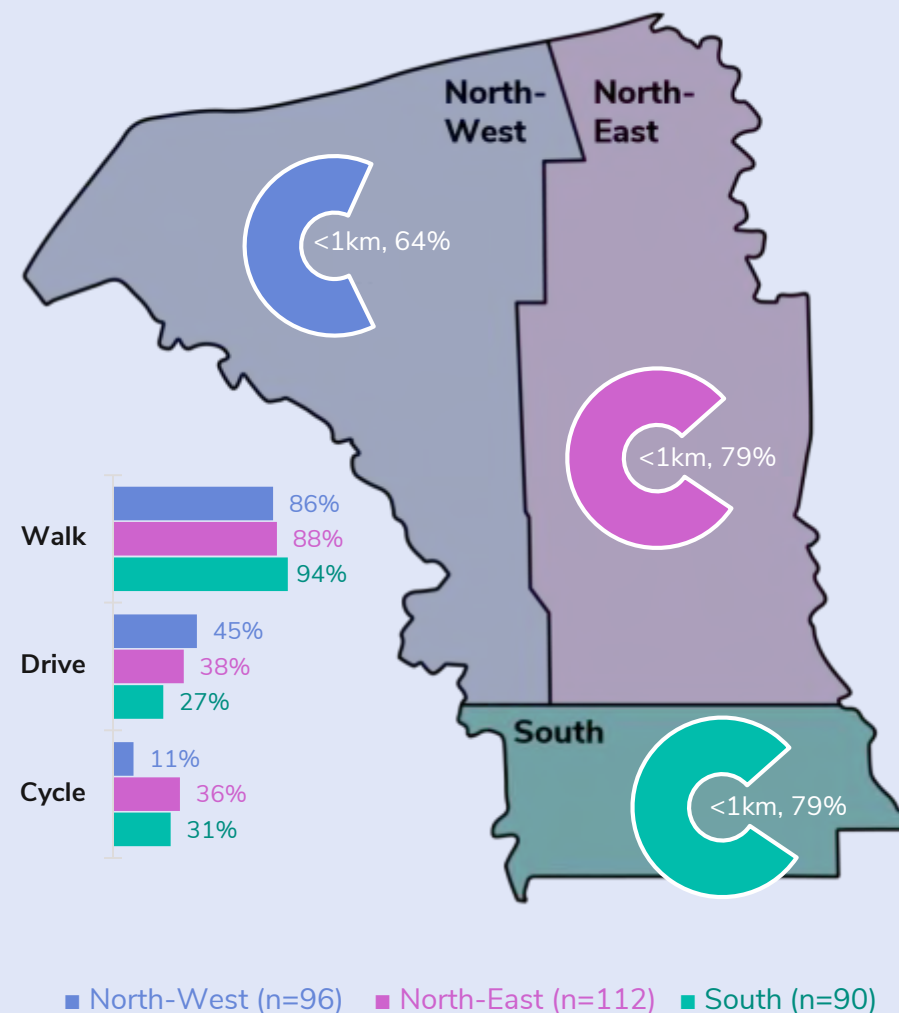
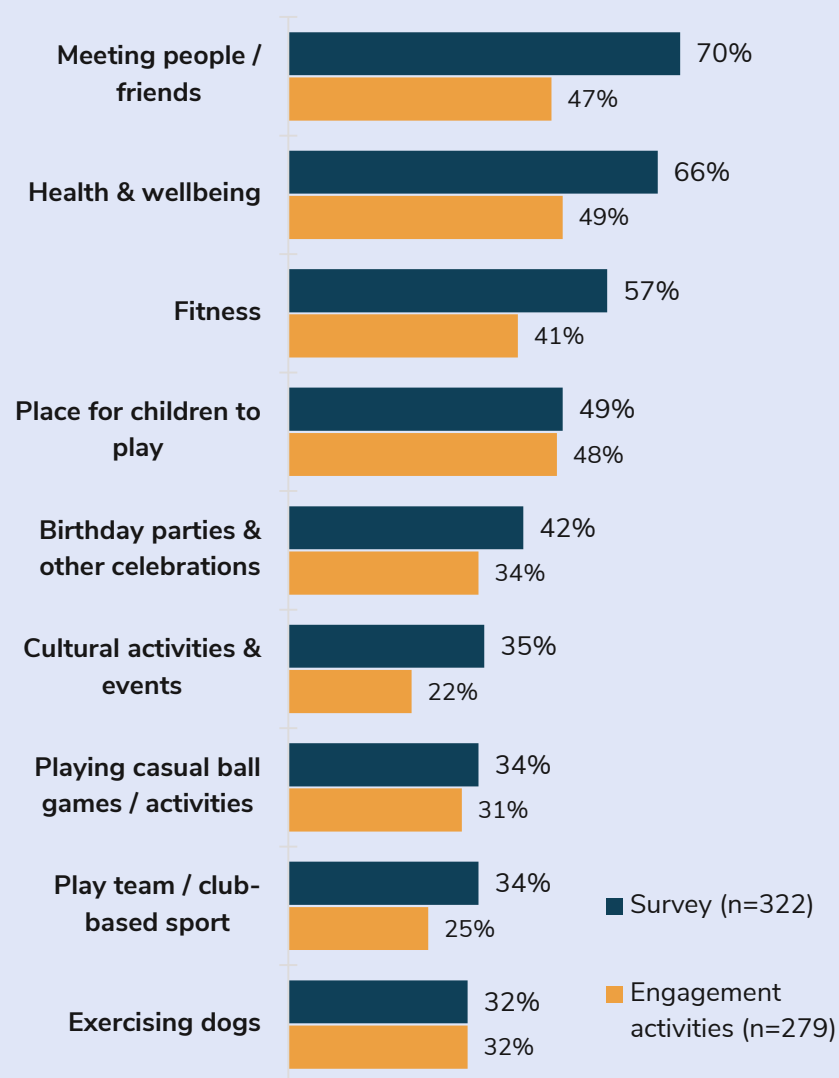


Figure 2 How people use open space in Merri-bek



Both the online survey and engagement events (pop-ups and CALD workshops) asked respondents to share how they use open space. Findings show that open space in Merri-bek is primarily used for health activities, socialising, and a space for children to play.

There were some notable variations in the survey findings:

- Using parks as a *place for children to play* peaks amongst those aged 35-49 (39%, falling to 17% for 60+ year olds).
- *Play team sport / club based sport* was more common amongst 40-59 year olds (46%, compared to 17% under 35 year olds and 13% 60+ year olds).
- Respondents from the North-East more often said they use open space as a *place for children to play* (58%, compared to 37% of those in the South).
- Respondents from Fawkner showed a higher instance of using open space for *cultural activities and events* (51%, compared to 12% of those from Pascoe Vale).
- CALD respondents showed a higher instance of using open space for *playing team / club based sport* (40%, compared to 27% non-CALD), *place for children to play* (60%, compared to 36% non-CALD), and/or *cultural activities and events* (44%, compared to 24% non-CALD).
- LGBTIQ+ respondents less often said they use open space to *play team sport / club based sport* (12%, compared to 37% non-LGBTIQ+) and/or *place for children to play* (26%, compared to 51% non-LGBTIQ+).

Of those who completed the survey, the most common facilities used and valued in open space relate to infrastructure that supports using the space for socialising, such as BBQs, shade, seating and drinking fountains; and amenities (bins and toilets).

When analysing the findings by subsets of the sample for whom features are relevant, usage increases:

- 69% of respondents with children under 14 (n=165) said they use/value *playgrounds*.
- 58% of respondents with a dog (n=106) said they use/value *dog parks with agility equipment and fenced areas*.
- 62% of respondents who said they play organised sport (n=135) said they use/value *sports facilities*.
- 43% of older adult respondents (60+ year olds, n=46) said they use/value *outdoor fitness equipment for adults and seniors*.

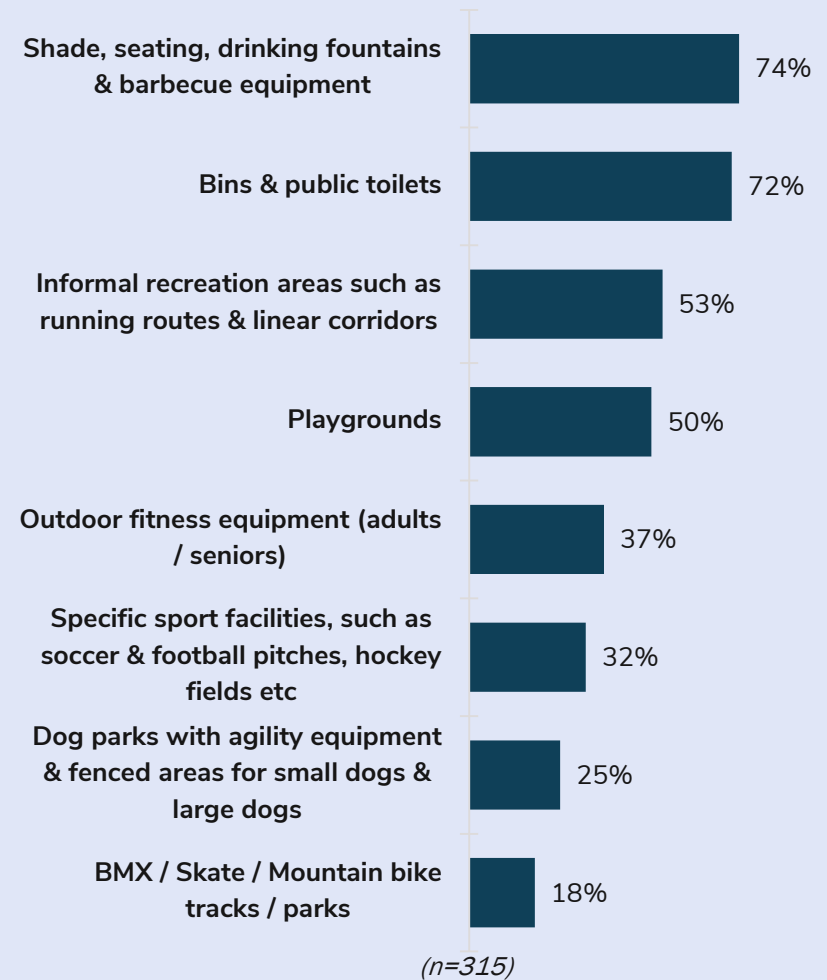
Furthermore, CALD respondents more commonly said they use/value *outdoor fitness equipment* (45%, compared to 27% non-CALD) and/or *playgrounds* (56% compared to 42% non-CALD).

LGBTIQA+ respondents more often said they use/value *dog parks* (32%, compared to 17% non-LGBTIQA+) and/or *informal recreation areas* (74%, compared to 51% non-LGBTIQA+).

When analysing by region, respondents from the North-West more often said they use/value *BMX/skate tracks* (27%, compared to 10% South), whereas respondents from the South more commonly said

they use/value *informal recreation areas* (63%, compared to 43% North-West).

Figure 3 Facilities used / valued in open space



Further insights as to how spaces are used and valued were evident through the focus groups and deep dive workshops.

People with a disability and carers of people with a disability point out that how they currently use open space is not necessarily reflective of how they would like to use open space; they would use the space differently if access was improved. Currently their use is for playing, walking, bike riding, relaxation, entertainment and dog walking; and most will use parks close to their home. One participant mentioned there is a Melbourne Playgrounds website that can be used as a non-judgemental way to find playgrounds with accessible equipment (social media groups can be judgemental).

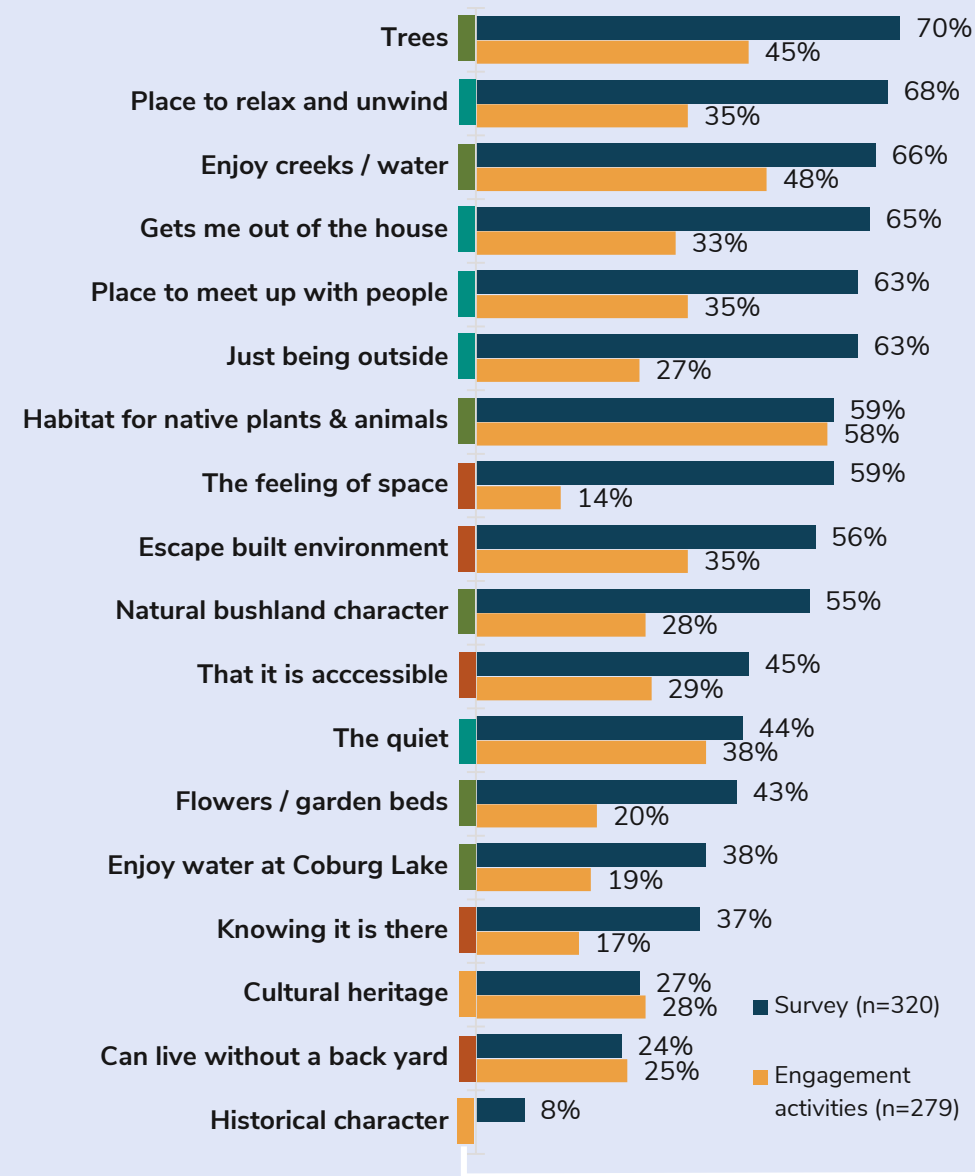
Through the focus group with **young people**, it was found that they like to use open space to hang out with their friends, play basketball, swimming, skating, bike riding and soccer. They typically select parks that are close to home.

A written submission expanded on the range of uses of open space, including dog walking, exercise, socialising, eating by the creek, bird-watching and bird photography, bike riding, mental health, escaping urban pressures, and local access.

It was noted in the **Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee** workshop that how we use space now may be different in 5 years' time, so planning needs to be adaptable to external forces.



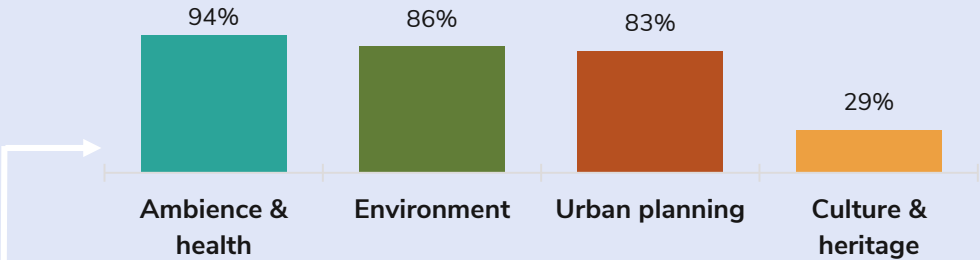
Figure 4 Things liked about open space in Merri-bek



The environmental aspects of open space were highly valued by the community, in particular *trees* and *waterways* in the survey responses, and *habitat for native plants & animals* amongst engagement participants.

Of the n=320 **survey respondents** who answered the question, almost all selected an option relating to the ambience and their mental or physical health* (see colour coding on chart to the left and associated NETs in chart below. Generating NETs is only possible for survey responses, not engagement activities).

Figure 5 NET of things liked about open space in Merri-bek (survey)



The urban planning elements* were more often selected by non-CALD respondents (90%, compared to 80% CALD), whereas the culture and heritage elements* were more commonly selected by LGBTIQ+ respondents (44%, compared to 27% non-LGBTIQ+).

Those who don't play sport more often selected elements relating to urban planning (94%, compared to 74% of those who play sport) and Environment (93%, compared to 79% of those who play sport).



CALD respondents showed higher instances of selecting *enjoy the water at Coburg Lake* (49%, compared to 25% non-CALD) and *flowers / garden beds* (49%, compared to 35% non-CALD).

In the **Children's Reference Group** engagement, participants spoke about liking:

- How open space is for everyone, you don't have to be part of a club.
- That it helps you relax and take your mind off stuff
- Merri Creek, particularly riding along here.
- Dog parks, and visiting open spaces with dogs.

Other things liked, as shared through other engagement activities and submissions, were:

- Having parties and events in parks (examples given were Harmony Park, Coburg, and Coburg Lake).
- Denzil Don playground, Brunswick East (Age Friendly Reference Group).
- Parks as an extension of their back yard, to play and meet friends.
- Wetland regeneration, Jones Park, Brunswick East and CERES.
- Nice to hear the sound of children in parks, during COVID lockdowns.

The submission by **Friends of Merri Creek** strongly support Theme 1 in Merri-bek's Community Vision: An environmentally pro-active Merri-bek, noting that waterways provide a broad range of values: "waterway corridors need space for multiple functions: recreation, landscape amenity, habitat and wildlife movement, drainage, sewerage, flood management and maintenance access through."



I love the different open space areas around me (Brunswick), including space for formal sport, off leash dog areas, playgrounds, BBQs, hills for a view, Merri Creek for walks and runs, and the grand stand for people watching. I'd love to see Council continue to value open space for everyone. I see real benefits in improving little pockets along the Merri Creek for different uses which currently feel unsafe and unutilised, such as under the bridge near the Ceres entrance. More and better seating would be welcomed everywhere. Also, I see tennis walls being used in other Council areas and they're very popular. (conversations Merri-bek website)

I am a keen birdwatcher and I value Merri-bek's open spaces for their native bird life. I frequently visit Gilpin Park for birdwatching & conduct annual Backyard Bird Counts from there & Brunswick Park. There are often birds like tawny frogmouths nesting in smaller open spaces like Mailer Reserve & Jacob's Reserve. Birdwatching, which started for me during lockdown, has made me feel more connected to my community: I've got to know people in Merri-bek's open spaces over a shared love of birds (especially tawny frogmouths!).

I also use the open spaces for walking, both for leisure and for commuting across the suburb as an alternative to walking on the roads and footpaths. I love that I can walk from my home in Hope St across parks to Glenlyon Rd. Walking is great for my physical and mental wellbeing and I will often do laps of Gilpin Park at the end of the day (working from home) to get moving and relieve stress.

Also, though I'm a woman in my 50s, I still love a playground, especially swings, and I value adult-friendly swings like the ones at Gilpin Park and the A Gillon Oval playground. Again, a great stress reliever and simply joyful! (consultation page, 3 up votes)

I walk a lot and with the prevalence of COVID-19 I no longer eat at restaurants and cafes so finding a comfortable clean place to eat is very important. (conversations Merri-bek)

4. Things preventing use of open space

45% of **survey respondents** indicated there was something stopping them from using open space in Merri-bek, of whom 116 (82%) provided comment about what was stopping them.

When grouping the written comments into themes, the two primary things stopping people from using open space were dogs (against) and landscape maintenance.

Regarding dogs, the main issues were:

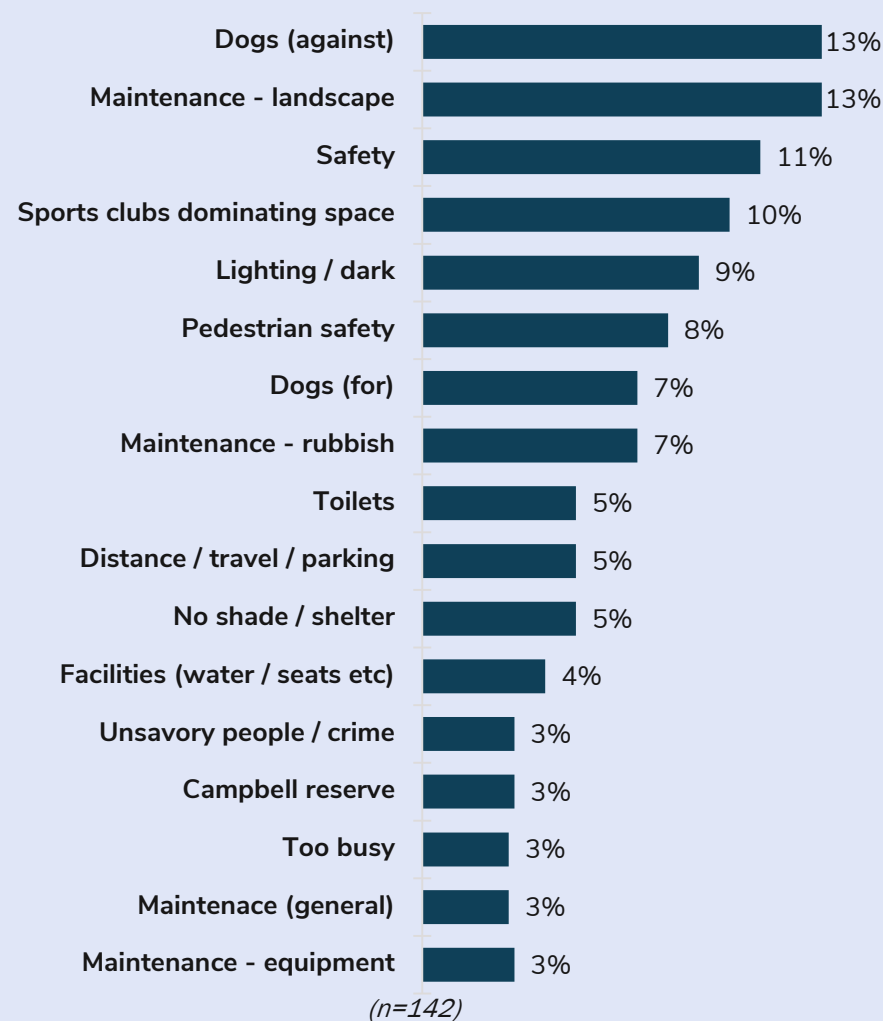
- Dog owners not following the rules (off-lead when should be on-lead, rushing people).
- Too many dogs in the parks.
- Uncollected dog poo.
- Dogs in children's playgrounds.

The main issues regarding maintenance of landscape were:

- Condition of soccer pitch (drainage / muddy).
- Condition of grass areas.

Regarding safety, most of the comments simply said 'safety' without further explanation. When elaborating on safety it was mostly in reference to the Merri Creek path.

Figure 6 Things stopping people from using open space



Insight into other themes follows:

Theme	Details
Sports clubs dominating space	There is concern that access to the off-lead dog areas is too limited as space is scheduled for use by sporting clubs. (Council is aware of the names of the sports clubs)
Lighting / dark	Few comments provided any information beyond just mentioning that there is poor lighting at night.
Pedestrian safety	Specific to lack of pedestrian crossings, no linkages between paths, and clashes with cyclists.
Dogs (for)	Lack of off-leash spaces and off-leash areas that aren't fully fenced prevent people from using them.
Maintenance – rubbish	Too much litter.
Toilets	Not clean, or not enough of them.
Distance / travel / parking	Mentions of it being too far to get to larger parks, difficult to get to parks without a car, and inaccessible by public transport.
No shade / shelter	General 'lack of shade' as well as comments specific to shade over playgrounds, and shelter from both the sun and rain.

Theme	Details
Facilities	Inappropriate seating (need more, seats with backs for elderly), poorly maintained formal and informal sports facilities, dirty water fountain.
Unsavory people / crime	Terms used include assault, creepy, violent, unsavory, odd people.
Campbell Reserve	Issue with it getting water logged / condition of surface.
Too busy	Overcrowding due to limited locations.
Maintenance (general)	No further information given about what sort of 'maintenance'.
Maintenance (equipment)	Specific to playground equipment and sports equipment.

I don't feel safe from dusk and even before that I've been jumped up on and hounded by dogs. (survey)

Shelter from rain, need for access to toilets, lighting after dark, dogs off leash in exercise areas, poor sections of bike path. (survey)

Allowing so many dogs to use the little parks to wee and poo. Toddlers run through the grass after 20-30 dogs have weed not 20 minutes prior. The little parks are swimming in dog excrement. Surely we can have some no dog parks. (survey)

The soccer pitches at Moreland Road are often washed out during winter - drainage needs to be improved. Kids soccer games and training are constantly being cancelled which is so disappointing as it is avoidable. (survey)

ATC Cook Reserve is my closest playground and park. The basketball area & playground area feels neglected and unsafe- broken glass on the playground equipment often, unsavoury activity in the toilet nearby, filthy unusable water fountain. (survey)

Over allocation to soccer of public spaces wherein the soccer club does NOT use even a moderate amount of the allocation. Allocation should be on specific hours of predicted use. No more allocation Just In Case for PVFC. (survey)

Absence of pedestrian, crossings, poor CPTED principles, travel distances. (survey)

Often it is hard to get there without a car, especially when traveling with kids. (survey)

Sometimes there isn't enough of it, particularly in summer when shade is needed, but there aren't enough shaded spots to sit. (survey)

While the bike path along merri Creek is lovely, getting there and connecting to it from my house is very dangerous as the path along albion st disappears just when it becomes nichollson. (survey)

Need for seating with back support. Need for aesthetic beauty. Lack of variety. (survey)

Overcrowding, e.g. Merri Creek Trail is very busy at peak periods. (survey)

Campbell reserve gets very water logged, which means the club football training is constantly cancelled. Also, the soccer ball can get water logged which makes it heavier thus dangerous. The amount of rapes and assaults. (survey)

When theming the comments made through the engagement activities (workshops, meetings and pop-ups), the main reasons raised for stopping visitation to open spaces in Merri-bek were:

- **Safety** (14 comments). Comments about safety were mostly made during the CALD workshops. Situations that made people feel unsafe were using the walking tracks alone, walking the dog (fear of other dogs attacking their dog), night time (poor lighting), safety of play equipment, and other general concerns about not feeling safe in parks.
- **Dogs** (14 comments). Issues with un-leashed dogs, uncollected dog poo, being scared of dogs.
- **Facilities** (12 comments). Including shelter, picnic tables, water fountains, toilets, and shade.

There were a broad range of other topics raised as issues in the engagement activities, including:

- Inaccessible to people with a disability.
- Lack of toilets.
- Distance to travel to get to a park.
- Unsavoury people and crime (smoking, driving through park, drug use, interrupted by strangers).
- Rubbish and litter.
- Too busy and crowded.
- Sporting clubs dominating the space.

- Not enough larger parks.
- More space needed for informal sports (e.g. badminton, indoor soccer).
- Ibis in Coburg Lake Park (smell, over-populated).
- Boring play equipment.
- No navigational support for blind people.
- Not enough appropriate sites for community gardens.

A submission by the **Friends of Merri Creek** provides further insight into the challenges for open space around creeks, specifically “weed-infested stretches with low habitat, recreation or amenity value; remaining private frontages; poor water quality; sections with narrow public land corridors (or none at all for some smaller creeks); conflicts between users, dogs and wildlife; adjoining (re)development impacting on the corridors; and substandard sections of trail and signage”.

A further **community member submission** suggests that there is not enough tree canopy in open space, such as Jones Park, Brunswick East, and too much focus on cutting grass rather than managing or improving other vegetation.

In the focus group with **people with a disability and their carers**, the main reasons for stopping use of open space were:

- Poor design and maintenance of public toilets. 'Exeloos' design made people feel less safe and encouraged users to make more of a mess.
- The complexities and conflicts of animal management – particularly off leash dog areas. Some want more off-leash times / areas (that align to when they are used), whereas others say their children feel unsafe around off-leash dogs. Uncollected dog poo is a particular issue for those in wheelchairs.
- Inadequate consideration of people with disabilities in the design of facilities in shared open space (paths not suitable for wheelchairs; no hard standings around BBQs, drinking fountains, play equipment; playground surface (bark) preventing use by those in a wheelchair; 'Chaotic Points' at shared paths and crossings - lack of clear direction for different users).
- Transport to and parking near open spaces. There is a need for more well-located parking for people with disabilities (noting that not all have a disability sticker).

Through other parts of the consultation it was also raised that playgrounds and equipment are not able to be used by people with a disability.

The focus group with **young people** revealed that things preventing young people from using open space include:

- Lack of lighting at nighttime.
- Anti-social behaviour (drugs, smoking, theft).
- Litter.

In the **deep dive workshops** there were 6 key challenges identified for open space in Merri-bek:

- Challenges associated with sharing spaces (12 mentions). In particular shared pedestrian / cycling paths, sharing between dogs and paths/sport, and organised sport monopolising open space.
- Maintenance of open space (11 mentions). Specifically, trees, shrubs, along creeks, sports grounds and structures, weed control, mowing and litter.
- Protecting the environment and biodiversity (9 mentions). Concerns were raised about tree loss due to development (causing urban heat island) and the need for habitat management, as well as the need for open space without structures in it.
- Not enough open space and the need to provide better and more open space for a growing population (8 mentions).
- Lack of facilities – seating, toilets, signage, shade, bike parking etc. (8 mentions).
- Lighting / safety / use of spaces at night (7 mentions). In particular safety for women at night in the winter months.

Culturally we are not used to dogs and we are scared to go to creeks / parks because people are not respectful and are not putting them on leash. (survey)

There is still so much work to do to improve women's safety along Merri Creek. I hear stories too often of women being harassed and followed, preventing them from running and walking in the area. Instead of finding new open space, it would be great if we could improve the Merri Creek so that half the population can confidently use this huge amount of open space. Procure a report by experts which identifies why crime is occurring so frequently here and what can be done to address it, and then prepare an implementation plan to action these changes - this would go a long way and is long overdue. Increasing activity along it, be it commercial or community activities, particularly in the evening would dramatically improve safety. Improving lighting in a number of areas would also help. As someone who has had a terrible experience along Merri Creek, I would love to see Council taking some serious steps to address this huge issue for so many of us. (consultation page, 4 votes)

Rain in Melbourne usually occurs in short showers. This is a very positive feature about the city (compared to say, Vancouver – where it rains for endlessly for days!). It allows people to get outside more easily (e.g. I ride to work between showers), or utilise our park facilities.

But those of us with slow-moving children can get 'caught out'. Others amongst us enjoy being outside when it's raining (but not necessarily under the rain!)

The fix: Ensure every park has at least one covered area that can shelter 2 picnic tables from the rain (and remember it sometimes blows sideways so make them big enough!). Preferably with BBQs, bins, and playground nearby to make maximum use of the shelters. (conversations Merri-bek website)

5. Improvements over next 10 years

Written feedback from the survey and engagement activities was grouped into themes for ease of analysis.

Amongst **survey respondents**, environment and landscaping was the most common theme, covering:

- More native planting.
- Improve biodiversity / wildlife corridors.
- More trees.
- Community (food) gardens.
- Upgrading pitch surfaces (some want artificial turf removed, others want it installed).

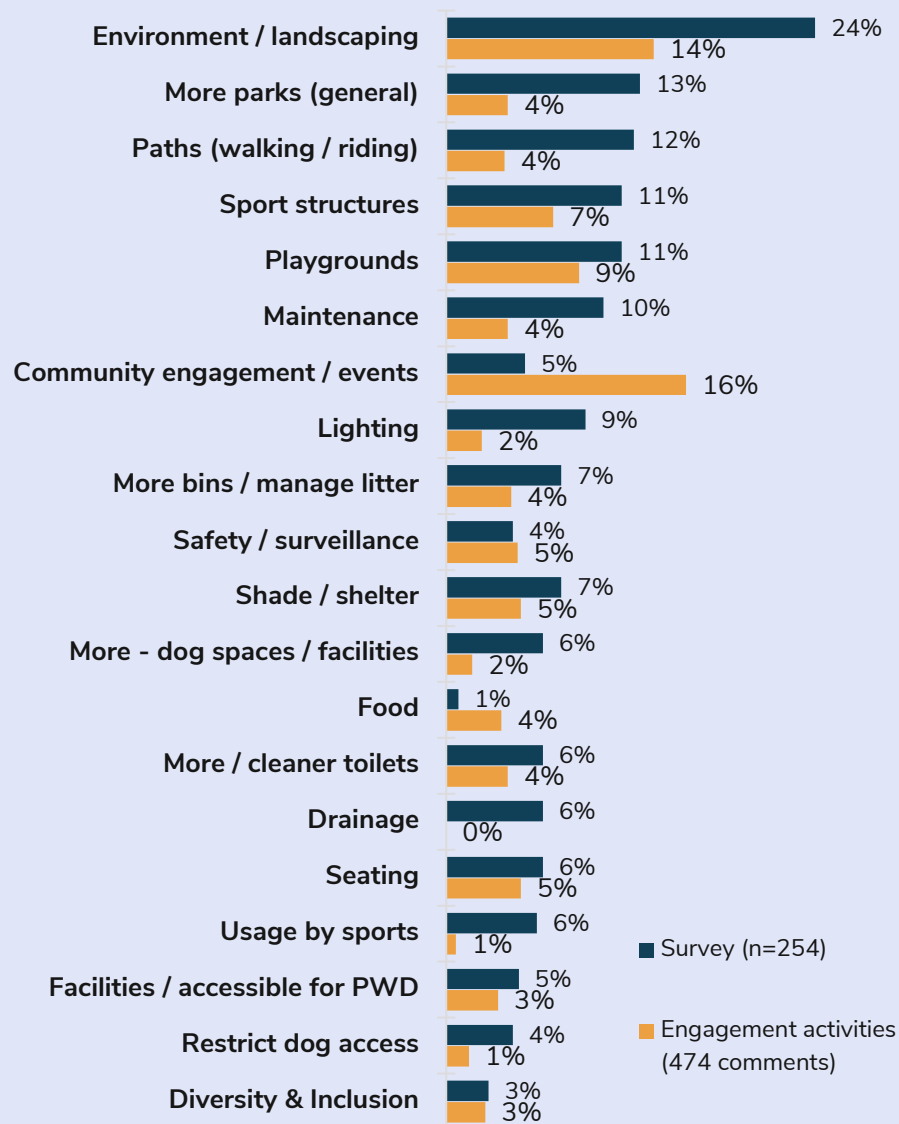
Responses under this category from the engagement activities were along similar lines, with an emphasis on more trees and community gardens.

A common response at the engagement activities was a call for more community engagement and events, which is understandable given the responses were collected through community events.

Suggestions included:

- Street / park libraries.
- Special events.
- Cultural festivals.
- Yoga / other fitness classes.

Figure 7 Things for improvement in the next 10 years



Further detail regarding other improvement themes follows:

Theme	Details
More spaces	Some want more smaller spaces, whilst others want current spaces expanded. There were suggestions relating to closing off roads and turning them into parks, as well as requiring more green space for new developments, or even Council buying private land to convert to open space.
Paths	Both cyclists and pedestrians suggested that pedestrian and cycle paths need to be separated to reduce collisions between bikes and people/dogs. There were also mentions of the need for more connections between paths (walking and cycling).
Sports structures	The most common type of sports structure requested was exercise / gym equipment, particularly equipment suitable for older adults. Other common requests included basketball rings, table tennis tables, and cricket nets.
Playgrounds	Many mentions of nature play and water play, as well as greater variety of equipment to suit different ages.

Theme	Details
Better Maintenance	Specific to sports grounds surface, litter, playgrounds and toilets (toilets mentioned in 6% survey and 4% engagement responses).
Better Lighting	More lighting would help people feel safe in winter when walking the dog or exercising after work.
Food	More cafés and food vans in open spaces.
Drainage	Particular issue at Campbell Reserve, Coburg – causing the cancellation of sports events.
Seating	More of it, particularly seating with backs for older adults, and under-cover for protection from the sun and rain. A few even suggested seating in circles.
Usage by sports	There is some conflict between people walking their dogs on sports fields and sports teams. Dog walkers feel the fields are used too often by sports (reducing their access to open space) whilst sports clubs have concerns about holes dug by dogs (potential injuries) and uncollected dog poo.
Restrict dog access	There was a call for enforcing no dogs in fenced playgrounds, and providing spaces that can be used by people who have a fear of dogs, or children who want to roll in the grass without health risks from dog waste.

Some other themes that weren't charted (less than 5% of responses) were:

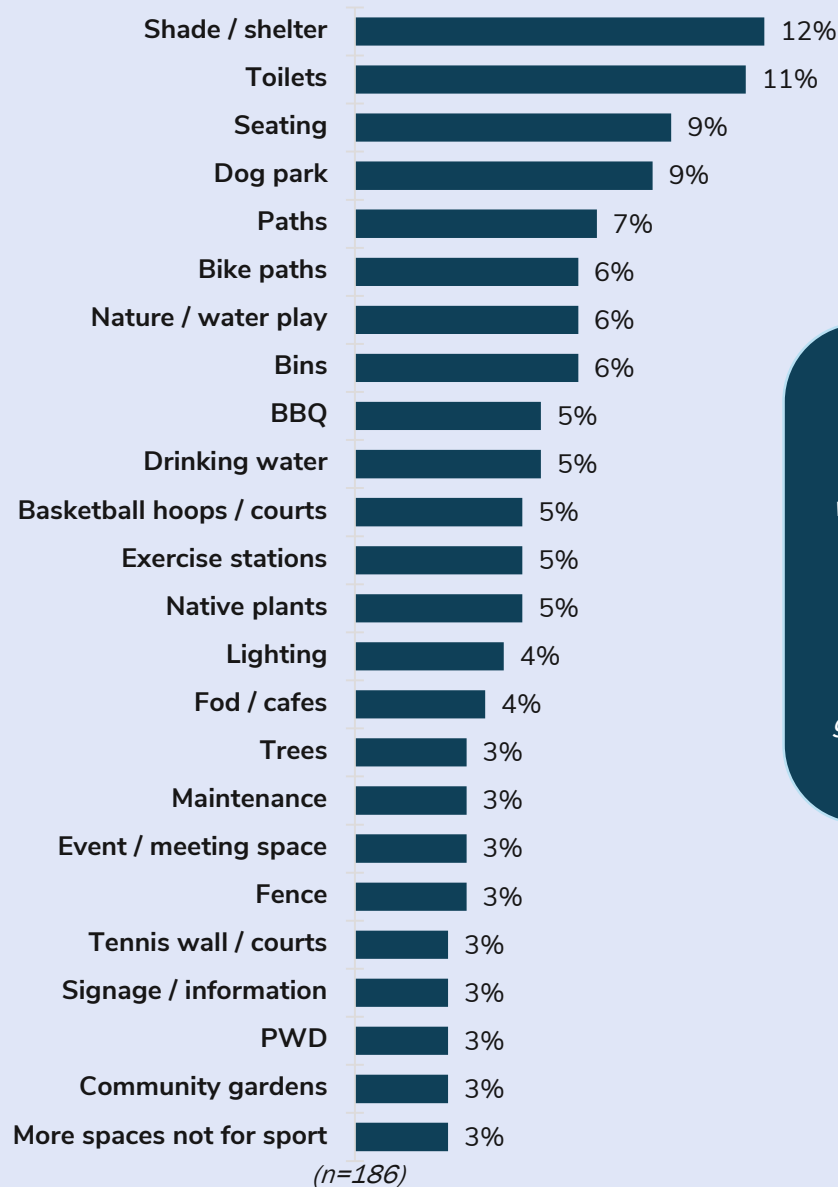
Theme	Details
Diversity & inclusion	Prayer room and ablution taps. Also providing safe spaces for women-only activities.
Signage	Signage requests mostly relate to dog walking rules, First Nations information, and plant identification.
Fencing	People want fences to keep dogs and children separated, and also prevent them from running onto roads.
Drinking water	More taps available.
More for young people	Suggestions include ninja courses, basketball rings, table tennis tables, skate parks. However it was suggested that many of these options may not be of interest to girls.
Other facilities	Including BBQs, more parking, and dog poo bags.
Other	Public art. Implement actions from Open Space Plan.

More plantings of indigenous vegetation....especially get rid of mowed grassed areas and replace with treescapes. Sadly, Merri-bek has one of the highest per capita rates of carbon pollution in the world due to over-development and the council needs to do much better, such as not putting cement bike paths/freeways through our parks such as at Blue Bell Dell Reserve (renamed Cr KW Joyce and he would be proud to see parkland converted to cement) (survey)

My children have been members at Moreland City Football Club. Our seniors team are now in the top NPL league but our facilities do not meet the requirements. Our club doubled in numbers in 2023. We desperately need an upgrade to our lights and a stand to accommodate training sessions and crowds at the game. Sport is an important and vital activity for many kids and their families in our community. I would like to see funded granted to the club. (survey)

Some of the playgrounds like James Reserve in Pascoe Vale are getting quite old and could use an upgrade. Would be beneficial to add a BBQ, shelter and more seating to this reserve as allot of people use it on on the weekend and on the way home from the nearby school (PVPS). (survey)

Figure 8 Facilities missing, to consider in planning



When **survey respondents** were asked to write in any facilities missing that Council could consider in future planning, a similar range of ideas were shared.

Of the 186 comments, the most common themes were the need for more shade / shelter, more toilets, more seating (including picnic areas), the need for more dog parks (off-lead and fenced) to reduce the reliance on sports fields, and nature play areas.

There are not enough public toilets in recreational areas. This is really important for women especially given they are the people most likely to care for children and older relatives who need toilets more frequently, and generally have a higher need for toilets. (survey)

There should be more shaded areas to comfortably enjoy the outdoors regardless of the weather. Proper consideration of sheltered spaces during design can make summer heat, rain, and wind less of an obstacle. (survey)

Of the leash dog parks. The spaces are not just for dogs to run freely, but meeting spaces for their owners, enjoying the space and community. (survey)

Currently there is a lack of public toilets along the Merri Creek Trail, and lack of drinking fountains. Clearer designations of dog off-lead and on lead spaces would be great, currently it is unclear, and without sufficient alternative spaces, off lead dogs cause significant conflict and feelings of being unsafe on the Merri Creek. (survey)

On the **consultation page** an online post-it-note tool gave the community the opportunity to share ideas on how to improve Merri-bek open spaces over the next 10 years, and vote on other's ideas.

There were two comments that received more than 10 'up-votes', one relating to climate change and one relating to development:

- *Given the climate crisis and worsening effect of the sun, shade cloth should be mandatory for all playgrounds in Merri-bek now* (14 up-votes).
- *Council keep approving huge apartment towers right next door to parks. There should be consideration given to natural light and over shadow* (13 up-votes).

Further comments expanded the topic of **development**:

- Avoid overshadowing open space with tall buildings (5 up-votes).
- Purchase industrial properties that have residential on 2+ sides (example of Garrong Park, Brunswick given) (5 up-votes).
- Extend existing open space by purchasing adjacent properties when they become available (2 up-votes).
- Adequate open space, transport and social services needs to be considered when approving new development (1 up-vote).
- Tie development approvals to funding for open space.

One **email submission** also raised concerns about the linear park aspect of the development for the second Nightingale Village in Hope St, stating concerns that it would be overshadowed by buildings and the elevated rail line, and therefore not have any sun access to offer quality green space.

A variety of ideas were also put forth on the **consultation page** for improving infrastructure within open spaces:

- More small parks with seating and tables so people from apartments can relax (5 up-votes).
- Parking, BBQ, bins, seating, toilets, larger playground, and shelter for Kelvin Thomson Park, Pascoe Vale South (1 up-vote).
- More art in open spaces (1 up-vote).
- Improve bike flow (Albert St / John St, Fleming Park, Brunswick East, SE entrance).
- Shade sails at Soudan St playground, Coburg.

For **people with a disability and their carers**, the key improvements would be:

- Safe and accessible paths around and within parks, with particular consideration for hard surfaces for wheelchair users.
- Accessible parking close by to parks and open spaces (and promotional activity to increase awareness of parking availability).
- Clean and accessible toilets that are regularly maintained.
- Accessible barbeques (increase concrete area around facilities).

- Good lighting (LED) to provide feelings of safety.
- Council being aware of the actual needs of people with disabilities and being proactive in incorporating their needs in the design and maintenance of play equipment (rather than people having to identify problems and advocate for change).
- Consideration of the hazards of using weed killer for pest management (timing and communication).
- More playground equipment that is genuinely accessible, with rubber matting rather than soft fall mulch around all-abilities swings.
- Ensure strong, well thought through principles guide the Open Space strategy, with time frames, targets and measures.
- Ensure a dialogue about accessibility is maintained between the City of Merri-bek and with people with disabilities in the community.

In the focus group with **young** people it was felt the top priorities for Council regarding open space should be safety and cleanliness.

Some specific suggestions for improvement were:

- Gender neutral bathrooms;
- Skate Park at Coburg Lake;
- More bins;
- A lot more bathrooms; and
- More seating.

In the **deep dive workshops**, a range of suggestions were put forth for improving open space in Merri-bek.

More open space needed

- Don't just focus on traditional open space - green other areas like nature strips, streets, roofs / create community gardens, town squares, pocket parks etc. (17 mentions).
- Increase lighting for safety reasons and also to increase use of existing open space at different times like at night and during winter to ease pressure (9 mentions).
- Get developers (especially those in high-density areas) to provide open space instead of "paying the fee or increase the contribution" (4 mentions).
- Partner with others (schools, cemeteries, churches, State Government re train lines etc.) to open up private open spaces for use (3 mentions).
- Purchase land on the border of parks to make existing spaces bigger, and along creek areas (3 mentions).

Challenges with sharing spaces

- Increase communication, information, apps, signage, education etc. to ensure people know when certain open spaces are being used for different purposes like sports training; to show what other spaces are around, near-by and what is available; and to educate about user responsibility (24 mentions).

- Create community building activities in open spaces to bring people together and create a sense of respect and ownership over spaces like events, festivals, food trucks, activities, exhibitions and volunteering opportunities (12 mentions).
- Increase information and signage about the history, culture and what is special about each open space area to increase respect and ownership over those areas (6 mentions).
- Create open spaces that are multi-purpose for a range of different groups and needs (8 mentions).
- Separate/ widen paths/ more on-street bike paths (6 mentions).
- Maintain open spaces more to increase safety but to also increase community pride and ownership in the spaces to help with sharing.

Protecting the environment and biodiversity

There were 9 mentions of protecting the environment and biodiversity as part of the **round-table discussions** including making some areas just for biodiversity, increasing nature-based play rather than playgrounds, use sensor lighting, planting more trees, and expanding natural areas along the creek.

Lack of facilities (seating, toilets, signage, shade, bike parking etc.)

There were 13 mentions of adding facilities to open spaces including seating, bins, shade, signage as well as poo bags, park libraries and dog-ball sharing buckets.

In a **submission by the Friends of Merri Creek**, it was suggested that creek corridors in Merri-bek require the following:

- Expand the area of multi-layer indigenous revegetation.
- Establish fenced wildlife refuge areas.
- Ensure that existing Public Acquisition Overlays on creek frontages are activated.
- Identify sections of creek corridor where the open space corridor should be widened.
- Introduce stronger Planning Scheme protection of the creek corridors where adjoining (re)development is likely to occur.
- Reduce the extent of off-lead dog areas in the waterway corridors, and enforce on-lead provisions along waterway trails.
- Construct more wetlands and apply WSUD to new developments.
- Identify opportunities to create open space links across Merri-bek.
- Upgrade substandard sections of waterway trails, and improve wayfinding and interpretive signage.

Another detailed **community member submission** suggested:

- Better system of shared path connections.
- Better planning scheme protection of creek corridors.
- More off-lead spaces with better signage to explain restrictions, better fencing and more appropriate bin locations.
- Mountain bike facilities and nature play spaces.
- Incorporate art into park design.
- More tree canopy and natural habitat (reduce grass).

We could have playgrounds that are much bigger, bolder, more interactive, promote more creativity, develop risk-management skills (the heights are dizzying!), feature 'ninja training' (balance play), more interactive water and sand 'earth moving' play, and are also much more fun for parents (which means a longer stay for the kids). (conversations Merri-bek website)

Symons Park needs a picnic table and seats (conversations Merri-bek website)

Roads around our parks, like Albert St and Pearson St around Gilpin park should have lower speed limits, speed bumps and pedestrian crossings to make accessing parklands safer for kids, pedestrians and cyclists. (consultation page, 8 votes)

Ensure every park has at least one covered area that can shelter 2 picnic tables from the rain (and remember it sometimes blows sideways so make them big enough!). Preferably with BBQs, bins, and playground nearby to make maximum use of the shelters. (conversations Merri-bek website)

Providing for skate friendly design in parks that allows for skaters to utilise existing public space for them, instead of being forced to travel outside of the area to skate parks, or skating on the streets. Examples of good casual skate infrastructure include the southern end of University Square. (consultation page, 3 votes)

Managing shared footpaths. For me this is largely about cyclists. The speed they travel at and the use of bells, or the lack of. I now don't walk between 8-9 am as it's peak hour for cyclists. I'm sure this will increase as well over time, which is great. It would be great to separate these and have designated bike paths. The one that runs parallel to the upfield train line is a great example. (survey)

More facilities taking into account older people's needs eg seating with back support.

Communal (circular) outdoor seating in the shade in parks. Exercise equipment like in Harding St. Coburg in all part of Merri-bek. (survey)

6. Open Space elements

6.1 Playgrounds

Of the n=190 respondents who said they have children, a good range of ages were covered.

The most popular activities / infrastructure to be included in playgrounds were nature play and more shade.

Notable variations by demographics were:

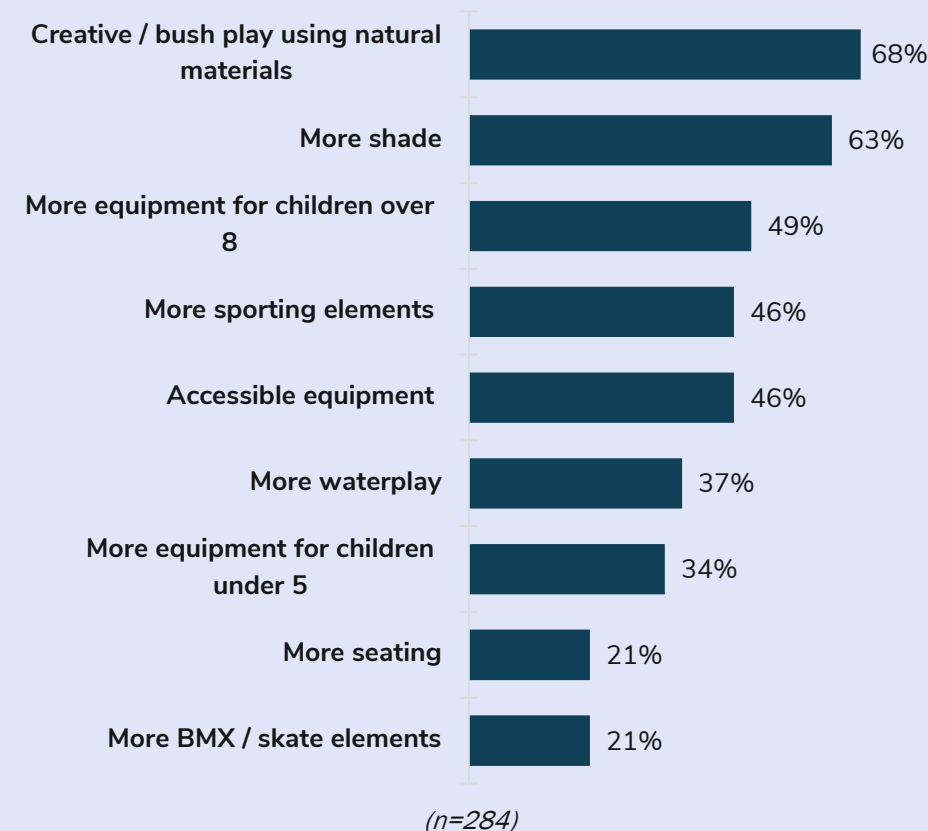
- 56% of respondents from Fawkner said they would like *more seating* (compared to 30% or less for other suburbs). Fawkner respondents also showed higher instances of wanting more *equipment for children under 8* (79%), *accessible equipment* (68%), and/or *waterplay* (56%). Given the higher instance of CALD respondents from Fawkner, these aspects were also chosen by higher proportions of CALD respondents.
- Women more often wanted *more seating* (27%) than men (16%).
- *More equipment for children under 5* was selected by higher proportions of younger respondents (48%) and those in the North-West (45%).
- 61% of those with a disability or who care for someone with a disability want *accessible equipment*.



Age of children (n=190, includes multiples)



Figure 9 Things people would like to see included in playgrounds



9 community members provided playground-specific feedback on a map on the **consultation page**, with 18 locations pinpointed.

11 of the 18 locations pin-pointed were in Brunswick, with half being on Albert Street (between Gilpin Park and Clifton Park). The issues identified at this playground location were:

- Lawns poorly maintained with debris.
- Pointless car park that can be removed.
- Pedestrian crossing needed between Gilpin and Clifton Parks.
- Speeding / rat running cars. Needs reduced speed and pedestrian crossing.
- Shade needed over new playground.
- Small children can't reach slide from climbing ropes.
- Bins were removed.

Another 3 comments related to Pearson Street, around the corner. There was a request for a pedestrian crossing on the Pearson St, Albert St roundabout, planting of more trees for shade in summer, and crossing Dawson St to get to Gilpin Park being dangerous (request for pedestrian crossing).

Other playground suggestions in Brunswick were:

- Need for change tables in toilets.
- Demolish the stadium at Gillion oval and reclaim as green space.
- Request for a pedestrian crossing between Clifton Park and Brunswick Park on Victoria Street.

Feedback in other areas of Merri-bek includes:

- Two commenters suggested shade is needed over the playground in Soudan Street in Coburg.
- Not enough play equipment in WK Larkins Reserve (Dunstan St, Preston).
- Kelvin Thomson playground needs more regular grounds maintenance and more activation (Cleve Rd, Pascoe Vale South).
- Fox C Reserve (Peterson St, Coburg North) would benefit from a fence to improve safety for children, and the playground could use an upgrade.

Email submissions also provided recommendations for playgrounds:

- Shade sails for the playground in Soudan Street, Coburg to make it safer and accessible in hot weather (7 emails). Also a seat opposite the slide.
- Fisher Reserve in Brunswick East playground needs enhancement. Dated with poor quality equipment, consequently under-utilised. Will have increasing demand with recent local residential development.
- More nature play/all abilities/water play playground. Merri Bek seem to be lacking in large parks with adequate shade, seating, and toilets.
- Bulleke-Bek Park in Brunswick has new residential developments completed and in construction near-by. This park is inadequate. Needs more green grassy area to sit and relax.

As explored in the focus group, playground features that work well for **people with a disability and their carers** are:

- Fenced off to provide safety from cars and dogs.
- All abilities play equipment for all shapes and sizes and ages.
- Parks with Pendulum swings and rubber matting underneath.
- A preference was stated for concrete or Lilydale Topping. Soft fall mulch does not work well for people with a disability.

To **recap**, within the initial sections of the survey (reported in sections 3-5 of this report), key insights relating to playgrounds were:

- Place for children to play was mentioned by almost half as a reason why they use open space in Merri-bek (49% of survey respondents and 48% of engagement activity participants).
- 50% of survey respondents said they use/value playgrounds.
- When asked to put forth ideas for improvement, 11% of survey respondents and 9% of engagement participants put forth a comment relating to playgrounds, mostly mentions of water / nature play as more variety to suit a wide range of ages.
- When asked to write in facilities that are missing in Merri-bek open space, 9% put forth a comment relating to the need for shade, often in relation to playgrounds. This was further supported by other engagement activities (email submissions and conversations Merri-bek website).

- When asked to write in facilities that are missing in Merri-bek open space, 6% mentioned Nature / water play.
- The engagement activity with people with a disability and their carers revealed the need for more playground equipment that is genuinely accessible, not just for children with a disability, but also for carers with a disability (e.g. hard surface that is suitable for a wheelchair around playgrounds).



Australian cities have a unique and bizarre lack of wild bushy spaces in parks. This came as a shock to me moving here from Canada, and my wife from Germany, where parks always have a section left untamed – where children can play with sticks, leaves, insects, and climb trees and rocks. Darebin Parklands is the best example anywhere around here, and it's wonderful. More of that here in Merri-bek (Brunswick East if possible!) please.. (conversations Merri-bek

Would be great to see a mandatory requirement for Council to provide proper shade for kids at playgrounds. We can't wait 20 years for trees to grow up! Please install shade cloth at all kids playgrounds. (conversations Merri-bek website)

There is no grand feature or major attraction in Hadfield and it often feels like a forgotten area in Merri-bek. Bartlett Reserve is often empty because the play equipment is sad, but there is so much space that it can accommodate a large feature (like a large slide, dinosaur, tower, rocket ship or anything). With unrestricted street parking, it can cater for people driving into the area, meaning flow on commercial opportunities for nearby business, such as those in East St. (conversations Merri-bek website)

Austin Creek walking trail is so lovely to stroll through, it feels like you are miles away from the city in the heart of the bush. The paths are wide which is lovely for introducing kids to bike paths that are less aggressive. I love the BBQ areas and the ability to drive and park easily. I use these areas also for walking the dog, handy the toilets are close by the playground. The playground itself is a lovely playground. Would love to see more parks in the area receive this attention & possibly have them all connect by a linear route throughout pascoe vale & pascoe vale south. (conversations Merri-bek website)

Example of shade sail requested for Soudan St, Coburg



6.2 Dogs

Of the 34% of respondents who said they own a dog, 68% said they take their dog to an off-leash park/area. All respondents (regardless of dog ownership status) could rate their satisfaction with dog facilities, of which 64% of the n=115 who answered said they were satisfied.

The most common off-leash dog park locations used by survey respondents were:

- Gilpin Park, Brunswick (13 mentions).
- Jones Park, Brunswick East (9 mentions).
- Merri Creek (9 mentions).
- Fleming Park, Brunswick East (7 mentions).
- Hosken Reserve, Coburg North (7 mentions).

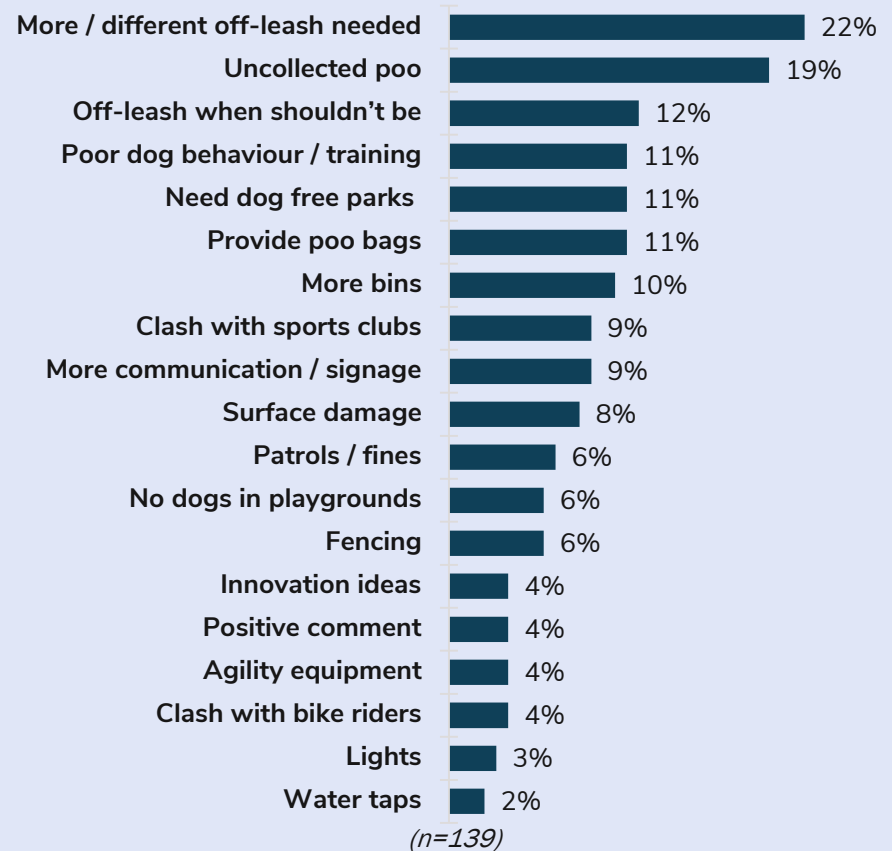
Those who weren't satisfied attend a range of dog park locations, including Hosken Reserve (6 mentions, dissatisfaction mostly due to the mixed use with sports clubs), Gilpin Park (6 mentions, muddy when it rains, too far away) and Jones Park (4 mentions, confusing signage).

Respondents were provided with the opportunity to share other comments regarding dogs and dog parks in Merri-bek. n=139 respondents provided a comment, which were coded into key themes in the chart to the right.

The main issues raised related to there not being enough off-leash dog parks in the area, people not collecting their dogs' poo, and dogs being off-leash when they shouldn't be.



Figure 10 Other comments regarding dogs and dog parks in Merri-bek



Common issues raised in the written comments in the **survey** were:

- There was a call for more off lead dog parks, particularly in areas with new high density developments, so that current parks don't end up just being toilets for dogs.
- Muddy surface at Gilpin Park.
- Clashes with soccer clubs (dog owners report over-allocation of open space to sports clubs, whilst parents of children who play sport complain about injuries from holes dug by dogs, and stepping in dog poo when playing).
- Some wanted designated no dog areas, on sports fields, wildlife corridors, and playgrounds. This request arises for people who are afraid of dogs, children who want to play in the grass, sports clubs who are concerned about injuries, and those trying to regenerate ecosystems and protect wildlife.
- It was felt that better fencing of off-leash areas could help keep children and dogs safe.
- Improved lighting, particularly in winter, could help people feel safe walking their dogs after dark.

15 residents shared feedback regarding dog parks through the visioning tool on the **consultation page**. Some posted multiple comments, totalling 20 post-it notes. The most up-voted note (3 votes) said "Off leash areas are so important for dogs to socialise and exercise their legs, with the added benefit that people enjoy them too."

Feedback called for:

- Provide lighting so that people can walk their dogs after work in winter (2 votes).
- More small areas nearby for variety (2 votes).
- Action to address uncollected dog poo (2 votes) and dogs off-leash when they shouldn't be (2 votes).
- Provide free dog poo bags (2 votes).
- Large fenced or unfenced areas where dogs can run further (1 vote) / explore for longer (2 votes).
- Better signage for on-lead areas, specifically in Brunswick (1 vote).
- Fenced on lead only areas for people who want to picnic or have reactive dogs (1 vote).
- Fenced off-leash parks between Golf Rd and Ronald St Bridge, and along Albert St.
- Action to stop Foletta Park, Brunswick being a dog toilet (open fence suggested).
- Better communication about when sports events are on n fields to help people plan when they can walk their dog.
- Providing dog walking trails through bush (bushwalking paths).
- Positive reinforcement training for dog owners.
- Address 'disengaged' dog walkers as they pose a risk to the environment, community health and child safety.

All dog parks should have supplied poo bags there. Not just the newly made ones. All parks could use more lighting at night for the safety of everyone to walk their dogs after work. (survey)

Having dedicated dog parks and banning dogs along the wildlife corridors is a requirement if parks are to fulfill their purpose for people and wildlife. I completely understand that dog owners like walking along the more natural spaces but it is not responsible to let their dogs run free all over the place. Thus dog owners should help council revegetate some places away from wildlife corridors which are fenced, and their dogs can run around there. (survey)

I love that so many parks have off lead areas, and that dogs are so welcomed in merri-bek! Such a refreshing change coming from Sydney. Keep up the good work! (survey)

Dog parks are great but more clarity and supervision regarding regulations is potentially needed. Lots of dogs off-lead in areas where dogs are banned, especially those which are poorly trained/aggressive and tackling bikes, running over picnics and generally causing a lot of fuss, somewhat spoiling the natural serenity. (survey)

Many dog owners believe their dog is friendly, and so, don't mind if they are running about children who are at a park/playground. Often this causes great distress (and sometimes lasting fear of dogs). Greater signage to keep dogs on lead or away from playground space would be appreciated! (survey)

I love dogs but I feel strongly about dogs not being allowed on the pitch at merri bek. The creek is a wonderful open space for dog owners and their dogs just metres away. Our children cannot play soccer and train on the creek. The upgrade to the drainage and grass a few years ago was so inadequate that the ground gets water logged often and hundreds of kids are left with no ground to train on, games often forfeited on the weekend. Some weeks, it us as though we don't have a home ground. The dogs dig up the ground and make ditches making it very prone to rolled ankles and other injuries if which we've had plenty. (survey)

If you only do one thing, please gazette the area behind the wetland near Edgars Creek a dog off leash area. This is the perfect area for off lead walking. It is only ever used by dog walkers and it has all the features that make it appropriate: enough space for social dogs and owners and those who need more space around them, line of sight, not too isolated, near houses and people. This is the only area in Coburg I feel that I and my dog are safe at the same time. Most of the dog walkers I meet are women. (survey)

Yes the dog owners allow their dogs to constantly dig up the football pitch [...] and do nothing about it. Which makes the pitch dangerous and causes more injuries. (survey)

A range of feedback regarding dogs and off lead dog areas was provided throughout the other consultation activities.

When asked in **pop-ups and reference group meetings** how open spaces can be improved over the next 10 years, there were suggestions of:

- More bins.
- Fixing the surface of the enclosed dog area at Gilpin Park (grass with paved areas near seats).
- Enclosing other grassed areas for off-lead.
- Separating pedestrian and cycling paths to reduce risk of collision between cyclists and dogs.

Email submissions also provided recommendations for dog facilities:

- Fenced off-lead dog park between Golf Road and Ronald Street Bridge in Coburg North. Promotes social cohesion, reduces isolation, encourages responsible ownership. There is no fenced off-lead area in Coburg North, East of Sydney Rd (9 emails).
- Allow dogs off-lead on the western side of the creek between Golf Rd, Conga Foods building, Kodak bridge and the Merri Creek confluence. Fence off the bike path and wetland.
- Fenced dog park on the grassed area between the Soudan street East and West roads in the block of unused land up from the playground, Coburg.

- Provide lighting on the west side of Cole Reserve in Pascoe Vale, connecting from the street lighting in Alpine Grove to the corner of Penzance and Valerie Streets, to operate daily from dusk, and to switch off at 10 pm, enabling local residents to walk their dogs at night-time in safety in Cole Reserve. Also provide a water tap and bowl for dogs, poo bag dispenser, fence with gates on Alpine Grove and Valerie Street, seating, shade (away from children's playground) and improve drainage (SW floods in winter).
- Separating dogs on their own isn't a great universal solution although they have their place. They can be very intense for humans and dogs and without enough space for dogs to self-select who to engage with - a big space like Campbell Reserve, Coburg is ideal as it is spacious and a lot of dogs can enjoy their time there.
- Cole Reserve, Pascoe Vale. It is good that dog owners meet up in this place to socialise, however there is a large amount of uncollected dog poo due to owners not paying attention to their dogs. Issue is adjacent to Alpine Street, Pascoe Vale on the South/West side of Cole Reserve behind the second football ground. Need signs about responsibilities, poo bags and patrols.

The issue of uncollected dog poo was raised in the focus group with **people with a disability and their carers**. This can cause a particular issue for those in wheelchairs.

To **recap**, within the initial sections of the survey (reported in sections 3-5 of this report), key insights relating to dogs were:

- Exercising dogs was mentioned by 32% as a reason why they use open space in Merri-bek.
- 25% of survey respondents said they use/value dog parks with agility equipment and fenced areas for small dogs and large dogs.
- Dogs was one of the most common reasons put forth as preventing use of public space (13% of those who mentioned a barrier), specifically due to dog owners not following rules (not on-lead, not collecting poo), too many dogs in the parks and dogs in children's playgrounds. In the same question, 7% mentioned a dog-related barrier specific to the need for more infrastructure for dog walkers (more and fenced off-leash areas).
- In the engagement activities dogs was one of the most common concerns raised, specific to issues with unleashed dogs, uncollected dog poo, and being scared of dogs.
- When asked to put forth ideas for improvement, 6% of survey respondents and 2% of engagement participants put forth a comment relating to the need for more spaces for dogs, whilst 4% of survey respondents and 1% of engagement participants mentioned something relating to the need to improve enforcement of dog rules (no dogs in playgrounds, picking up dog poo).
- When asked to write in facilities that are missing in Merri-bek open space, 9% commented that there is a need for more dog parks.



6.3 Formal sport

It should be noted that while 39% of **survey respondents** said they 'participate' in formal sport, it may be that some may participate as a non-player. In the first survey question 31% indicated they play team/club based sport.

When asked what sport(s) they participate in, the most common was soccer, which is notably more popular amongst the men surveyed. More women selected 'other, which included lacrosse and touch football, as well as things that are not typically considered formal sport: golf, running, horse riding, and yoga.

The most common formal sports fields / facilities used by survey respondents were:

- Campbell Reserve, Coburg (12 mentions).
- Moreland City Football Club (7 mentions).
- Clifton Park, Brunswick (6 mentions).
- Raeburn Reserve, Pascoe Vale (6 mentions).
- Oak Park Reserve, Oak Park (5 mentions).
- Coburg Leisure Centre (4 mentions).
- East Coburg Tennis Club (4 mentions).

More than half of those who participate in formal sport said they were dissatisfied with the facilities provided. The main issues were:

- Drainage (13 mentions, particularly for Campbell Reserve).
- Lack of maintenance (13 mentions, particularly the cricket nets at Raeburn Reserve and ageing facilities at Moreland City Football Club).

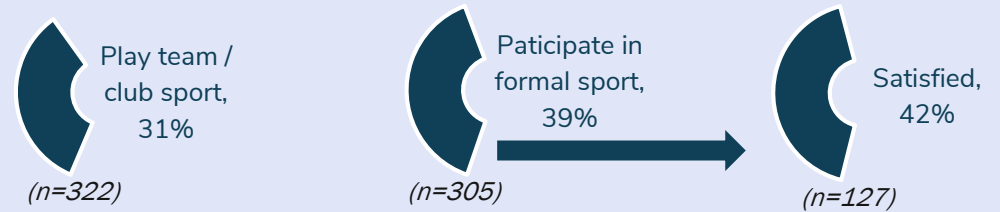
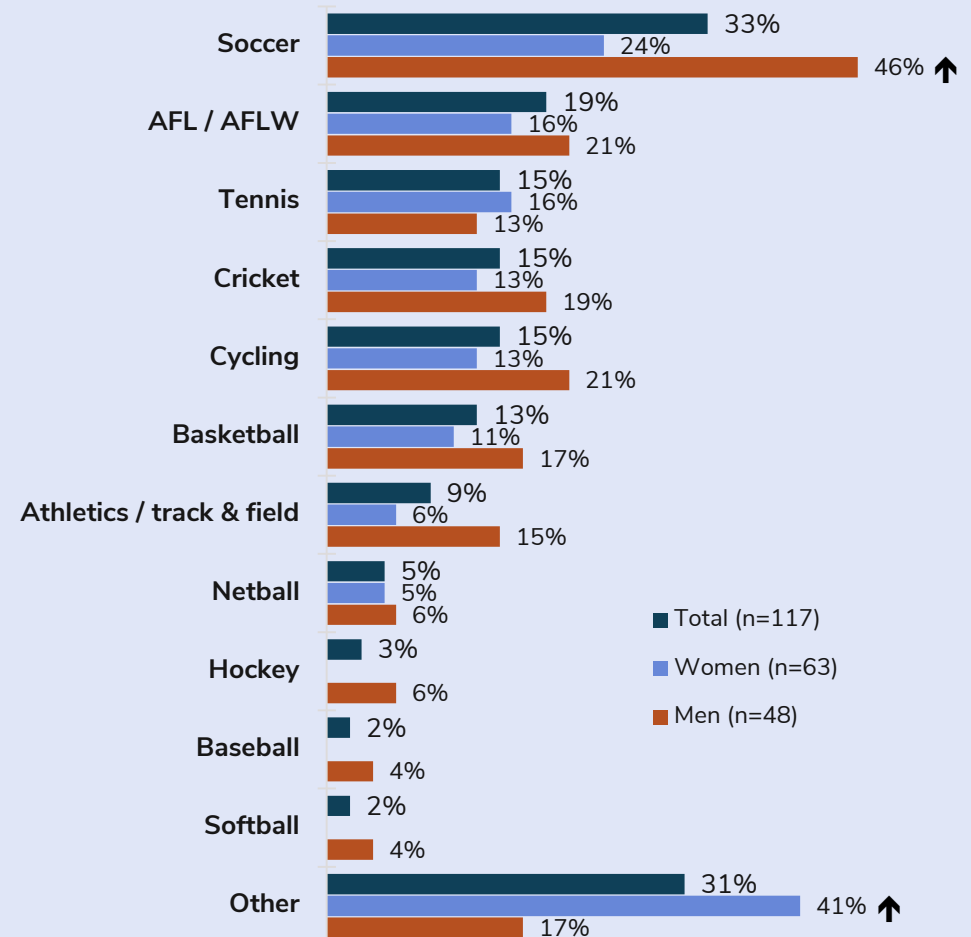


Figure 11 Sports participated in



- Lighting (10 mentions, across a variety of locations including Campbell Reserve, Raeburn Reserve, Moreland City Football Club and Oak Park).
- Dog damage / poos (5 mentions, mostly at Campbell Reserve and Clifton Park).

A mapping tool was provided on the **consultation page** where the community could provide feedback on formal and informal sports facilities at locations across Merri-bek. Three people provided comments relating to formal sport:

- Moreland City Football Club games being cancelled due to the pitch.
- Gillon Oval, Brunswick – Cricket nets not used, suggestion that they be removed and turned into green space.
- Fawkner Netball Club – need facility upgrades (lighting, club rooms, court maintenance).

Email submissions also provided additional feedback regarding formal sports areas:

Sports involvement isn't the only healthy use of open space for children. *"Informal use, community use, and young people owning the space are equally important for getting kids active"*. Increasing formal use causes damage to the grounds, leading to thinking astroturf is the only answer. There are studies about astroturf revealing environmental impacts, heat issues, nasty skin infections from grazes etc.

To **recap**, within the initial sections of the survey (reported in sections 3-5 of this report), key insights relating to formal sport were:

- Playing team / club based sport was mentioned by over a quarter as a reason why they use open space in Merri-bek (34% of survey respondents and 25% of engagement activity participants).
- 32% of survey respondents said they use/value specific sport facilities, such as soccer and football pitches, hockey fields, etc.
- In the question asking what is preventing use of public space, 10% of comments raised a concern about formal sports clubs dominating open space.

When asked to put forth ideas for improvement, 6% of survey respondents and 1% of engagement participants suggested there needed to be better management of shared use facilities (sport and dog walking).

6.4 Informal sport

Just over a third (34%) of **survey respondents** said they participate in informal sport, the most common being running, cycling and walking.

When asked which open space they use for these activities, the most commonly mentioned were:

- Merri Creek (19 mentions).
- “Parks” or “Creeks” (no further information, 13 mentions).
- Coburg Lake (10 mentions).
- Campbell Reserve, Coburg (4 mentions).
- Hosken Reserve, Coburg North (3 mentions).

Most indicated they were satisfied with the informal recreation space provided (58%). The main reasons for dissatisfaction were:

- More facilities needed (9 mentions, such as free tennis courts, goals, half court).
- Poor ground condition (6 mentions, particularly Campbell Reserve).
- Too busy / crowded (4 mentions).

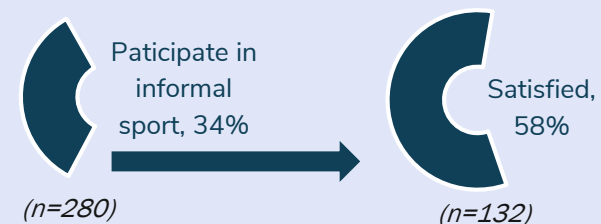
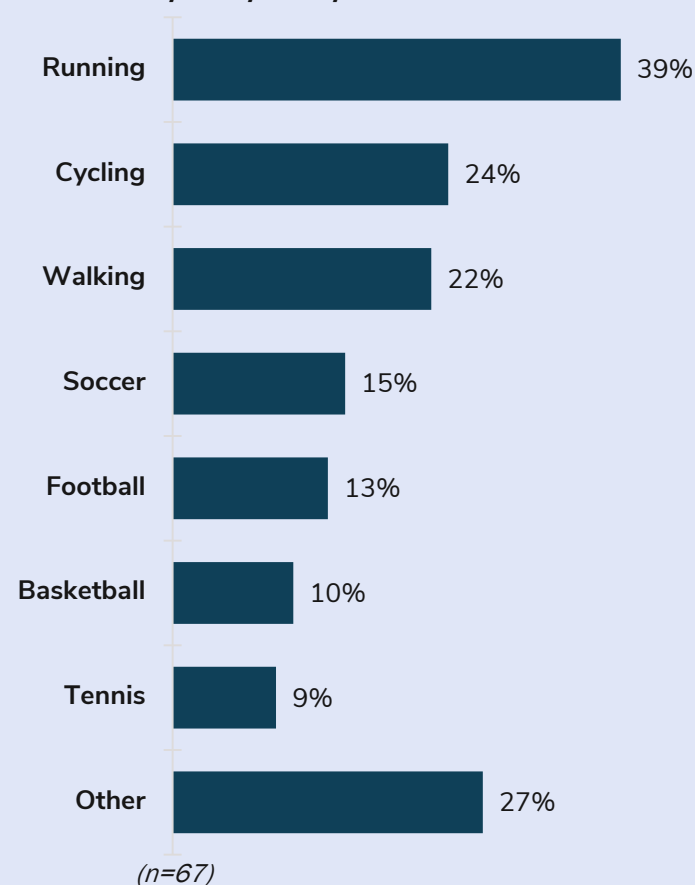


Figure 12 Informal sports participated in



A mapping tool was provided on the **consultation page** where the community could provide feedback on formal and informal sports facilities at locations across Merri-bek. Three people provided comments relating to informal sport, at four locations.

1. Fawkner– Indoor sports centre near the Fawkner Primary School that caters for sports liked by Muslim women (table tennis, badminton). It was suggested the mums walk their kids to school here so it would give them a social space to connect.
2. Jones Park, Brunswick East – Free tennis courts (other Council areas have free courts, not in Merri-bek).
3. Allard Park, Brunswick East – Exercise facilities need to be updated.
4. Railway Parade, Pascoe Vale – Connect up shared bike / pedestrian paths with safe crossings to make it safer for children.

Email submissions also provided recommendations for informal sports:

Improve safety of paths for pedestrians and cyclists by having separate paths for cyclist and pedestrians and installing fencing. For instance, the path on the western side of Merri creek between Golf Rd, Conga Foods building and Kodak bridge (Coburg North).

To **recap**, within the initial sections of the survey (reported in sections 3-5 of this report), key insights relating to informal sport were:

- Fitness was one of the top reasons why people use open space in Merri-bek (66% of survey respondents and 49% of engagement activity participants), and a third use open space for playing casual ball games / activities (34% of survey respondents and 31% of engagement activity participants).
- 53% of survey respondents said they use/value open space facilities as an informal recreation area such as running routes and linear corridors, and 37% said they use/value open space facilities for outdoor fitness equipment.
- When asked to put forth ideas for improvement, 11% of survey respondents and 7% of engagement participants said more sports structures, specifically public exercise / gym equipment (suitable for older adults), basketball rings, table tennis tables and cricket nets.
- When asked to write in facilities that are missing in Merri-bek open space, 6% mentioned bike paths.



Off lead dogs in non off lead areas, crowded and shared use trails along Merri Creek make mountain biking dangerous (particularly for kids when there are off lead dogs). (survey)

Soccer clubs at Campbell reserve and Hosken reserve have tried to monopolize these grounds at the expense of the majority of other community members. (survey)

The shared trails we have are always so crowded, it's hard to get a relaxing bike ride. (survey)

We can't always use this space when the after school program is on. Sometimes it's very busy there being the only full court locally. (survey)

The exercise apparatuses around this park need to be improved and expanded. Please include something to do pullups on. Please renovate/recalibrate the other things (the sit-up bench is too steep and the space for you feet is way too wide, the jump platform is too high and the ground beneath it uneven, the shoulder exercise thing is loose/broken). (conversations Merri-bek website)

Not enough parks in Merri-bek, parks get crowded on weekends and it makes it hard to run along the path. (survey)

I think a tennis court could be placed in Brunswick east. (survey)

6.5 Environment

Through the engagements a number of ideas and suggestions were made for protecting and enhancing the environment within open spaces over the next 10 years. 61 comments in the **online survey** were specific to the environment and protecting habitats.

The key overarching themes were:

- Plant more trees.
- Plant more native and indigenous plants to encourage biodiversity.
- Create and protect wildlife corridors.
- More nature play in playgrounds (including water play).

A mapping tool on the **consultation page** was used by 3 people, providing 5 points of interest relating to biodiversity and nature:

- 51 Albert St (Fleming Park, Brunswick East) identified as an ideal area for untamed bushier landscape to allow children to explore (Darebin Parklands given as an example).
- Kelvin Thomson Reserve in Pascoe Vale South identified as an area that could be transformed into a marsh area (as it floods in winter) with bridges and opportunities for nature play. It was also suggested that the drier area be transformed into water play.
- Another area identified as potential for water play was along Edgars Creek, north of Jackson Reserve in Coburg North.

- There was a query as to why the park at the end of Meadow St, Coburg was not showing up on the map as green space as it was recognised as a good space for play and exploration.
- The stepping stone creek crossings at the end of The Grove in Coburg was identified as a good activity for children.

In the **written submission** by Friends of Merri Creek, there were concerns raised about a range of environmental aspects of open spaces around the creeks, specifically weed infestations, low habitat value, poor water quality, and stretches not meeting the Merri-bek Planning Scheme (minimum 50m corridor on each side of the creek, with a 30m vegetation buffer).

A **submission** by a member of the general public expanded on these concerns about the environmental aspects of open space, putting forth the following suggestions:

- Need more canopy trees (Deciduous for denser shade, as well as native), natural habitat and shade to provide resilience in the face of climate change.
- Reduce exotic grassland (requires too much water) and replace with mix of habitat areas.
- Design for reduced water use.
- Review planning to ensure it protects the environment.

Little pied cormorant CERES
pond by Peter Mollison.



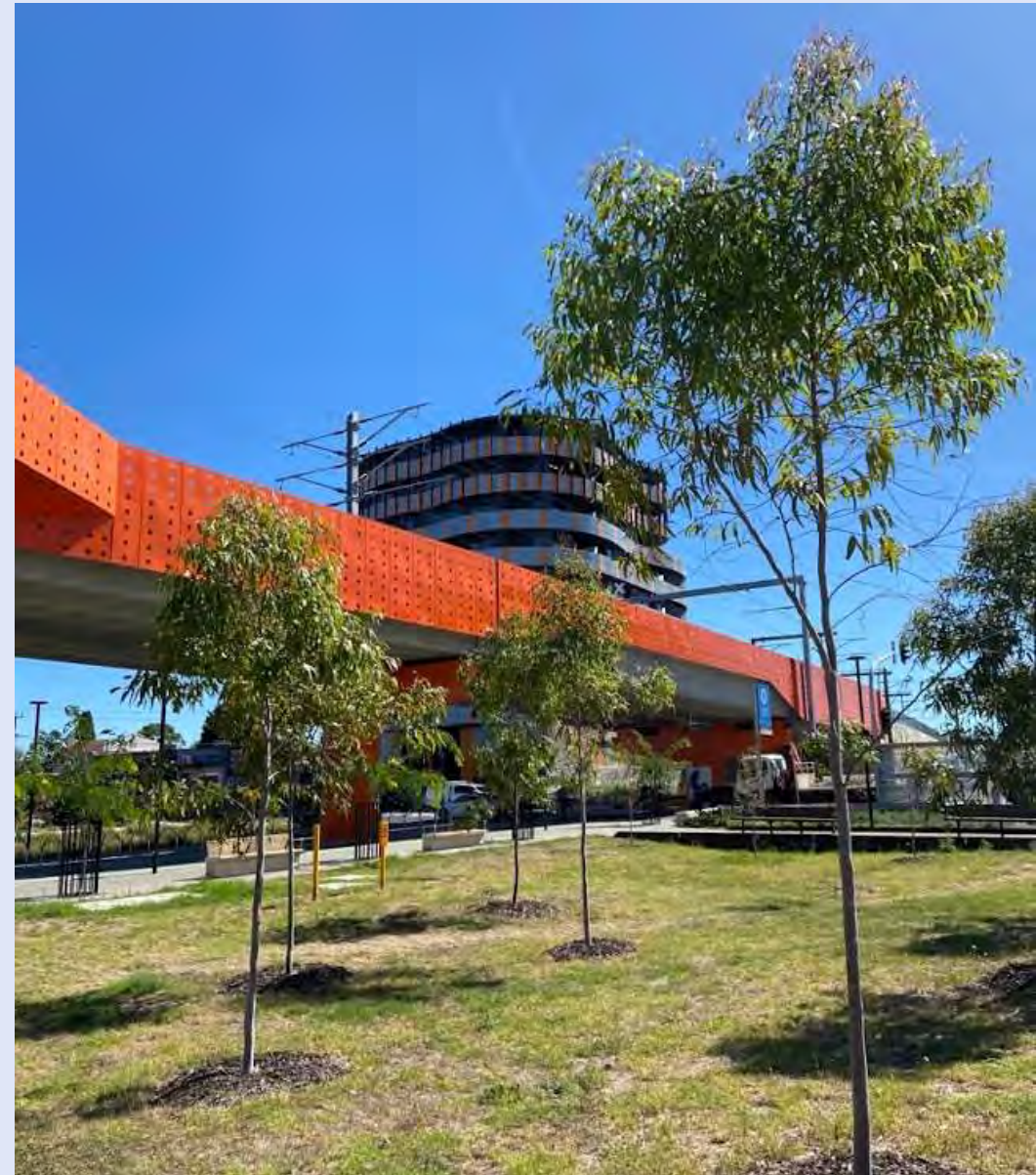
*I also think we should have nets over major drains running into Edgars and Merri Creeks to catch all the plastic rubbish that flows into the area after heavy rain. Council should be responsible for collecting this rubbish.
(conversations Merri-bek website)*

*There are some beautiful walks in Merri-bek where you can hear birds and sometimes surprise small animals - would love to have more of these.
(conversations Merri-bek website)*

*I also appreciate the bird life & would like to see areas like Kelvin Thompson Reserve that has an abundance of bird life that rotate through the year receive more attention & thought as for a Reserve of its size, with plenty of no restricted parking more can be done for this Reserve which is a strong feeling by all who frequent it in the area. An update to this area was done 5 years ago but it is still lacking compared to other parks in the area that I drive to for facilities such as BBQ areas, toilets & walking paths.
(conversations Merri-bek website)*

To **recap**, within the initial sections of the survey (reported in sections 3-5 of this report), key insights relating to the environment were:

- Almost all (86%) of survey participants said they linked an element of the natural environment in open space in Merri-bek, specifically trees (70%), creeks and water (66%) and habitat for plants and animals (59%).
- Landscape maintenance (primarily grass and pitches) was one of the most common reasons put forth as preventing use of public space (13% of those who mentioned a barrier).
- Through the engagement activities there were concerns raised about maintaining habitat value (tree/shrub maintenance, weeds and poor water quality), conflicting uses resulting in threats to wildlife and lack of tree canopy cover.
- When asked to put forth ideas for improvement, the most prominent theme was the environment (24% of survey respondents and 14% of engagement participants), specific to the need for more native planting, improving biodiversity, more trees, community (food) gardens and upgrading sports pitch surfaces.



7 Key segment considerations

Note: given the survey distribution wasn't representative (see notes on analysis section for further detail), when referring to survey results this is providing a profile of those who answered the survey, not the broader Merri-bek or nearby population.

7.1 People with a Disability

There were 43 responses in the community survey from people with a disability or carers of those with a disability (13%). Survey results showed some unique traits amongst this segment:

- 77% like that open space can be used to meet up with people (compared to 60% others).
- 61% would like to see accessible equipment included in playgrounds (compared to 44% others).

Discussions with people with a disability emphasised that the objective of the Open Space Strategy should be to ensure that open space is for everyone - including people with a disability.

Other things to consider for people with a disability:

- There is limited public transport access to open space. This means they have to rely on having a support worker who can drive them (difficult due to limited trips on NDIS).
- Navigational support for blind people.
- Topography (e.g. CERES difficult).
- Resting spots with seating and shade.
- 'Continuous path of travel' principle required.
- Make playgrounds more sensory comforting / less overloading for neurodiverse children (e.g. safe spaces).

- Bulleke-bek park in Brunswick was given as an example of good design.

Key stakeholders suggest that Council undertake an audit of disability access to open space (playgrounds, paths within, access to parks, public transport access etc.).

Key locations identified with accessibility issues can be found in the 'Locations' section of this report.

The focus group with people with a disability and their carers provided some useful insights for designing open space for people with a disability:

- The way spaces are currently used by people with disabilities is not reflective of the way they would like to use them. i.e. They would use them differently if access was improved.
- There is a need for hard surface paths around the perimeter of facilities, and extended hard standings underneath equipment such as barbeques and drinking fountains.

7.2 CALD community

There were 177 respondents in the survey classified as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD, 55%, born overseas, or speak a language other than English). In the survey findings, unique traits for this segment of the sample included:

- 44% said they use open space for cultural activities and events (compared to 24% non-CALD).
- 60% use open space as a place for children to play (compared to 36% non-CALD) and 56% use/value playgrounds (compared to 42% non-CALD). This is due to this segment of the sample showing a higher instance of having children (68%, compared to 54% non-CALD).
- 49% said they enjoy the water at Coburg Lake (compared to 25% non-CALD).
- 49% said they enjoy the flowers and garden beds (compared to 35% non-CALD).
- Fewer experience barriers to use of open space (38%, compared to 54% non-CALD).
- 14% travel 3km+ to access open space (compared to 4% non-CALD), and perhaps consequently they more often drive to reach open space (43%, compared to 31% non-CALD).
- High instance of use of outdoor fitness equipment (45%, compared to 27% non-CALD) and playgrounds (56%, compared to 42% non-CALD).

- Relatively few CALD respondents said they use open space to *exercise dogs* (20%, compared to 47% non-CALD), as only 21% of the CALD sample said they have a dog (compared to 50% non-CALD).
- 37% of CALD respondents with children want more seating at playgrounds (compared to 2% non-CALD).

Some ideas put forth for activities in open space for the multicultural community were:

- Group fitness.
- Women only classes.
- Walking groups.
- Events with different cultures together.

Given the religious diversity of the area, there were some calling for more appropriate toilet facilities to meet their needs, with bidets and foot and hand cleaning facilities. There was also a call for prayer rooms.

Those from culturally diverse backgrounds may also benefit from women's-only safe spaces, and some report fear of being in places with dogs.

7.3 Women and girls

The survey received 189 responses from people who identify as a woman or girl (58%). This segment of the data showed a range of characteristics:

- Higher instance of using open space to *meet up with people* (69%, compared to 51% men) and *getting out of the house into fresh air* (71%, compared to 55% men).
- Higher instance of wanting *more seating* in playgrounds (27%, compared to 16% men).

Engagement activities revealed safety is a key issue for women and girls, especially when using open space at night (need more lighting).

Engagement with young people found that the infrastructure typically installed in open space for teenagers (e.g. skate parks) is not always of interest to girls.

Have open space that is able to provide a different type of activity and opportunity for girls (8-16) in open space to make them feel like they are able to use the space and not be pushed out by younger kids or teenage boys.

An email submission provided some ideas to improve safety for women and girls:

- Personal alarms to hire out to women who felt unsafe jogging along the Merri Creek.
- Woman's-only (including trans) survey to find out when they jog along the Merri Creek, and then from the results organise group runs based on the most popular times.
- Female self-defence and bystander training.

7.4 Young people

In the survey there were 58 respondents under the age of 35 years (18%). Notable differences in the survey results for this segment were:

- 43% said open space means they can *live without a back yard* (compared to 17% 60+ year olds).
- 19% travel to their local open space by public transport (compared to 6% or less for other age groups).
- 88% said nothing prevents them from accessing open space facilities (compared to 67% 40-59 year olds).
- More often play netball (20%, compared to 6% or less for other age groups).
- 41% participate in informal sport (compared to 15% 35-49 year olds).
- 24% identify as LGBTIQ+ (compared to 9% 60+ year olds).

Young people were also engaged through a focus group and discussions with school students. The main findings specific to young people were:

- They visit parks close to home.
- The main reasons for visiting open space are to relax in open space, dog walking, swimming, riding a bike, and spending time with friends.
- Young people are prevented from visiting open space by antisocial behaviour (smoking, drugs, “creeps”).
- They want more spaces suitable to their varying age ranges, more trees and biodiversity / nature play, to feel safe (more lighting), gender neutral bathrooms, events, more bins, skate parks, more seats at skate parks, and teenage activities of interest to girls.

7.5 Older adults

In the survey there were 47 respondents aged 60 years or over (15%), showing the following traits:

- Less often play team sports (13%, compared to 46% 40-59 year olds).
- Seldom catch public transport to open space (2%, compared to 19% Under 35 year olds).

Through the engagement activities, findings suggest older adults want the following within open space in Merri-bek:

- More people of all ages using the parks (makes them feel safer).

- Seating with back on it, under shelter.
- Suitable public exercise equipment.

7.6 LGBTIQ+

There were 33 respondents in the survey who identified as LGBTIQ+ (11%). Cross-analysis of the survey data shows the following notable findings for this segment of the data:

- Less often drive to get to open space (18%, compared to 40% non-LGBTIQ+), instead opting for walking or cycling.
- High instance of using dog parks (41%, compared to 24% non-LGBTIQ+) and informal recreation areas (74%, compared to 51% non-LGBTIQ+).
- Lower instance of participating in formal sport (18%, compared to 36% non-LGBTIQ+).
- High instance of living in Brunswick West (41%, compared to 41% non-LGBTIQ+).

Through engagement activities with LGBTIQ+ people the following open space needs and wants were identified:

- Safe spaces – space to be expressive (inclusivity for all), and protest safely.
- Better lighting to improve safety.
- Multi-use spaces such as arts and culture events and informal sports – more people using the space increases safety.
- Diversity and inclusion signage.

7.7 First Nations

The survey data cannot be analysed by First Nations' respondents due to the low sample size (to protect anonymity).

To date, the consultation has engaged with The Merri-bek First Nations Advisory Committee; Elders from the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation; and First Nations persons in the Merri-bek community.

Through Council meetings with First Nations groups, the key considerations for the Open Space Strategy are:

- Continue programs that enhance the natural values of waterways;
- Recognise that collective waterways expanding into neighbouring Council areas are living entities;
- Ensure the strategy talks to the upcoming Treaty;
- Celebrate Indigenous and First Nations culture;
- Show open space visitors that they are standing on Country and communicate pride of First Nations peoples through festivals, signage and artwork, sculptures, story-telling, yarnning circles, indigenous plants and promoting history;
- Promote stewardship through engaging with children and including indigenous cultural elements in playgrounds;
- Consider Wurundjeri seasons when planning maintenance and indigenous planting;
- Consider Narrap team funding; and
- Continue using Wurundjeri namings for open spaces.

There were further suggestions made by other community members specific to First Nations' contribution to open space planning, notably:

- Include signage in places of significance to celebrate First Nations' history in the area (self-guided walks).
- Plant areas of indigenous and native edible plants that were used by First Nations' people.
- Protect areas of significance to First Nations' people.
- Cultural markets that acknowledge areas of significant of First Nations' history.
- Example of how to design with respect to Country - <https://www.terracottem.com/en/news/urban-rooftop-Brisbane>.
- Codesign all decisions with First Nations' people and Elders.

Council is undertaking ongoing discussions with key First Nations groups to ensure comprehensive consultation throughout the strategy development process.

7.8 Businesses

Of the 4 businesses who completed the survey, the main findings were:

- Respondents mostly use open space frequently (at least once a week), and can access open space within 1km of work. Most walk or cycle to access the open space.
- Open space is used as a break from work, to get out of the workplace into fresh air, to eat breakfast / lunch / dinner, as a place to relax and unwind, for exercise, for its natural elements (trees, creek, bushland), and for work functions / classes.
- Things stopping use were work commitments and the weather.
- Suggestions for improvements were sheltered areas (for when it is raining) and more tables.



8. Locations

Throughout the consultation a range of issues / suggestions specific to particular locations were raised. Some of the more common issues / suggestions have been outlined in this section.

Location	Issue / suggestion
Campbell Reserve, Coburg (Moreland City Soccer Club)	Poor drainage resulting in sports games having to be cancelled as the pitch is not safe to play on. Some suggest synthetic turf as a solution, however there were also concerns raised about the environmental impact of synthetic (e.g. microplastics).
Fawkner (suburb)	Not enough open space. It was suggested that a community space suitable for those from CALD backgrounds (with dedicated women's space) be developed.
Gilpin Park, Brunswick	Surface in off-lead dog park damaged (dust/mud bowl).
Cole Reserve, Pascoe Vale	Lighting for the dog park, as well as facilities for dog walkers (water, shade, seating, fence, poo bags), signs about responsibilities and patrols to enforce effective control and collecting poo.
Raeburn Reserve, Pascoe Vale	Lighting needs to be repaired and infrastructure needs upgrading (Cricket nets).
Oak Park Reserve, Oak Park	Improved lighting.
Randazzo Park, Brunswick	Need a fence

Location	Issue / suggestion
Hosken Reserve, Coburg North	It is felt that this should be more available for the general public (often unavailable due to perceived excessive soccer club use).
Soudan St playground, Coburg	Request for a shade sail.
Golf Road and Ronald Street Bridge, Coburg North	Calls for this space to be designated a dog off-leash area (and perhaps fenced).
Jones Park, Brunswick East	Not enough tree canopy – replace grass with more shade and natural plantings.
Disability access issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brunswick Community Garden not accessible. • Merri Creek – too steep / cambered. • CERES. • Moonee Ponds Creek, too steep and shared paths with cyclists. • Bridget Shortell @ the Hub playground – the path isn't even – tripping hazard. • Coburg Lake not accessible. • Harmony Park not accessible.

Appendices

A1. Consultation events run by Council

Date	Location	Attendees	Number*
31 May 2023	Glenroy Community Hub	CALD workshop	23
8 May 2023	Fawkner Neighbourhood House	CALD workshop	16
30 April 2023	Glenroy music festival	Pop-up – general public	~80
4 April 2023	Harmony Park, Coburg	Pop-up – general public	~30
13 May 2023	Gowanbrae	Pop-up – general public	~20
18 May 2023	Barkly Square shopping centre	Pop-up – general public	~35
27 May 2023	Fleming Park, Brunswick East	Pop-up – general public	~60
3 June 2023	Bonwick Street shopping centre	Pop-up – general public	~15
9 May 2023	Online	First Nations Advisory Committee	7

15 May 2023	Coburg Town Hall	Merri-bek Age-friendly disability group	7
15 May 2023	Council offices	Merri-bek Age Friendly Reference Group	8
17 May 2023	Online	Chain of Ponds Program	1
23 May 2023	Mercy College	Mercy College year 8 & 9 students	~100
30 May 2023	2 Lee Street, Brunswick East	Friends of Merri Creek + Merri Creek Management Committee	4
1 June 2023	Council offices	LGBTQIA+ Reference Group	4
1 June 2023	Council offices	Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee	15
13 June 2023	Council offices	Disability Reference Group	5
31 May 2023	Council offices	Children's Reference Group	14
30 June 2023	Online	Growing Farmers & Fawkner Food Bowls	2

A2. Deep Dive Workshop methodology

Recruitment

To ensure a good cross section of the community participated in the workshops, it was recommended to undertake an expression of interest (EOI) process to recruit for the four 'deep dive' workshops. This was to enable Council to select participants for each workshop to ensure there were a participants from a range of diverse groups such dog owners, cyclists, sporting clubs, walkers, parents, runners, personal trainers, non-users of open space, "Friends of" Groups, as well as people of different ages and backgrounds.

Council promoted these workshops via the Conversations Merri-bek Project page, and social media, as well as by sending out invitations to a range of specific groups inviting them to participate.

- 85 people expressed their interest in attending a workshop.
- 1 person declined the offer after the first email offer.
- 17 people did not respond to any email, including two reminder emails.
- 5 people changed sessions to enable them to attend.
- 13 people cancelled their attendance after accepting a workshop.
- 16 people said they would attend a workshop and did not attend on the day.
- 40 people attended the workshops.

Details

Workshop	Attendees
Gowanbrae Community Centre, Tuesday 20 June 6-9pm	10
Harry Atkinson Art Centre, Lake Grove, Coburg North, Wednesday 21 June 11am-2pm	10
Glenroy Community Hub, Saturday 24 June 10am-1pm	6
Kirrip-Djerring Brunswick Town Hall, Sunday 25 June 1-4pm	14

Agenda

1. What are the three biggest challenges for open space in Merri-bek?
2. Background presentation.
3. What we have heard already from the community.
4. Conversation about open space users.
5. Round table discussions: Topic 1: Provision of open space in Merri-bek & Topic 2: Sharing open space in Merri-bek.
6. Self-reflection and last feedback.
7. Information about next steps in the process.

A3. Survey distribution

The online survey was hosted on the overall engagement website at Conversations Merri-bek at <https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/open-space-strategy>

This website (and survey) was promoted via:

- Hard copy flyers distributed by Council staff to people at events, as well as copies left at Council buildings (Coburg Town Hall, etc.)
- Social media (Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, targeted posts in languages other than English).
- In-person at pop-up events, deep dive workshops, advocacy group meetings.
- At the focus group workshops (persons with a disability + youths workshop)
- Hard-copy 'Inside Merri-bek' newsletter which goes to every household in Council in hard copy in the post / letterbox - <https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/my-council/news-and-publications/inside-merri-bek-newsletter/> in the Autumn 2023 edition (page 5).
- 'My Merri-bek' e-newsletter 11th May ('opt in' email newsletter newsletter).
- Conversations Merri-bek page email list (those registered as interested in the topic).

- Through the Community Connector program – Community Volunteers distribute the survey and website to their social networks.
- Signs throughout Council: (The QR codes linked to the main website and also had a 2nd QR code linking to various languages).
- Hard copy surveys in languages other than English distributed at pop-up events (later translated to English).

Given distribution of the survey occurred at events where views were collected through other means (discussion notes etc.), it is possible that some survey respondents were sharing information that they had also shared through pop-ups, workshops or meetings (double-up).



A4. Survey data analysis techniques

Statistical significance testing

Results have been tested for statistical significance using the Bonferroni method at 95% confidence level. Where a statistically significant variation has been identified in the analysis, this has either been included in a written comment or demonstrated in charts and tables with arrows denoting a higher than average result (↑) or lower than average result (↓). To ensure relevance and usefulness of this report, cross analysis of variables which do not yield any statistically significant insights have not been included in the written analysis.

All findings have had significance testing conducted based on:

- Gender.
- Age.
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (born overseas and/or speak a language other than English).
- Disability (Person with a disability or carer of a person with a disability).
- LGBTIQ+ (identify as LGBTIQ+ and/or non-binary gender).
- Location.

Thematic analysis

For the questions collecting a written answer, responses have been grouped into meaningful themes to assist with analysis. Where relevant, individual comments have been assigned to multiple themes. An excel document with this thematic analysis has been provided in a separate document and allows for filtering of comments by themes.

A5. Survey respondent profile

	Variable	N=	% sample	2021 Census %
Gender	Woman / female	189	60%	51%
	Man / male	109	35%	49%
	Non-binary / different term	6	2%	-
	No answer	9	3%	-
Age	Under 18	2	1%	18%
	18-24	9	3%	9%
	25-34	47	15%	22%
	35-39	48	15%	9%
	40-59	158	51%	24%
	60-69	33	11%	8%
	70-84	14	5%	7%
	85+	0	0%	3%
Diversity	LGBTIQA+	33	11%	-
	Person with a disability	15	5%	6.5%
	Carer for person with a disability	29	9%	13%
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1	0%	1.7%
	Language other than English	143	44%	35%
	Born overseas	143	46%	33%

	Variable	N=	% sample	2021 Census %
Suburb	Brunswick	48	16%	15%
	Brunswick East	28	9%	8%
	Brunswick West	10	3%	9%
	Coburg	50	17%	16%
	Coburg North	27	9%	5%
	Fawkner	35	12%	8%
	Fitzroy North	4	1%	1%
	Glenroy	44	15%	14%
	Gowanbrae	0	0%	2%
	Hadfield	5	2%	4%
	Oak Park	7	2%	4%
	Pascoe Vale	27	9%	11%
	Pascoe Vale South	13	4%	6%
	Tullamarine	2	1%	0%

A6. Survey data cleaning

The following variables were generated to enhance analysis of the survey findings.

Crosstab banners	Variable	Includes
Gender	Women	Woman / female
	Men	Man / male
Age	Under 35	Under 18
		18-24
		25-34
	35-39	35-39
	40-59	40-59
	60+	60-69
		70-84
		85+
CALD	CALD	Language other than English
		Born overseas
Disability	PWD / carer of PWD	Person with a disability
		Carer of person with a disability

	Variable	Includes
Ward / region	North-West	Glenroy
		Gowanbrae
		Hadfield
		Oak Park
		Pascoe Vale
		Pascoe Vale South
	North-East	Fawkner
		Coburg North
		Coburg
	South	Brunswick
		Brunswick East
		Brunswick West

NET of things liked about open space in Merri-bek

Variable	Includes
Ambience & health	Gets me out of the house
	Just being outside
	Place to meet up with people
	Place to relax and unwind
	The quiet
Environment	Enjoy creeks / water
	Enjoy water at Coburg Lake
	Flowers / garden beds
	Habitat for native plants & animals
	Natural bushland character
	Trees
Urban planning	Can live without a back yard
	Escape built environment
	Knowing it is there
	That it is accessible
	The feeling of space
Culture & Heritage	Cultural heritage
	Historical character

Data cleaning

The online survey form did not have appropriate skips and branching applied, leading to some people answering questions that weren't relevant to them. As a result, the following data cleaning stages were implemented.

- Made sure "Do you participate in formal sport?" was "Yes" if the respondent chose one of the formal sports in the follow-up question.
- Removed the "No" comments from "Are you satisfied with the facilities provided? (formal sport)" question if they said they don't participate and didn't specify any facility.
- Removed the "No" answer for "Do you take your dog to an off-leash park/area" if they said they don't have a dog.