



Wyndham Play Space Strategy

Discussion Paper



ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document provides a discussion on some of the topics that have arisen following the analysis of demand and supply for play in public open space in Wyndham.

A comprehensive assessment of the supply of play equipment areas and other potential play spaces has been conducted, by planning precinct, and a number of maps have been prepared.

This paper presents some key directions on a selection of issues as a precursor to the development of the strategy and key actions. Following feedback on this paper, a vision, principles and draft strategy will be prepared that will guide policy and a future capital works program.

Appendix 1. provides the definitions of terms used in this document.

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- Susan Staines (Former Coordinator of Landscape and Urban Design)
- Members of the project control groups (PCG)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The project

City of Wyndham is preparing a Wyndham Play Space Strategy to provide strategic direction for Play Space developments, and programming of capital works to 2029 with a view to 2045, in line with the Wyndham Open Space Strategy.

This Play Space Strategy will create a clear vision and principles, consider changing demographics, quality, activity levels, and place making, age appropriateness, diversity of play provisions and accessibility.

The strategy will promote the importance of play and access to local play spaces and deliver an enhanced environment for outdoor play.

This discussion paper follows:

- A review of background information, policies and plans
- Preparation of an outline about “what is play”
- Community consultation and an assessment of demand and demographic influences
- Assessment of all open spaces with play equipment, and those with potential for play.
- Preparation of a demand and locality analysis document.

A series of maps have also been prepared to analyse the distribution, accessibility, age appropriateness and play value of existing spaces.

Terminology

This report concerns **play spaces**: public open spaces with purpose-built **play elements** that include natural elements and/or play equipment (desirable both), in addition to other landscape features, paths and open areas for kick and throw activities, and furniture such as seats and tables. Play elements are purpose-built elements designed and positioned to encourage play. These may be sculptural elements, paved areas, traditional play equipment and natural features designed and placed to encourage play. Nature play spaces are designed play spaces that focus on nature play and that are designed predominantly using natural features.

Appendix 1. provides more detailed definitions for terms uses in this plan.

This report does not concern play spaces provided in conjunction with community facilities such as children’s centres that are not open space or always accessible to the public.

The role and definition of a play space

Why Council provides play spaces

The value of play is widely understood as having significant value to enhance the development potential of individuals, and it is necessary for healthy and happy individuals and communities as a whole.

Council provides dedicated play spaces in open space¹ (and in community facilities) that are designed specifically to encourage children and other people to play. The reason why they need to be designed specifically for children is that for children, play is essential for developing social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills, that will aid the growth of children into happy, healthy and resilient adults.

Access to play opportunities is deemed as highly influential to child development – in the early years. Having dedicated play spaces and purpose-built play elements also legitimises play as an activity, and these spaces act as a “flagpole” for local families.

Why do we need designed spaces?

Play spaces can and should be consciously designed to create play value and aid child development, and facilitate access to essential learning and fun experiences for the whole family, as these may no longer be available to children in association with the dwelling they live or their local neighbourhood.

Play spaces seek to compensate for the opportunities for learning that are no available to children in their private space and those that were facilitated by family in previous times.

Council provides public play spaces as these provide benefits to individual users and the whole community.

A careful choice of play elements can create a diverse range of play opportunities and make it more likely that every child can find some way to participate, and all family members feel welcome and included. The inclusion of residents of all ages and abilities in play requires attention to a high level of detail and multiple options and combinations of elements that require specialist design skills.

The design and selection of play elements (See [definitions](#)) seek to facilitate specific development opportunities for children – such as fine motor skills and vestibular development, and cognitive development. The degree of challenge, learning and danger ([see](#) risk and challenge) that a child is exposed to relates to specific types of play elements provided and age appropriateness.

How play and other elements are sited in parks will have a significant impact on how well the park functions.

What is a play space?

This document assumes that if an open space does not provide **purpose-built play elements** designed specifically for children, it is not a play space. This does not imply that children don't play everywhere and that local parks cannot encourage older people to play. Most play spaces are designated areas in local parks. However, those parks that are well positioned, welcoming, attractive leafy green spaces suitable for social and physical activity for the whole family, make the best play environments and provide the greatest return on investment.

Local parks are the most important hierarchy to serve Wyndham residents play needs

Local parks are the most important in the hierarchy of open space for play because they are the parks that less mobile people will depend on for their everyday play needs; for relief from roles and surroundings at home, and for social interaction. In Wyndham, these parks can play a vital role in introducing new residents to their neighbours and their surroundings. Studies have shown that limited independent mobility is partly due the lack of familiarity with neighbours and the immediate neighbourhood. New residents born overseas have told Council they don't always know that they can use the open spaces available in their neighbourhood. For this reason, local parks and play spaces need to be welcoming, and attention should be given to planning and local park design to ensure that both configuration and design encourage use by people of all ages and abilities and cultural backgrounds, without dissuading others.

Who is the target audience for play spaces?

The provision of an equitable distribution of play spaces assumes that children are the target audience when planning such spaces, as children are more dependent on designated places available for play than adults who may be more mobile and have access to a wide range of places for recreation and entertainment that they may use for play. However, play space design seeks to involve all people including those older than 12 years (and older adults), in the play of children they are accompanying – so that the adult and child benefits, in addition to residents that will come to the space for recreation. Recreation activities are generally distinguished from play as they typically have a defined purpose or goal such as social outcomes, relaxation, contemplation, fitness or health prevention, etc. whereas play is intrinsically motivated, but can be stimulated by a conducting environment with a range of stimuli.

People of all ages and abilities and cultural backgrounds need to play, and local parks and play spaces should be designed not to exclude anyone. In fact, they should be designed to include everyone. As a baseline, all play spaces that have purpose-built play elements, should welcome people relying on mobility devices and prams for example. By providing a central social space where everyone can be, see and interact with playmates, siblings, family members or carers, and are able to engage in activity that may be table based, path based or nature based or interactive equipment based, everyone can be included in play without specialised equipment provision for example.

The strategy does not propose separate specialised facilities for people with a disability but assumes that district facilities will have higher levels of inclusiveness and wayfinding, than a local space. A regional level play space that serves the whole Council area and beyond will include play equipment and support facilities for people who have high support needs.

Relationship with the WOSS

This strategy is developed in response to the Wyndham Open Space Strategy (WOSS) that recommended a further strategy be undertaken for play spaces. This document builds on the WOSS. It adds to the hierarchy of spaces by further classifying play spaces as either local, district or regional.

The WOSS requires 1 ha of passive open space be set aside per 1000 residents. Within this are pocket parks that are <.5 ha. In town centres and medium to high-density residential areas, these have a catchment of 200m. These Urban Parks located within medium /high density development needs to be designed to withstand a much higher intensity of use. The park type particularly is a cross between a town square (social gathering spaces) and local park (provision of open area suitable for kick and throw activities). These parks are usually in addition to a local park within the catchment, which will offer the more formalised play environment. Therefore, the WOSS indicates the Urban Park type shouldn't contain a formalised play area, but an adaptable space for multiple other 'play' activities across all age groups.

Town Squares are to offer an open space respite area for visitors and workers within the town centre environment as well as offer open space to adjoining retail (café/restaurants etc).

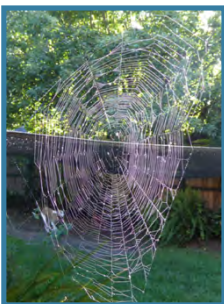
Local parks are to be .5ha- 1ha, within 400 of 95% of all residents, and district parks of 1-2.5ha are to be within 1000m of 95% of all residences.

Lifestyle influences on children – the importance of this strategy

Play and open space provision in the already established, as well as planned suburbs in growth areas, is a complex task because planning processes provide constraints on the diversity of opportunities, and availability of suitable land for play. In future, because of increasing land values, smaller private spaces, fewer trees, the increased uniformity of residential areas and the limited resources other than the land development process to provide open space for play, the design of play spaces will have more of an impact on the wellbeing of generations of children than ever before.

Local government has a key role in representing the needs of future generations of children especially in the development approval process, and the design of open spaces in the subdivision process is heavily influenced by commercial decisions. Council's attention to this issue is commended.

Many factors in contemporary society are contributing to drastic changes in children's play opportunities and behaviour, which are considered detrimental to their healthy development. Some of the most significant are the adoption of sedentary, indoor lifestyles and the restriction of children's independent mobility around their neighbourhoods.



There are many well-documented benefits that are derived from children's outdoor play, their mastery of risky situations and challenges; and from children's exposure to the natural world, as well as mental health and physical activity benefits.

Open space, woodlands, creeks and left over spaces and the trees, vegetation, structures and found objects within the neighbourhood and back yards, as well as large crown allotments once contributed to a rich tapestry of environments that children discovered for themselves. These comprised the settings for their play.

Adults now typically take children to parks for play. Parents tend to be less involved in their children's play and have less of a role in coaching and teaching children skills and activities. Play is now largely a curated experience.

Many residential subdivisions and play spaces don't leave scope for future change, manipulation by children or interventions. They are relatively uniform and lack a diversity of elements that stimulate play.

Children growing up in urban areas have less access to and attachment to nature and are therefore less likely to protect it. Access to nature has been associated in literature with the development of healthy immune systems and providing an important source of inspiration, environmental education and creative play. Urban residential areas provide limited opportunities for children to interact with nature, and there is a strong movement to bring nature back to play spaces.

Position statements

The issues and directions outlined in this document stem from the position that:

- Outdoor play is vital to the healthy development of all children
- Adults need to be attracted to open space for children to be taken outside to play
- The availability and accessibility of parks and play spaces within the residential neighbourhood has a strong impact on patterns of use
- The quality of open space needs to be rich and varied to provide the diverse settings for play that are required for healthy development
- Very small parks and play spaces are not, on their own, adequate to meet the demands of the community. These need to be supplemented by other incidental or 'wilder' areas or corridors of open space that may need to be designed in, where they do not occur naturally. Access to open-ended and natural settings is critically important to children
- All the community will benefit from well designed and equitably distributed play spaces in local parks that can include people of all ages and abilities in that play
- Provision for play is much broader than the provision of play equipment and requires attention to the design and planting of the whole of parks, especially local parks
- Many of the play activities that are beneficial to children are ideally creative, messy and noisy and this sets them at odds with property values, and the nature of many parks being provided.

2. PLANNING OF RESIDENTIAL AREAS IMPACTS ON PLAY SPACES

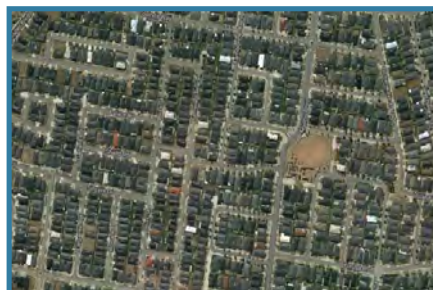
Not enough open space for everyone to play, and dependency on one park

It appears that in the current planning system there is not enough open space taken in new residential developments to provide for play as well as sports, conservation, environmental and the range of other activities and functions that provide the benefits sought by communities from open space.

The Victorian Planning provision state that: "Ensure that urban open space provides for nature conservation, recreation and play, formal and informal sport, social interaction and peace and solitude. Community sports facilities should be accommodated in a way that is not detrimental to other park activities". The WOSS indicates that based on population forecast for 2045, the quantity of active open space per 1,000 residents in the Wyndham urban area will only increase by 0.25 hectares while the quantity of passive open space will marginally reduce by -0.05 hectares. Given the private open space per person is reducing it follows that the quality, capacity and quantity of public space for play will need to improve if additional benefits are to be provided.

The limited amount of open space in the system to provide for all the functions required by the planning scheme has a number of implications for the hierarchy of open spaces that are required to have "play settings" or playgrounds (see separate issue related to park [hierarchy](#)) the dependency on one park for all local open space needs, the diversity of play experiences possible, the distribution of play spaces, priority uses, how much can be planted with canopy trees (see separate [issue](#)) and development priorities.

New suburbs are entirely planned and less likely than ever before to retain trees or have access to regional crown reservations and natural areas as previously. Because of limited land budgets and small backyards and open space representing a cost and marketing tool to the developer, the outdoor play resource may be more limited in size, more overly curated and less complex and available to children than ever before. The Leisure Strategy in 2013 also reinforced that the established areas - especially Werribee - have the greatest number of leisure assets in the City.



While established urban areas may have small parks and lower quality play spaces, in newer suburbs there is little flexibility and capacity to change, like in established areas where that may be a mix of previous land uses such as business and industry or not for profit or church land and vacant lots, or open drains that may have been of little value to develop. Streets were typically wide with nature strips, and footpaths, trees and car parks on both sides. New suburb areas don't tend to have any flexibility in the public realm. Roads are narrow, and there may be little room for trees or grass due to services, and development may be almost kerb to kerb.

In these types of new suburbs, children are now entirely dependent upon typically small designed spaces for their outdoor play experiences.

With the pressure for these parks to sell houses, they are typically overly manicured. This was reinforced by resident's views expressed as part of the landscape guideline project for Council in 2016. "Parks are too over-designed because of new developments." Many community participants emphasised the importance of retaining the natural environment in Wyndham. Developers and designers, however, suggested that the community wants a "manufactured landscape".

Many of these highly ornamental (manicured) parks are not "child-friendly" or encourage contact with nature, creative play or physical activity, etc. These will be designed for visual amenity or social activities, and opportunities for more contemplative and therefore environmental/nature-based experiences may not be available to children. Activities such as exploration of nature, bike riding off-road, moving freely around the neighbourhood, and creative play tend to be ruled out, unless there are drainage corridors remaining.

If there is only one park within walking distance, families will be heavily reliant on it for all local play needs - for all ages and abilities, social and physical activities and in all weather- hot or cold, etc.

As the population grows there is potential for more conflicts in public open space for example between children and dogs and play and social sport, boisterous and quiet play and it will be important to increase education about the responsible and respectful use of parks, including for dog owners.

In line with the WOSS, it is highly recommended that Council considers an acquisition of land for open space and play spaces where gaps have been identified, and to open up poorly configured site i.e. parks with narrow park frontages. In addition, Council could explore opportunities to partner with not for profit, commercial developers and landowners as well as land management agencies such as Parks Victoria, to develop play spaces that serve Wyndham residents.

One example is the Point Cook Coastal Park, that provides an opportunity for Council to develop a regional nature play space in conjunction with Parks Victoria. Currently, the play space provided in the park is relatively low value, and it does not contribute strongly to environmental education objectives or the understanding of the Coastal Park.

Size of parks

In the WOSS a pocket park can be <0.5ha. and local “passive” parks can be .5-1ha. These will typically have a 400m catchment. The Strategy stipulates a local passive park ‘will contain’ a ‘play opportunity’. In a number of suburbs of Wyndham staff said many parents are reliant on a park they can reach on foot.

The WOSS says local active open spaces is not a park hierarchy Council supports, but it will acquire these through the PSP. Staff, however, have indicated that this 400m catchment for local “passive” parks, may also need to include “active areas” for games and social team sports. However, if sites are .5ha (as stipulated in WOSS as the minimum size of local parks) it will be difficult to provide adequate space for kick and throw activities, a path circuit, canopy trees, seating, tables, social activities for all ages, landscape elements and play infrastructure.

Desirably at least 40*30m is required for small groups of children to have kick to kick, that is away from other facilities and private yards. This space may also need to be supported by higher fences (2.4m high, where the area abuts private yards). This kick to kick space is not going to be able to cater for social team sports. Flexible space will need to be provided for social team sports if they cannot be provided (with current minimum park sizes) in "Active" open spaces in either higher levels of open space than local (i.e., district "passive" spaces) or additional "active" spaces.

It is not desirable to allocate one park just for kick and throw activities and one for equipment for example, as many families will depend on the one park close to home, and because there may be only one open space in 400m. Therefore, it is desirable that:

- the minimum sized park allowable under the WOSS should not be provided
- a minimum range of physical, social and environmental opportunities are required in each space,
- parks of the same classification should not all be the same
- a diversity of different types of spaces should be available across each planning precinct – in terms of open space function and landscape setting types
- where there are multiple play spaces in the same planning area, they should have different landscape settings: ie open grass areas, bushland/forest, cultivated garden, hard surfaces/plaza, or treed parkland etc.

This will enable a much wider range of experiences to be provided in addition to a broader range of age groups and activities catered for.

Size also affects the configuration of parks. The narrower the space, the fewer the sides of the park that should have a private outlook onto the park. The narrower the park, the less suitable it is for children’s play if there is a road close by, or it is surrounded by roads. If smaller additional incidental open spaces areas over and above the key open space required by Council are desired by the developer to provide premium residential properties for sale, this is excellent, but these spaces must not be included in the minimum calculation of required play spaces.

Other Councils seek to take local parks for play spaces that at least meet the minimum standards specified in the Standard C13 of Clause 56 (Residential Subdivision of the Victorian Planning Provisions that suggest “Where not designed to include active open space, local parks should be generally 1 hectare in area and suitably dimensioned and designed to provide for their intended use and to allow easy adaptation in response to changing community preferences. “This size allows for play space not to be single purpose or age specific, to provide social, physical and environmental activities, allow for canopy trees and open space areas, to provide social sport or dog related facilities, and a perimeter paths circuit.

Distribution of play spaces and independent mobility

Perceptions of safety impact on independent mobility, and therefore play opportunities and physical activity. A recent study by Latrobe University indicates that some 35% of young people are not at all mobile, and don't walk in their neighbourhood. Parks need to be close by to encourage independent mobility, be viewed as a meeting space for all the community, and be welcoming and pleasant places to in order to encourage all age groups.

Independent mobility is influenced by the perceptions of other parents, traffic hazards, parent's confidence in the child, familiarity with people in neighbourhood (social friendships in the community) and familiarity with community spaces and the broader neighbourhood. Therefore, local parks can play a very important role in encouraging people to meet others in the neighbourhood as well as enticing people to walk there. In turn, greater independent mobility will increase social connectedness and physical activity levels in the general population.



Knowing where parks are and what they are for, has been raised as an issue for many newly arrived residents. This points to an important role for Council in educating new residents about what the value of play is as well as independent mobility, and what is available for their use.

All areas outside 400m from a play equipment area have been mapped, and open spaces in these areas were assessed. Not all parks have been deemed as suitable for provision of play equipment in those areas outside a 400m catchment. There are currently 28 reserves in areas outside 400m of a play space with equipment, that were assessed as benefiting from some play space development – either nature play or equipment elements. A high order of cost has been provided to construct each recommended development. (See site assessments provided in a separate volume).

It is desirable that some form of purpose built play elements are provided within 400m of all households in Wyndham.

Directions: General Planning

1. Consider introducing an acquisition program for play spaces where gaps in provision have been identified.
2. Ensure that each local open space provides a diversity of play experience and activities suitable for all age groups, including kick to kick, canopy trees, play elements, seating and tables, a path circuit, and that local open spaces are planned and designed to provide a diversity of play experiences and opportunities across each precinct.
3. Adopt a 400m catchment threshold to parks greater than .75 ha with purpose designed local play elements. This provision standard relates to affordability to provide, develop and maintain infrastructure or designed play spaces and those that can provide a minimum range of social, physical and environmental activities for all age groups.

This standard may be met by play equipment provided in other categories of open space such as sports parks (“active “open space), and district play equipment areas with picnic and other facilities.

4. Consider fitness equipment as non-essential to provide in conjunction with play spaces. This is because the priority for play space is to meet children and their carers and family's needs. Few children use fitness equipment. Other vegetation, natural elements and kick to kick spaces are considered more important to provide in conjunction with play elements. Fitness equipment is better located as adjunct to trail corridors and hubs of social and physical activity – such as at sports parks.

Colocation of play areas with community facilities

Most play spaces are provided with a social focus. These are best located adjacent to other community hubs or community facilities in publically visible sites, where people go to, or pass in their daily lives. It makes sense that play spaces are co-located adjacent to community and children’s centres, schools and sports facilities.

Where there is a tight land budget, planning should encourage joint developments with schools and provide community access to playing fields and sports courts. If this can be negotiated, play spaces should include more nature and vegetation elements, and the community should be encouraged to use full sized courts in schools after school hours.

Schools can provide for additional complementary play needs including hard courts, playing fields for kick to kick and other social games. Play equipment areas, however, need to be accessible for families with young children during the day.

Directions: Co-location

1. Seek to ensure that a new any new play space complements the nature of any existing park/ play space nearby, rather than duplicates it.
2. Where possible, encourage shared use arrangements to be developed with schools to provide community access to sports fields and sports courts. Where community access to sports courts can be negotiated with a school within the same catchment as a play space, focus the play elements in the play space on a diversity of other elements excluding courts.
3. Provide purpose-built play elements in a park within 400m of all households in Wyndham.

Position, permeability and prominence of play spaces

Many communities are not able to obtain the best value from existing local play spaces for the following reasons:

- the impermeable street layout that makes journeys on foot much longer than necessary because of the convoluted/impermeable layout
- spaces that are too closely associated with a few nearby houses (the 'dress circle') may intimidates users from outside, and discourage playful activity.

Grid like street patterns tends to facilitate easy legible access for walking in circuit routes and more direct access to community facilities and parks. Grid like street patterns also often provide for better configured parks, that have better passive surveillance are in more prominent locations, and they limit the number of small walkways required and facilitate wayfinding for pedestrians.

The examples below illustrate the effect of street layout on access/equitable distribution of play spaces.

Impermeable curved street layout often means poor access and equity of provision



More permeable grid like street layout is good for children and it means access to place spaces is generally more equitable



Hidden away - Semi privatised open space don't provide good play spaces.

Formal symmetrically designed parks don't leave scope for future change/or Interventions



Semi privatised 'dress circle' parks may provide good surveillance but have a high impact on neighbours. These parks are acceptable as amenity landscapes to promote property values, but they are not adequate to sustain children's activities over time.



Prominence and site lines

In some suburbs, especially older suburbs - there are battle-axe blocks, leaving parks with narrow entries, surrounded by backs of houses. These offer poor or no public surveillance and low prominence. This is a bigger problem where the park is the only one available for play (i.e. where there is a high level of dependency on that park). Park locations behind housing with very narrow street frontage are also not good locations for play spaces.

Regent St Park.



Where play spaces exist in internal locations with narrow entries, Council could:

- Consider purchasing a house block at the entry to open space to open them up.
- Emphasise the presence of a play space or park with a narrow entry by locating a prominent gateway artwork or planting and/or major signage at the street access.
- Provide a formed wheelchair accessible path into the space from the street, and
- Site equipment in view of the street entry, to draw people in

Council does not allow these style of developments now, however many exist and they are difficult to retrofit cost effectively. In addition, many subdivisions may be approved a long time before the houses are constructed.

Directions: Position, permeability and prominence

1. Seek to deliver parks for play that have dwellings overlooking from across a road on at least three sides, and limit the area where parks adjoin private yards.
2. Continue to scrutinise development applications and encourage street layouts that are permeable to facilitate walkability and independent mobility, and create better access to play spaces (and hence provide a better return on investment in these assets).
3. Consider selectively purchasing a house block at the entry to battle-axe block parks with play spaces, where these are strategically important, to open these up for additional use.

3. THE IMPACT ON PLAY OF CHANGING FORM AND DENSITY OF HOUSING

Increasing density affects available private space

With increasing residential densities there will be smaller and fewer private yards, and more apartment style living for families: This will limit:

- "door stop play", opportunities for children's games, to play with a dog/keep pets, to make things outside, to grow things, dig in dirt
- the amount of incidental open space
- the quality of open space in multi-storey dwellings: due to lack of deep soil, car park structures underneath, limited solar access, noise, and more prevalent wind



The Victorian Better Apartments (VBA) Design Standard 2016 does not require medium and high-density developments to have public outdoor space.

Where these developments occur in Wyndham in future, they will include children.

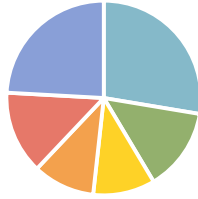
Location of medium density housing adjacent to parks

It is common practice to locate areas of medium and high-density housing adjacent to existing parks. Many such developments abut the space without a separation roadway or transitional open space.

- This proximity may exacerbate conflict between housing and children playing due to the noise of children. Ultimately complaints from new residents may restrict the use of the existing open space, especially when the space is small.
- The proximity of dwellings to public space without transitional space may encourage appropriation by the immediate residents that purposely discourages other public use.
- Consultation reinforced the focus on improving the landscape and the elements that influences children. See chart following from the householder survey.

Wyndham now will not accept residential abutting open space at the side or back of a residential lot. Fronting needs to be separated by a 4m postie road.

Household survey for this project -priority improvements



- Planning local parks better, generally, so they are bigger more diverse, welcoming and designed better for play
- Additional park landscaping and tree planting, paths and seats
- Additional social elements, people of all ages and abilities
- Additional items of play equipment
- Sand and nature play

Lack of transitional space between a park and housing

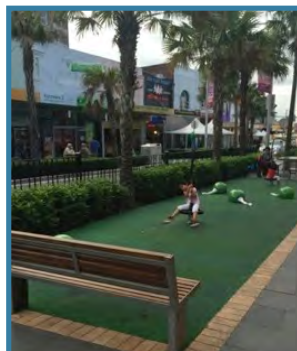
Where public parks are too small and/or too close to private homes/windows, this may act as a deterrent



to the normal/noisy/busy/active games that children and teenagers need and sets up inevitable future conflicts with neighbours. The image shows a design of park that could be viewed as a semi privatised 'dress circle' park: It has good surveillance but activities in the park may have a high impact on neighbours. These parks are acceptable as amenity landscapes to promote property values, but they are not adequate to sustain children's activities over time.

There is a relationship between the size of the space, the closeness of homes and windows, and the suitability of the park as a public play space.

The presence of two or more public edges/streets affects this balance between perceived private/public space for play.



Directions: changing form and density of housing

1. Consider requiring at least communal open space in multi-storey medium and high-density housing areas, in addition to public open space required by WOSS.
2. Seek to provide alternative spaces or elements encourage play in higher density developments. These may include for examples such children's gardens, play sculptures or play elements in pocket parks and plazas (see images above).
3. Ensure that local open spaces respond to the density of development and seek to compensate for environments missing in that location (i.e. such as canopy trees and loose materials). Ensure play spaces in medium density dwellings are outdoor and have adequate access to sunlight, canopy trees and natural features.
4. Consider introducing some additional planning guidelines for open space in higher densities to complement guidance in the WOSS, and provide for play space. These should promote the provision of quality play environments, address likely capacity of the site, and minimise potential conflicts between activities and people of different age groups.

4. PLAY EQUIPMENT AREAS MATCHING PARK HIERARCHIES

Hierarchies of parks with play spaces in the Wyndham Open Space Strategy 2045 (WOSS).

This strategy builds on the open space hierarchies in the WOSS. In this plan, play spaces are classified as either local, district (serving more than just the immediate suburb – or a group of suburbs) or regional – (regional being municipal or a wider area). This plan does not separate municipal and regional level play spaces because there are generally not distinguishable.

In the WOSS, Local, District, Municipal and Regional open space classified as “Active” open space may contain a “playground”. In future, it is desirable that sports reserves include a play space to support these spaces as hubs for social and physical activity, to support families spectating at sports activities. These do not need to be in addition to play spaces within a 400m catchment. Play spaces in sports reserves allow the provision of a greater diversity of opportunities in local “passive parks”. Including those with more environmentally based or “wild” play settings close to home.

“Passive” open space under the WOSS includes Pocket, Local, District, Municipal and Regional park hierarchies. The Local, District, Municipal and Regional level “passive” open spaces in the WOSS must provide an “appropriate play setting”. The Pocket level of “passive” spaces which can be less than .5ha in size are not required to provide play settings. These are noted as suitable for town centre or medium to high-density housing areas. As it is likely that there will be an increasing number of dependent children living in medium and high density housing, it may be desirable for “Pocket” level open space in medium and high density, and mixed use areas, to include an “appropriate play settings”. In fact, it could be argued that these higher density areas may need play spaces more than other areas. Although some higher density developments may include their own private or communal play spaces.

Some Councils have recognised the value in providing small localised play opportunities in higher density or mixed use areas or activity centres, either as communal open spaces, or where no space is available, they have provided play structures or tiny play spaces in street verges (See previous image Auburn NSW).

“Pocket parks” in the WOSS are divided into “town squares” which are largely paved, “urban parks” with some green space, and “nodes” which are attached to encumbered land. Urban Parks and Town Squares are to include skateable elements but not other “play settings”. Whereas the “nodes” may include play settings. If these skateable elements are provided without other play they will provide for children’s wheeled activities, however this may create some conflict with young adults if the spaces are small.

The inclusion of play settings in Urban Parks and Town Squares may need to be reviewed in the light of the value of providing play opportunities, the reduced availability of other spaces, especially more environmentally focused spaces as well as the need for a diversity of play opportunities.

Mismatch between equipment area hierarchy and WOSS park hierarchy

In a number of instances, the hierarchy of the parks with play spaces being provided by developers, do not match the hierarchy of parks established in the WOSS. (Note: Some parks in WOSS don't have a hierarchy such as encumbered open spaces, but they will have value to specific people especially for play and hence some people may travel some distances to these).

Many parks are over-embellished in the subdivision process in order to sell properties. For example, oversized play equipment areas are located on local parks in some areas, without car parking toilets and other services that would be typically provided at District Parks.



Over development of play spaces without the necessary supporting amenities such as toilets and car parking causes an extreme nuisance to residents. Examples include: Riverwalk (doesn't have car parking, or accessible equipment as would a regional park), and Bayview Park (has an over-development of a local level play space without toilets and car parking).

Servicing requirements are much higher in parks where the play spaces are attractive to a wider catchment. Hence more rubbish, and wear and tear is generated than what the current service level can address. Parks of a higher level of hierarchy will have a larger bin capacity and rubbish removal service for example than a local park.

The level of “over-development” of play equipment areas and parks is a problem for many new parks because Council will not be able to easily service these in future when it takes these over - especially water play features, major shelters and garden beds.

Also, these over-developed spaces often lack flexibility to change and the ability to expand because of the large-scale facilities in them - such as walls and concrete edges around equipment areas that constrain soft fall areas being expanded with different equipment. Major shelters that may not be very functional and large ornamental garden beds may not be able to be maintained to the level originally provided.

The over development/over-design also impacts on play values and accessibility.

Examples of core services that will need to be agreed to as part of this project are provided as Appendix 2.

Directions: hierarchies

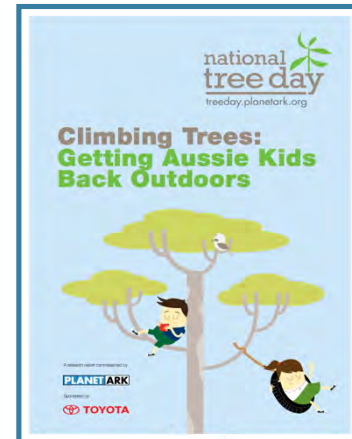
1. In future, provide play spaces in all "active" reserves to support them as hubs for social and physical activity, and to support families spectating at sports activities. This may allow the provision of a greater diversity of opportunities in local "passive parks", including those with more environmentally based or "wild" play settings close to home.
2. Ensure developers provide play elements and support facilities consistent with the designated hierarchy of the open space, and that which Council can afford to maintain.
3. Ensure that play elements and the design of the park provided by others, are consistent with core service levels developed for this project.
4. Ensure play spaces proposed by developers are clearly labelled as to their classification for approval by Council, and levels of embellishments are consistent with the hierarchy of the open space, as per the core service levels provided.
5. Consider providing play elements in "Pocket" level open spaces in medium- and high-density and mixed use areas, other than skateable elements (as per the WOSS provision standards), if and when required, as it is likely that there will be an increasing number of dependent children living in medium and high density areas in future.

5. THE NEED FOR MORE TREE PLANTING AND VEGETATION IN PLAY SPACES

Need for greater tree canopy

There is a need to increase the proportion of park area under tree canopy for a number of reasons related to play. The heat island effect will be exacerbated in new suburbs with increased area under paving. The smaller the private block, the greater the proportion of the block will be paved. Additional tree canopy will also be desirable to increase:

- the use of open space generally for play
- play value of public spaces
- landscape and user amenity
- physical activity in warm weather
- the area under shade, and reduce the need for water to sustain grass, etc.



Wyndham has less than 10% tree canopy. The national urban average for an LGA is 39%. The average LGA in Vic has 34%. Much of Wyndham has heavy basalt clay soils, which can be a challenging environment to establish vegetation and enable it to thrive.

Plantings in public parks, as well as street planting, comprise the main opportunities for growing large canopy trees in newer, and higher density suburbs. Therefore, more attention should be paid to providing space for large canopy trees in play spaces and parks, as well as ensuring their survival.

Large shady trees are also consistently the feature sought after by park users.



Adequate space for tree canopy as well as open areas for games

There is a high demand for social non-club and junior club sport in the municipality that cannot be met by open space classified as “active open space”. Council has identified that there is a need to ensure appropriate space is planned for games, kick and throw activities and social team sports in “passive” open space. The need for open areas in parks for games in appropriate locations away from residences, and Council’s desire to plant canopy trees on open areas, may be in conflict. This is due to the limited amount of open space able to be taken during subdivision, inability to provide canopy trees in private space and street verges, and the small size of many local parks.



Cheviot Dr. This site has more complexity in terrain, vegetation, spatial enclosure, loose materials. By creating more interesting terrain and with planting this reserve already offers more potential for children to explore the landscape for play opportunities.

Brentwood Dr. The landscape itself offers opportunities that extend the value of the space



Trees and play value

Tree planting and management must assume a higher priority in the design and management of all parks to encourage play. Many play spaces in Wyndham have few trees. Some have no trees. Trees remain one of the most popular and asked for elements in parks and play spaces. Trees provide enormous play value, aesthetic quality, visual character and interest, because they provide habitat, shade and cooling.

Most private yards and public streetscapes can't accommodate canopy trees anymore. Hence the importance of local play spaces with trees is increasing. Many new parks provided by developers have excellent tree plantings, although these will take considerable time to establish and so maintenance periods are important. Equally some 'dress circle' reserves have mostly ornamental planting that is minimal and without high quality or large canopy trees, and little in the way of understorey. While aesthetically pleasing this planting may not provide opportunities for children's contact with nature, or shade. Some newer parks do have understorey and complex vegetation that offers play value and well as environmental benefits and amenity. However, many parks rely entirely on play equipment to provide play experiences. Use of more open-ended elements such as landscape/vegetation and other natural elements could expand the value of play equipment areas, in a cost effective way.

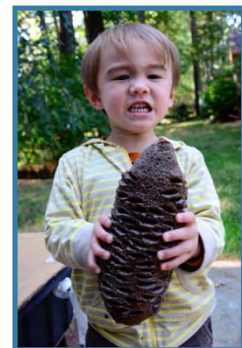


Some newer parks do have understorey and complex vegetation that offers play value and well as environmental benefits and amenity. However, many parks rely entirely on

Play design and trees

While the value of climbing trees is being widely promoted, Council is not able to encourage this in local parks. However, the specific selection of tree species to enhance other play attributes is desirable (along with other criteria related to the soil type, microclimate and suitability for shade).

Trees can be selected for their unusual form, for their colour, cultural significance, ability to generate materials and found objects that can be used in play (like paper bark, pine needles, flowers and seed pods). Trees can be used as props in games like hide and seek. They are often important local landmarks and create a unique character for a play space. They can reflect characters from children stories and create rooms or frame views. The arrangement/positioning of trees in parks, in groups, lines, circles, and around perimeters and along boundaries can provide high play value. Choice and management of trees needs to protect sightlines through and into play spaces.



Perception of trees

Many new residents don't necessarily share the same sense of the value of trees - especially native trees - which people of English and European cultures do. Hence some education may be required to ensure these are protected and the presence of trees does not dissuade use by some populations.

Directions: Trees

1. Place a higher priority on tree planting in parks with play spaces, than play equipment or other design elements.
2. Ensure planting plans for play spaces are signed off before construction.
3. Select specimen trees for their character and play value and to create diversity across play spaces
4. Ensure strategies for soil remediation and improvement, are conducive to tree health and are implemented where required
5. Development of a suitable tree planting palette is a high priority for new play spaces - in line with play value, risk management (re. limb and nut shedding), shade, local soil and microclimate, and robustness to withstand inadvertent damage during play.
6. Consider introducing longer than 2-year maintenance periods on vegetation in local parks to provide higher rates of survival for trees and plants.
7. Use vegetation as a key design element in more play spaces, and ensure a good distribution of areas for nature play across each locality.
8. Prioritise additional canopy trees as the play elements to be developed first in play spaces then provide pockets of shade around social areas, boundary planting and so as to protect locations for kick and throw activities in parks, (where there are large open areas).



Many new medium density housing areas don't do not have deep soil, and planting of canopy trees may need to be provided in boxes.



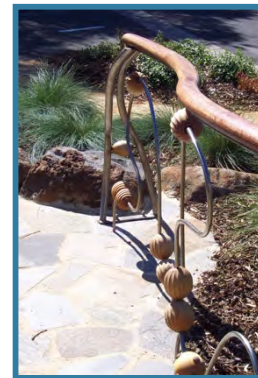
6. CREATING A DIVERSITY OF PLAY OPPORTUNITIES

Play provision requires access to a range of different elements

Provision for play is much broader than the provision of play equipment alone, and the principal focus of Council's play provision strategy should be the design of the whole of parks that facilitate play.

To provide a balance of play opportunities all play spaces should encourage:

1. social interaction
2. movement, physical activity, and risk taking
3. creative/sensory play
4. imagination/fantasy/role play
5. areas with nature and loose materials



Play equipment areas need to be supplemented by 'wilder' or incidental space that may need to be designed where they do not occur naturally.

Variations in provision are evident across different eras of residential development

Many older parks have a limited play offer, other than play equipment. Many newer parks have a high focus on built form but have a limited diversity of experiences, and often plant material. In Point Cook, for example, there is a very high degree of uniformity across play parks. In some newer parks, there is very high level of provision of equipment and facilities, yet play value and inclusion may not be high, as other less developed parks.

Access to loose materials, open-ended play opportunities and natural settings is essential for the healthy development of children. Many of the play activities that are beneficial to children are ideally creative, messy and noisy and this sets them at odds with property values.



The need for choice

On a hot day, a family should be able to choose a play space in their area (planning precinct) that is shady and green and on a cold day a space that is open and sunny. Also, a family should be able to choose a play space that has a paved landscape setting and is more conducive to wheeled toys and skateable elements for instance, and on another day a place where natural elements are the predominant feature. In all cases, the function of the space is the same, but the diversity of opportunities and experiences is created by a different landscape setting type. Similarly, if a family has small children, teenagers, and a grandparent parent with them, there should be space where the whole family can find something to do.

A diversity of opportunities available in play spaces will also mean that more people of different ages, abilities, cultural backgrounds and interests are likely to find spaces that they enjoy seeing and using. A diversity of landscape elements in a space generally means a higher aesthetic and play value, and the ability of the space to offer restorative qualities to those who can see and enjoy it. A diversity of environmental stimuli in open space will promote interaction with, psychological interest in, and attachment to a resident's surroundings.

The size of reserves tends to dictate the quality of experiences and diversity of opportunities available. Very small parks are therefore not, on their own, adequate to meet the demands of the community and facilitate child development. See issue above.

A diversity of play elements

Some play equipment provides such a narrow set of opportunities and sustains very short duration of play activity that it is quite possible that many users will obtain limited value from it at all. For example, if it is not possible for them to access; it is too challenging, or not challenging enough, or doesn't offer activities of interest. If the equipment doesn't appeal to some user groups or they can't use it, then there are no further options.

A path circuit, open space area of grass for kick to kick, trees to climb or use as props for games, seats and tables, and vegetation as design elements, loose materials and area of paving for ball play, skating/scooting or courts, can extend play and the range of people attracted to a space.

The relationship between play elements within a design that can create strong connections between particular spaces will provide better play value.

When older equipment areas are to be renewed, the asset renewal program should include a review of the age groups catered for (see separate [issue](#)), the range of abilities catered for, and the range and interaction between play elements.

Many parks have seats but no tables. Tables can facilitate more social interaction than one seat, as it may be more engaging to sit facing someone in conversation. Tables enable play to be extended by other activities, and easily supplemented with food and drink, provide a location for other companions to feel included, make a space more inviting or comfortable for an older adult, and can encourage older children or siblings to benefit from being outdoors, even if they are not engaged in active play.

Directions: diversity

1. Ensure all play spaces provide for:
 - social interaction
 - movement, physical activity and risk taking
 - creative/sensory play
 - imagination/fantasy/role play
 - nature and loose materials
2. Seek to increase the diversity of play elements in all parks – including plant material, natural elements and loose materials which children are more likely to be able to use as play props.

Directions: diversity (cont'd)

3. Ensure a landscape architect is used to design play spaces – especially in the play space renewal process, so that play equipment areas are not replaced like with like.
4. Ensure that a diversity of opportunities and play elements are provided in each play space, and across the open space network that means more people of different ages, abilities, cultural backgrounds and interests are likely to find spaces for play that they enjoy seeing and using.
5. Consider diversifying play opportunities in parks by adding environmental elements, path circuits, loose materials, canopy trees and social elements to equipment areas opportunities (e.g. tables and seats), and ensuring these are well integrated into the design of spaces to facilitate play and include a wider range of people.
6. If a site is fenced, ensure a diversity of play elements, not just equipment - is provided inside that fence, including furniture.

7. DESIGN OF PLAY SPACES

How can play spaces be designed to provide the important play experiences children need?

For normal brain development, children need environments that can enable them to experience different things, challenge themselves and motivate them to learn and develop certain competencies.

Key types of play that can be facilitated by the design and placement of different play elements include:

- Creative/cognitive and sensory play experiences
- Social spaces and elements that require co-operation and sharing
- Physical activity that may be via path activities, climbing, games, etc.
- Imaginative play
- Swinging, rotating, and rocking

Key elements not common in play spaces in Wyndham are loose materials and elements that children can manipulate, although some spaces have sand and vegetated areas.

For a child to understand something and develop creativity, they must construct or reinvent things for themselves. Hence, the provision of loose and changeable elements in a play space encourages this type of play. This open-ended play can be encouraged through the addition of natural elements, nature play, and materials and found objects that can be shared.

Creative/cognitive and sensory play experiences can be stimulated by access to sand and water, nature, cause-and-effect/mechanical equipment, table games, interactive panels, music, and communication through speaker tubes, for example.

Imaginative play may be encouraged through specific types of play equipment and props, for example boats and cars, steering wheels, shop counters, and cubbies.



Example Conquest Dr. Small role-play items such as this area are in Wyndham. If they were associated with sand or other creative settings, they gain additional play value.

Risk and challenge

Children and young people need to experience risk and challenge in their play (without being exposed to danger). However, there is an important difference between risk, challenge or unpredictability, and danger. Risk and challenge are necessary for children to test and extend their abilities, to learn new skills, and experience a sense of adventure. Danger is where the risk cannot be overcome by learning through experimentation, because it is beyond the physical and perceptual abilities of the child. For example, for children under 12 years of age, judgement has not developed to the point where the child can accurately judge the speed and the risk associated with traffic, or deep water for example. Hence it is always assumed children should be kept away from, or supervised near these dangers.

Risk is an inherent part of life. Attempts to eliminate all forms of risk-taking behaviour are unrealistic and counter-productive, resulting in children unable to recognise or deal with serious dangers when they do arise. It is preferable that children have opportunities to learn to take graduated risks in settings where the result of failure is not life threatening or serious injury.

Many people share the view that much of the risk and challenge children once benefited from has been removed from their lives, and therefore children don't have the same opportunity to learn as they used to. By removing risks children don't acquire resilience and skills beneficial for development.

A play space needs to provide choice and graded challenges or children will seek challenge elsewhere.

The ability for children to climb and test themselves physically is linked to the development of self-confidence and autonomy, and balance, co-ordination and strength development, along with children's sense of judgment, decision-making and persistence.

Play spaces should be designed so as to:

- Offer children the chance to acquire skills at their own pace
- Allow children to opt in or out of a challenge by choice
- Provide support in learning new skills - to climb for example
- Be able to get down unaided, once they have climbed an item of some height.
- Test their skills and judgment
- In the risk management context, risks in a play space must be considered alongside the benefits of providing challenge and learning.

Nature play

Natural elements including flowering plants, other vegetation and plant materials; sand, boulders, logs, rocks, branches and soil, may offer environmental and amenity value in parks, and also provide considerable interest and play value to children. These can be designed and placed so as to enhance play value in an urban environment.

For young children, nature encourages experimentation and a source of inspiration. The more opportunity for children to play with as many different kinds of things as possible, the more inventive they will be. Living things, colour, texture and movement, and changeability caused by weather and the seasons, for example, provide diversity, loose parts, collectibles, and the other sensory experiences.

No built structure can provide the depth of diversity and changeability for play and interactions that nature can. Nature brings access to unpredictability, loose materials, opportunities to learn about life stages, growth and decline, and diversity due to variations in colour, perfume, the positioning of elements and the presence of wildlife, that changes over time and in different seasons and weather patterns.

Exposure to nature is also fundamental to children understanding and protecting the natural world. All children should experience direct, intimate knowledge of natural elements.

Research suggests that the scale of nature is not important to children as long as the elements are there – a small puddle in a City might be as relevant as a small lake, or exposure to native mice as important as elephants.

Children's play is strongly affected by the opportunities they find in their environment. Children see their surroundings in different ways from adults. They often see the small details that adults miss.

Whereas an adult may appreciate a tree for its beauty, its shade or the habitat it provides for birds, children may see a wide, low branch that invites them to climb or swing; some weeping boughs amongst which they can build a cubby, or some gum nuts, pine needles or sap that they can use to decorate their sand castle.



When the environment surrounding a play space provides additional interest to children over and above the play equipment, the whole space will engage them in more complex play, for longer duration and on return visits. Enabling better value to be derived from existing play equipment areas- by adding nature play elements, should be a key objective of design and play space upgrades. One example is providing sand or, at least, vegetation near an under deck cubby house or shop, where children can use flowers, leaves, etc. in play. An extension of this is to provide a more extensive nature play space with multiple play elements that are designed natural features, in an open space for play.

Natural elements can be used cleverly to create safe spaces separate from other activities. Children have shown a distinct attraction to natural or leftover areas that adults may care little about as recreation spaces or rarely use, like "wastelands or creek corridors". Part of the attraction - apart from their wildness and variety - is the opportunity for children to establish some sense of possession, to have privacy, and some degree of control not allowed in places under adult supervision.

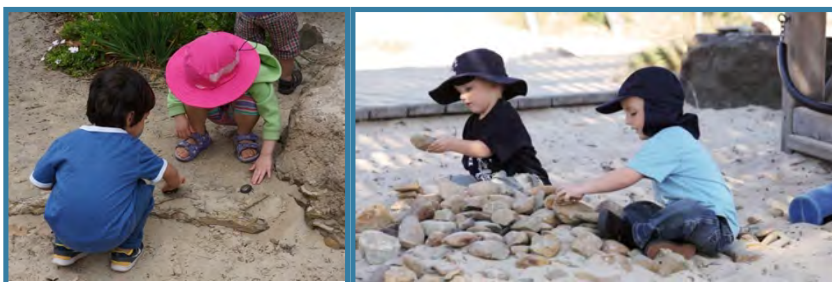
For children to properly gain a sense of self-esteem, they must experience psychological separation from others and "secret places" that no one knows about. Experiencing this sense of privacy, being alone, having secrets, not being bothered by people, and controlling access to spaces is important. These experiences can be provided through design at a very small scale, especially for young children, in a public play space.



Public play spaces can provide areas for children to get in and amongst plants and rocks and provide a sense of enclosure, yet be visible to carers. Trees, rocks, sand and digging areas can provide opportunities for loose materials to be used for play and exploration. Not all spaces need equipment to encourage play.

Nature play may mean children get dirty; and the community may need to be educated about the benefits of nature play, and to dress children appropriately for the activity.

One attraction of using natural elements in a play space is that may be cheaper to maintain than equipment. This may be the case for logs, boulders, hills to roll down etc. and soft fall surfaces may not be required. However, if nature play spaces have loose materials that may migrate to where they don't belong, these may need to be returned and edging maintained. Some hand weeding of specific planting for example, may be required, that may be more expensive than open parkland or grass areas, but more beneficial than mowing the grass.



Specialised design will be required in the first instance to provide more nature-based play opportunities (to ensure natural elements are presented to provide play value and are suitable for a public place and enjoyable for children), these spaces will still need to be maintained, and new management practices may need to be developed accordingly. In some cases, however, community input may be sought for some tasks that are not generally possible when a play space is predominantly equipment.



Wyndham Council has some significant natural landscape in land managed by others, for example Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water, along rivers and the coast, and access to these for nature play should be encouraged. Council could partner with Parks Victoria, for example and develop a regional nature play space at the Point Cook Coastal Park.

Rather than develop multiple nature play spaces on their own - where space allows - Council could develop areas associated with play spaces for nature play; especially in local parks, to extend the range of play opportunities currently available, and provide additional educational and cultural relevance to places for local children.

Directions: nature play

1. Introduce nature play elements into local parks, especially those with only play equipment
2. Rather than focusing on play equipment elements early in a parks development, the priority should be well-sited parks with a good framework of suitable vegetation and a path system, getting the design of parks right (its attractiveness, welcoming nature, and on the amenity and variety it can provide. Equipment could be added as a secondary stage).
3. Partner with Parks Victoria and develop a regional nature play space at the Point Cook Coastal Park.
4. Consider the implications of introducing nature play elements on the management of place spaces, and the acquisition of skills in relation to design.

Water play

Water is a highly sensory medium, loose material and a construction agent for children. It is changeable in appearance, form and temperature. It is highly appealing to children for these reasons and because it affects change, it can be a vehicle, a digging instrument, an ornament, a binding agent and a solvent all in one. And of course in the hot weather, it is a cooling agent.

Water may also support whole ecosystems of life, even in a temporary puddle its qualities may be adjusted by what it is mixed with, and its rate of flow. In remnant waterbodies and watercourses, basic life forms are often found, and these are of great value to children.

Catching tadpoles and yabbies, and watching water boatmen and dragonflies around water, and sending seedpod boats or flowers on a journey have been the pastimes of many generations of Australian children. Play spaces can be provided in parks with natural watercourses or creeks through them. A number of such facilities are provided around Australia. Water can also have a very calming effect on people, the sound of a bubbling brook or fountain can provide respite and peace in a busy city or park. However, children can easily drown in water of 100 mm deep, so access to water in or adjacent to play spaces must be managed very carefully.

Water play can be provided safely in many different ways as the following images show.



Water features are typically very popular, and children may seek to add sand or leaves or foam to them that may damage them, and therefore they require frequent inspection and maintenance. Drains can get blocked, sand gets into mechanisms, and moving parts get damaged or easily worn. They may also have constraints like the Riverwalk facility, which can't be used in high winds or rain.

Water play features may be very expensive to install and operate if they require connection and use of potable water, and to replace taps and moving parts such as levers and buttons. If they are designed for recycled water, the supply needs to be guaranteed, and water quality must be able to meet the guidelines for “primary contact”.

The water source must also be regularly monitored to ensure there is no contamination, and that a continuous supply can be guaranteed. This may be an issue for example, in drought times.

If the play items, jets, cannons, or water play equipment are above ground with an artificial cushioning surface underneath, this surface will not be impact-absorbing when inundated. There are sometimes issues with not being able to clean such a surface, should it be contaminated.

The design of water play spaces need to consider constraining loose materials from migrating onto surfaces that may become slippery, or into pipes and pumps for example.



The safest and most cost effective form of water play may be provided in district or regional parks as a hand pump that can be manipulated by children to deliver water to a basin that drains quickly or into a nature play space. In some instances, the design may enable the capture and recirculation of water, including tank water. Even this simple form of water play can be expensive to keep operational.

Council has two water play spaces designed and constructed by a developer (see images above) in recent years. There are other aquatic facilities provided in body corporate facilities. The Riverwalk space is being maintained by the developer, and currently, it is likely to require daily servicing cleaning and/or maintenance. The asset is planned to be transferred to Council in 10 years in an as-new condition.

Typically water play facilities are not likely to be affordable or sustainable for Council to provide.

Directions: water play

1. Considering the cost to provide and maintain water play elements and the greater need immediately for trees, landscape elements, and basic accessibility upgrades identified in this strategy, it is not recommended that Council provides water play in its parks in the short term - with the exception of shallow ephemeral water courses through parks.
2. Consider the provision of outdoor water parks only in conjunction with an existing or future aquatic centre.

Obtaining better shade in play space design

In the consultation for Council's Landscape Design Guidelines project in 2016, parents with children discussed the importance of shade near play areas, as a place to supervise their children out of the sun, saying "Lack of shade is a big problem in Wyndham. We avoid local parks in the summer".

Many parks do not offer sufficient shade or shelter. A combination of permanent shade from shelters and canopy trees is preferred over shade sails. Shade sails are subject to damage and are not as effective as other forms of shade.

Shelters are valuable additions to parks. A number of sites, however, have very large, elaborate, over-designed shelters. These are used by developers as landmarks and signature features. However, some of these elaborate shelters are located well away from playgrounds, some don't provide effective shade, and some don't have much furniture amongst them.



Directions: Shade

1. Plant additional canopy trees in play spaces for shade
2. For new play spaces utilise a combination of shade trees and well-designed permanent shelters for shade, before shade sails.
3. Where a shelter is proposed, the design should be scrutinised to ensure that it:
 - o is wheelchair accessible
 - o provides shade where it will be useful for seating and social gatherings and
 - o is close to the play space if one is provided.

8. HOW PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND ABILITIES GROUPS CAN BE INCLUDED IN PLAY SPACES

Access and inclusion in play

All children need to play and benefit from the enjoyment and experiences play brings. Children with physical and intellectual disabilities have exactly the same - if not an additional - need and desire to play; and the benefits from play could arguably be even greater for them in helping to overcome some of the effects of their disability. However, they may need more supportive spaces to enable them to access play opportunities and be included in friends and family play.

How do we encourage children of all abilities to play?

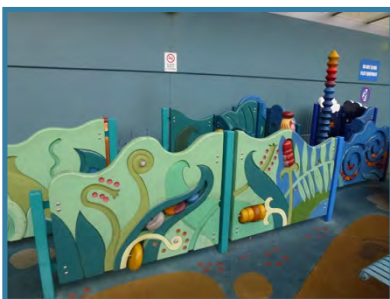
Specialised equipment is not essential for children with a disability to play.

A greater consciousness about universal design and spatial arrangements can encourage children with low vision or those using a wheelchair, to play. Children on the autism spectrum may benefit from challenging interactive play away from highly social spaces, and some containment of space for parents if children seek to abscond.

When play spaces are being designed attention to detail in the design of play equipment, paths and associated play elements can significantly enhance the opportunities for a child with a disability. Some consideration should be given to things that a child can do depending on different abilities for example.



1. Access by wheels and things that can be done with legs/ feet, and things that can be done just using fist hands (see images following with low items for manipulation, in the City of Hobart, and steering wheels accessible from the front City of Moonee Valley)
2. Items that can be reached from a seated, and those from a standing position – but be reached front on.
3. Things that can be manipulated from the front, and those from the side if inadequate space is available.
4. Places where someone in a mobility device can go: up, and under.
5. Play elements suitable for a group and also ones suited to individuals



Simple choices of equipment, accessible paths in and around the space, the ability to reach things from a chair or a mobility device, and space to get under shop counters or decks, as well the attention to detail in equipment design helps everyone play, together.

Attention to details such as:

- Areas under decks with suitable surfaces for accessible cubbies and shops
- A selection of items such as swings with seats with backs or baskets
- Types of moveable items such as steering wheels and attachments positioned so someone can sit at them
- Interactive items that a fistful hand can operate
- Spatial arrangement of items around a central social area with wheelable surfaces can include most people, including older adults
- Hand holds on equipment
- Back supports and straps on swings
- Stable wheelable surfaces to get to equipment (see image below)



- Carousels that are flush with the surrounding area (see image above)
- Wheel stops on ramp and deck edges
- Hammocks so children can swing and don't have to sit up (see image)
- Sand play for seated children with adequate space to get their knees underneath
- Space for multiple seats in rockets and swings that support social play and enable a person to assist



These types of things are essential so that children and accompanying persons with a disability are not excluded from play spaces.



The physical settings provided for play have traditionally been very difficult for many children with disabilities to access. The effect has been both physical and social exclusion of many children and their families from the experience of play, and socialization, as from many social gatherings and birthday parties (for example that involve public parks and play spaces). Sometimes it is possible to bring the play element to the child- like the dirt from a digging patch, or leaves to the child – as the image above illustrates.

All play spaces can accommodate people with a disability. Council doesn't need to build an all-abilities play space. These tend to be major destination play spaces that are of a regional standard that Council is unlikely to afford at this point of time.

The first priority is for all children to be able to get to the social spaces in a local play space that encourages interaction with other children, carers and family members and friends.

How accessible are Wyndham’s existing play spaces?

Existing equipment areas were scored for their physical accessibility:

Score 1: Cannot access the site from path/road into property due to physical barrier or absence of path, no wayfinding for a blind person, etc.

Score 2: Can get to at least a social area with a mobility device or along a path, i.e. picnic, hub, around the equipment, etc. - but nothing more.

Score 3: Can get to social area, and there is an accessible path that moves around the space to equipment, activities, etc. - but no access to, or no specialized equipment,

Score 4: Can get to equipment and some equipment suitable for people with ambulatory impairments, or with a mobility device.

Most play spaces have a relatively low level of accessibility in Wyndham, with some 10% scoring 4. However, only 11% of parks were not accessible (scoring 1). See Table following.

Degree of Physical Accessibility of Play Equipment Areas in Wyndham

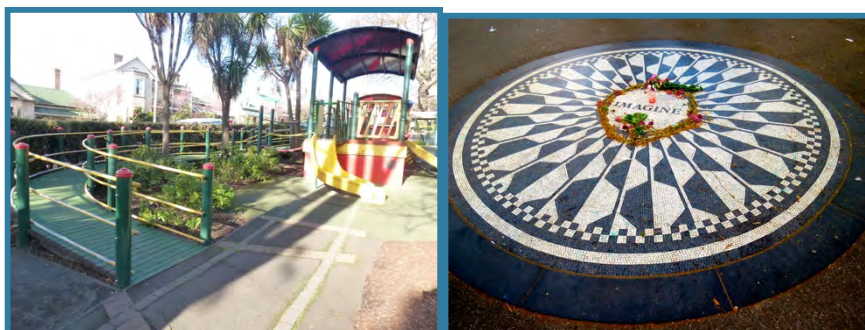
Planning Precinct	% of Spaces by Score:			
	1	2	3	4
Point Cook	3%	33%	56%	8%
Tarneit	-	44%	56%	-
Truganina	7%	20%	47%	27%
Werribee	23%	53%	18%	8%
Werribee South	-	50%	50%	-
Williams Landing - Laverton North	-	-	100%	-
Wyndham Vale - Manor Lakes	21%	32%	32%	16%
Hoppers Crossing	6%	58%	30%	6%
Little River	100%	-	-	-
Total	11%	42%	37%	10%

Some of the newest play spaces in the City - such as the Riverwalk - is not designed to be highly accessible or inclusive, and yet these serve a district catchment. The degree of accessibility should reflect the park's hierarchy. It is not suggested that specialised pieces of equipment are always needed even in district spaces; in fact, many of these are not inclusive. The higher the catchment hierarchy of the open space, the more elements should be made accessible to people with a disability or using a mobility device, and the more specific requirements and supports are appropriate.

Paths as a design element

One of the main uses of local parks (as identified in the Council consultation for the Landscape Design Guidelines project in 2016) was the inability to walk through local parks. In many cases this can be facilitated and encouraged where there are play spaces, even when the space is small. In addition, paths are central to making play spaces accessible to everyone. Paths can encourage the use of a park and hence create passive surveillance, as well as increase the enjoyment of walkers by providing restorative values, views of wildlife and other people, and interesting landscape elements etc.

Paths are important element of play spaces at all hierarchies.

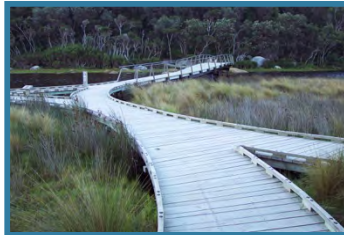


Paths can create a range of opportunities, regardless of how large the park is. For example, they can:

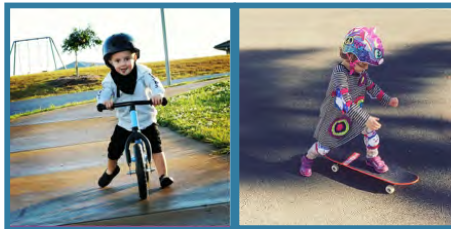
- Provide transitional space between public and private space



- Provide access to, or across, sensitive environments without impact



- Provide for a wide range of wheeled activities for very young children



- Facilitate ball and other games, and provide a blackboard for drawing



- Be embellished with sensory elements to contribute to play value – ie with patterns, textures



- Have culturally appropriate elements added or provide ways for residents to get involved in, and contribute to park design



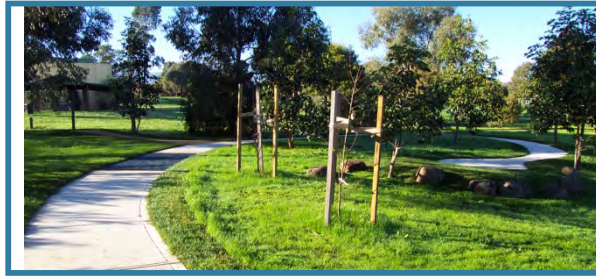
- Create a use for very steep areas of open space that adds interest and play value for every one



- Reduce conflict between different groups, such as runners and toddlers on wheeled devices, by differentiating pavements



- Encourage a sense of discovery and surprise as you are led through a space



- Provide the central spine from which play elements connect, that makes the space accessible to all and integral to the play space design



- Include people who need mobility devices for access, and have a vision impairment.



Be used in small spaces as long as they:

- are designed as a play element
- are embellished to indicate playfulness or cues to play, such as different textures and gradients
- don't unnecessarily alienate parts of the park that is left without activity
- have a surface that be used by everyone on – i.e. not large particles or slippery, or boggy surfaces
- reduce the other available are of the park – i.e. by placing around the perimeter



- Add to the variety of surfaces and topography (elevated / textured areas for example) in play space



Where parks with play spaces are large (over one hectare in size) consider providing an exercise circuit around the perimeter to encourage physical activity, allow children to learn to ride a bike.

Directions: Access and Inclusion

1. All play spaces, paths, and support facilities need to be designed utilising the principles of universal design
2. All play spaces should have a central social heart that encourages social interaction. This should have access to equipment via an accessible path from the street (see images above). Adults using wheelchairs and mobility devices should be able to use facilities such as BBQs and picnic areas

Directions: Access and Inclusion (cont'd)

3. District play spaces should have:
 - A path circuit and a central area - accessible by path to people using a mobility device - that is attractive for gathering, with seats and tables where a person can be seen and interact with others involved in a range of other play elements
 - Tables designed to enable people using a wheelchair to sit with others, and be easily assisted
 - Play elements that include those that enable interaction with others from a wheelchair, such a shop counter, sandbox, steering wheel, or water play that can be engaged in with a clenched fist
 - A rotating or swinging item, suitable for a child that doesn't sit independently, such as a roll-on carousel or a bird's nest swing, or a swing seat with a back and straps
 - Cubbies/shops underneath decks, and elements such as speaking tubes, plant material, steering wheels and other movable and interactive items, that allow a seated child to play alongside other children
4. District and regional play spaces should include way-finding that facilitates people with low vision moving around parks and using equipment safely.
5. Regional parks should provide parking for small buses and accessible vans, accessible toilets and include the widest range of people
6. As a priority, seek to enhance the accessibility and inclusiveness of local parks on which many families depend for their everyday play needs
7. Surfaces of paths should be of stable and compacted materials to enable safe walking and wheeling (sealed or unsealed paths)
8. A selection of reserves with fences should be provided to assist carers of people on the autism spectrum
9. Park information should set out which parks have accessible features
10. District/municipal play spaces such as Riverwalk should be upgraded to provide additional accessible elements

Including people of all ages in play spaces and through park design

If parks are to make people feel welcome, their siting in the neighbourhood and the relationship between the park and housing, as well as their size and their design are important.

The number of park edges directly adjacent to private yards, or without lane separation between a residential building and the park should be minimised.

Parks and play spaces should be green to be attractive. As the climate gets drier, it will be important to provide irrigated areas adjacent to play spaces and canopy trees. Even in areas that are a plaza, the place can be made feel green with pockets of grass and leafy trees.

The community survey conducted for the Council's 2016 Landscape Design /Guidelines found Developers want a unique 'point of difference' when participants saw the importance of having a sense of ownership or place in open spaces.

If residents have some sense of ownership over a play space, they are more likely to use it. While it is essential that local play spaces are developed by the time most residents arrive, (so they have somewhere where they can immediately gather) then there may be scope to leave some elements for further development at a later stage. This way Council can engage with new residents in the park. (For example in additional tree planting or garden areas, embellishing a path or adding a commemorative or interpretative element, or sculptural elements reflecting the origins of local residents). Where resources permit, local residents could be invited to occasional social activities or play days, or encouraged to be involved in regular or staged planting or development opportunities.

If multiple and the widest possible range of ages are to be included in a play space, some separation of activities will be required to minimise conflict.

- Positioning of equipment is important so that there isn't conflict from its use by annoying neighbours (i.e. swings and basketball hoops or skateable items).
- Positioning of kick to kick spaces that are large enough without impacting on other groups, or so the ball doesn't have to be regularly retrieved from neighbours.
- Positioning spaces for boisterous play is important for older children and young adults however it must be located so as not to conflict with areas where people may wish to undertake constructive, or reflective, quiet play, or interrupt social gatherings.

In the consultation for Council's Landscape Design Guidelines project in 2016, a strong theme of intergenerational play emerged.

Design of parks should seek to include play elements and something for all age groups to do, i.e. early, middle and senior school children, as well as young adults, carers, and older adults.



Encouraging intergenerational play

For social inclusion and to enhance the benefits of play across all families it is desirable to a) ensure the widest range of age groups are catered for in each space, and b) encourage adults to play with children.

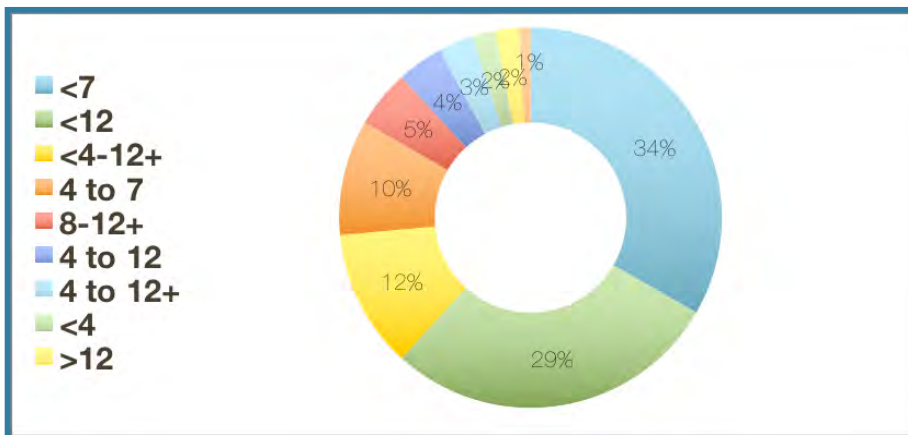
It is not uncommon for busy and tired carers and accompanying adults, not to play with their children, but to sit and relax or be occupied by their phone or other distractions. Education of local park users and mums should promote the value of playing with others and how this can be facilitated.

It is also desirable that social interaction between all age groups should be encouraged through design, but also provide some buffers as required, recognising that the behaviour of some (such as the loud and boisterous play of adolescents, or the crying and noise of mums groups with babies) - while normal - may discourage other age groups.

Ages provided by play equipment

Some 12% of equipment areas have play elements suitable for a full spectrum of children (under 4 years of age and over 12 years), but not necessarily older adults.

The majority of play spaces cater to the age group of under 7 years. The next highest proportion of spaces provides for under 12 years of age.





Currently, in some areas there is a good range of play spaces with associated hard courts or sports practice areas that enable activities, such as small-wheeled toys, scooters, and ball games for teenagers and older residents.

However, many spaces do not have suitable facilities for a continuum of age groups from early, middle and senior years, as well as carers, including older adults.

Older adults

Currently, few play spaces cater well to carers or older people, yet grandparents are the most common form of childcare in Australia today.²

Older people would find play spaces more accommodating if they could include:

- Provision of accessible, safe surfaces on paths, accessible paths of travel around reserves and rails on stairs, higher seating with backs and arms, shelter/shade and toilets, are key features most likely to support older people using parks.
- Accessible central areas in social/family parks that enable older people to socialise with other family members
- Clear way-finding directions in parks and trails
- Furniture close-by to equipment, including that within fenced areas
- Enhanced sense of security through design in parks
- Large clear signage, especially directions to toilets
- Features such as chess sets, bocce courts, etc. in select district social reserves where older people can undertake activities with children

² Grandparent childcare and labour market participation in Australia Productive Aging Centre Melbourne Sept 2015.

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Directions: Age groups

1. Ensure parks with play spaces are sited in prominent locations and are public on at least three sites to encourage them to be seen as welcoming to all the community
2. To encourage older children to use play spaces, Council could consider the following:
 - Continuing to providing social sports and practice facilities in parks, such as hardcourts, goal posts, hit up walls, etc. (unless a school with community access is available in the catchment)
 - Off-road trails connected to play spaces and places to ride bikes
 - Parks in highly social and shopping areas
 - Swings with large seats and multiple swings
 - More tables in parks so they can do things teenagers usually do indoors -out of doors
 - Places where teenagers or older people can sit and read and use a phone with free Wi-Fi
3. Consider the needs of older adults in the design of play spaces to be able to include the whole family, as well as support older people, and carers.

9. FENCING OF PLAY SPACES

It is desirable to fence a selection of play spaces across the municipality, for example one per locality (where a locality has multiple play spaces). Currently, less than 10% of play equipment areas are fenced. However, there are a number of additional parks with timber or steel bollards along the front of the play space.



Fencing contributes to the package of features that some families seek in association with using a park for play. Some families with toddlers, or a large number of children, or children with a hearing impairment or on the autism spectrum and have a tendency to abscond, for example, may seek fenced play spaces. Fencing may also be required to protect children from a hazard such as a water body, wetland or busy road and to keep dogs out of a play space.

Internal fences or barriers may also be required to prevent children running in front of equipment, such as swings.

This image above shows a box gate. A box gate can slow the exit of children and enables a person with a dog to leash/unleash and scan the space, before entry/exit.

Fences are not always beneficial

Fences can present barriers to people using wheelchairs or other ambulatory aids because of the design, i.e. narrow openings, difficulty in reaching child proof latches on gates, or other obstructions to the path of travel. Some parents have complained that bullies can trap a young child inside a fence. A fence can create a false sense of security for some people who use a play space for child minding and don't want to actively supervise their children.

What type of site should be fenced?

Not all play spaces should be fenced, or are suitable to fence.

If a site desirable to fence is small, the whole site is best fenced.

Select sites for fencing that are contained already on at least one or two sides, to reduce the cost and visual impact of the barrier.

Choose a play space to fence that has a good diversity of elements including vegetation, and some open grassed areas for games and that suits the widest range of age groups.

The cost of fencing may double the budget required to build a playground, and this may mean there are limited resources left in a project budget for the play elements. Because of the cost, it is common that the fence is designed as short as possible and therefore presents like a cage restricting the play that usually emanates from the equipment into the surrounding space. Fences around just the play equipment may prevent children from accessing other valuable areas of the park and can reduce the play value of the whole site.

Due to cost, cheap, less aesthetic fences may be installed and give a place an institutional feel if care is not taken to design them with other landscape elements. The edges of parks are crucial in determining their appeal and need to tantalise and welcome the user.

Effectiveness of, and alternatives to fences

Fences are only as good as the gate. If the gate is left open, then the fence is not effective. Any horizontal element in a barrier that is climbable, or the placement of a lower structure (such as a seat) abutting a fence, can render a fence ineffective. A fence will need to be approx. 1800 mm high if it is to act as a serious barrier to absconding children who are good climbers.

Partial fences or decorative barriers may slow children down and direct activity away from hazards without being a traditional fence and be less expensive.

A seat near the opening of a partial fence can help parent supervise the exit point.



The image above shows how a fence can create a cage effect.

Fences, supervision and dogs

Sometimes a fence encourages poor behaviour by carers of children and dog owners. Carers and dog owners sometimes place their children or dogs inside a fenced area, instead of supervising them.



Signs should advise that children are not to be left unattended inside a fenced enclosure.



Decorative fencing as shown in the image can add to the character and play value of a site.

Fence design

The design of a fence can be a positive feature in the landscape, especially when it consists of a landscape features such as a wall, a living fence, hedges or other plant material, or the natural boundary of the site. Alternatively, a fence can be a major visual imposition in a landscape. So, design and careful positioning of a fence are vital. Views into the site need to be maintained through any fence or barrier.

Fencing can be live, delicate and ornate (see images above).



Other considerations related to fence design include:

- Fencing material must be suitable to the context, durable and not get too hot in summer
- Capping (and edging) will be needed for longevity of timber, and needs to remain secure
- Design needs to ensure there are no points of entrapment on fences, no horizontal rails that can be easily climbed, and no sharp and projecting fittings
- Any preservative treatment used on fences needs to be suitable and compliant with relevant safety standards

Avoid using cables or wire fencing that is not easily seen at night, or by a person with a vision impairment

Promotion of where fences are

Fenced play space sites should be well promoted so that residents and visitors who need them can easily find them.

Gates

The presence or absence of a gate will be a critical factor for some parents who need a fully fenced space for their children.

Gates with high, difficult to reach latches can make access for wheelchair users difficult. The latches on gates need regular maintenance and are expensive to replace.

Types of fencing

Suitable cost effective types of fencing for play spaces include:

- Pool type fence (flat topped)
- Chain mesh (black coated mesh with timber posts creates a less utilitarian appearance)
- Timber slats
- Other landscape barriers



Fences around wheelchair swings

Sometimes suppliers recommend fencing of items such as wheelchair swings (such as a Liberty Swing) to prevent people running in front of it. The signage provided with this equipment is sometimes negative, implying it is a "restricted area", and only for wheelchair users. (See images over). Wheel chair swings are generally designed to be used by others not just people in wheel chairs and they should not be segregated from other items even though they could be fenced or positioned so that people don't run across their path.



Directions fencing

1. Provide a selection of fenced play spaces across Wyndham, desirably with at least one fenced site per planning precinct.
2. Selectively identify suitable sites to fence to ensure fencing: does not alienate landscape elements from other play elements or tightly enclose equipment, does not obstruct views into the park, utilises other natural barriers to restrain wandering children.
3. Promote fenced play spaces so these are easily found by people who need them.
4. If items require fencing, the design should not alienate or exclude people and impede social interaction while the swing is in use.

10. MARKETING AND EDUCATION

Council has a role not only in providing for play, but also in promoting the use and value of the activity and play spaces, because without marketing or promotion, use of play space won't be maximised and families won't feel they have choice. Marketing and education is a key role for Council to ensure that a good return is made for its investment in open space.

Not all parks are described on Council website. If more details of parks and play spaces were provided, parents would have a better choice to find the types of spaces that meet their family needs. For example: which play spaces are suitable for a grandparent to sit in the shade? Which parks have accessible paths access or wheel chair swings? Which parks have water, sunny areas, large shady trees, sand play, or suit toddlers or older children? Which parks are fenced, or have a basketball court?

Some families need to plan a trip to the park well ahead because of the extra planning and time required to support a child with a disability, and to avoid the disappointment of a child not being able to get into a space, or use any element, or being excluded from gatherings because of physical barriers, design, lack of support facilities, or shade for example. For many families, a trip to a park may be out of the question without a full fence, accessible toilets, and a kerb crossing for wheelchair access.

Council should provide information about accessibility for all play spaces and district spaces, and provide more information online as to:

- Getting **to** the park
- Access **into** the park
- Access to **social spaces and amenities, and any**
- Play activities once you are there (**participation**) is required.

There will be benefits of additional marketing of Council play spaces, as Wyndham is such a big municipality and not all spaces can provide for everyday play needs, as well as family outings. Council could include information about where to find play spaces and what they offer, information about how to encourage and support play for different aged children, and information to assist parents with what is acceptable as play in a public park.

With the changing nature of public play spaces, promotional information should encourage parents to let their children get dirty, dig, climb on logs, and use the loose material in parks. Information should answer common questions such as “are children allowed to pick the flowers?”

People need to be encouraged to connect with nature and be involved in and use parks, and to be encouraged to use local parks to meet neighbours and friends. This will help encourage greater familiarity with the neighbourhood and children's independent mobility.

Council could provide information about how to be involved in park and who to provide feedback to, in any new resident's kit.



As residential densities increase there is potential for more conflicts in public open space, for example between children and dogs, play and social sport, and boisterous and quiet play, and it will be important to increase education about the responsible and respectful use of parks, including for dog owners.

Given the social determinant of health (age, income, education and cultural background and remoteness) and the high number of people born overseas located in Wyndham, it can be assumed that the value of the natural environment as we know it, the value of play and the Australian landscape may need to be promoted. Brimbank Council, like others, have introduced campaigns such as "Branching Out" to educate newly arrived residents about the value of trees.

Directions: Marketing and education

1. Consider investing in an education campaign about the value of play, using local parks and what they provide, and seeking to align resident's expectations with what Council can afford to provide in local parks.
2. Provide specific information about play spaces and play in a public place for new residents, people born overseas, families who have a child with a disability, and mum's groups.
3. Provide more detailed information about play spaces on Council's website. Include in this, information about:
 - a) accessible elements - especially parks with accessible paths, specialised items of equipment, play spaces with shelters, water, accessible toilets and car park and large number of seats and tables suitable for mum's groups, for example.
 - b) what is acceptable in a public place for children to do and why play is good for children
 - c) how it is beneficial to play with the children you accompany to the park, and how this can be facilitated
 - d) how you can encourage children to interact with nature

11. INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL AND COST OF PLAY SPACE WORKS

The replacement value of play equipment in open space in Wyndham is valued at over ten million dollars. This doesn't include landscape elements, furniture, paths, trees and surfaces and structures for example. This is a major investment by Council that has to be serviced and maintained, in addition to the cost of provision of new play spaces, upgrading the quality of existing spaces and replacing play spaces when they have exceeded their useful life.

Play spaces with equipment, and other parks that may be beneficial to upgrade for play purposes were assessed as part of this project. Some indication of works identified and costed. The table below provides a rough estimation of the cost of these works (although they have not yet been designed).

Table 1 Probable costs of undertaking upgrades recommended in this plan and probable replacement costs of existing play equipment areas

	Probable Capital Cost of Upgrade (000)		Population 2017	Cost Per Capita 17	Cost Per Capita 17	Replace ment (Est.) cost (000)	Per Capita replacement cost 2017
	Play Equipment Reserves	Non Equipment Reserves		Play Equipment Reserves	Non Equipment Reserves		
Planning Precinct						Play Equipment Reserves	
Point Cook	\$1,780	\$165	53,608	\$33.20	\$3.08	\$1,560	\$29
Williams Landing - Laverton	\$95	\$50	7,482	\$12.70	\$6.68	\$30	\$4
Hoppers Crossing	\$2,300	\$155	38,076	\$60.41	\$4.07	\$1,290	\$34
Werribee	\$3,345	\$475	42,090	\$79.47	\$11.29	\$2,020	\$48
Tarneit	\$1,445	\$100	33,866	\$42.67	\$2.95	\$810	\$24
Wyndham Vale	\$1,365	\$945	14,892	\$91.66	\$63.46	\$2,700	\$181
Little River	\$125	\$0	1,145	\$109.17	\$0.00	\$120	\$105
Werribee South	\$150	\$0	2,897	\$51.78	\$0.00	\$1,030	\$356
Truganina	\$840	\$485	22,047	\$38.10	\$22.00	\$570	\$26

If the life of an average play space with equipment is 15 years then the costs of keeping play equipment in good order is likely to be about 7% per year or \$700,000 in total, without allowing for depreciation or the cost of managing elements in play spaces other than play equipment.

There are considerable differences between parks and between play spaces in different planning precincts that mean a budget based on rates from each area can't be assumed will be spent in the same local area.

A number of issues are relevant to the cost and affordability of play equipment. These include:

- Council is unlikely to ever be able to invest in park design as the current development industry does, and because of the quantum of parks reaching 'renewal' at the same time.
- An average replacement cost of just the play equipment in an existing local park is likely to be in order of \$30,000, and for a district park \$60,000 (not including surfacing, paths, fencing and other furniture). For a regional park it may be to be up to one million dollars.
- Many older parks (that were not formally designed and these have a selection of play equipment items located in them) should be redesigned and upgraded to increase play value.
- Some newer parks have been over embellished (above what the site is classified as and what can be provided everywhere) as developers who provide them use play spaces as a marketing tool. Some include expensive structures that limit flexibility and change, and will be costly to replace.
- Sometimes the quality of infrastructure constructed in the land development process is not as durable as Council would typically provide and it requires replacement much earlier than the life Council would typically plan for. Currently the maintenance period for which developers are responsible for, on newly constructed play spaces is only 2/3 years.
- Council rates can only pay a proportion of the cost of replacement of the current value of play equipment. In some areas Council will not be able to collect enough in rates that cover the costs of parks – because there may be a low population and include areas of social housing where rates collected will be lower.
- If Council were to budget for play space upgrades on a per capita basis the cost of upgrades will vary considerably by area from approximately \$100 per capita to less than \$15.
- Currently the replacement value of landscape elements and trees etc are not calculated. As nature play elements, and more canopy trees are included in parks this will be important to calculate and budget for this cost.

Council has several ways of potentially reducing its recurrent costs associated with play spaces to be more affordable. For example:

- Increase the life of asset before replacement (however whilst this may reduce the asset renewal cost if may increase maintenance costs in later years as the condition of items worsen)
- Change maintenance schedules- i.e. the number of times a play space is mowed or inspected) that reduces maintenance cost. However, this may reduce the life of the asset, and usability and not be considered acceptable to residents)
- Increase catchment of parks with play elements from 400 ms to 500-600ms. This would increase the rates per park to maintain it, and reduce the number of play spaces to maintain the space – although in some cases it may mean the carrying capacity of the park is exceeded and therefore the cost in some areas may rise
- Encourage more community involvement in management of play spaces and encourage residents to notify Council when items need to be repaired.

Directions: cost of play works

1. Seek additional funds from external sources for development of play spaces
2. Focus upgrades on nature play elements that will have a longer asset life and require less renewal and maintenance costs
3. Undertake further assessment of costs, for example to maintain nature play elements
4. Include in costings the costs of management and depreciation of trees and other natural elements
5. Through the planning and approvals process ensure that:
 - What is provided by developers is in accordance with the agreed hierarchy of the park
 - That developer play spaces include play elements and infrastructure that is appropriate to Wyndham and can be cost effectively maintained
 - The scale of new developments is what Council can afford to maintain in the long term, or that additional compensation or maintenance terms are negotiated to offset ongoing costs
 - Do not reduce the quality or distribution of local open spaces to reduce recurrent costs

12. APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Definitions

Play Space

In this report, the term *Play Space* has been applied to any purpose-built setting for children's play. Play spaces frequently include play equipment and their accompanying areas of impact absorbing surfacing, but they may also include (or solely consist of) other play elements such as trees, boulders and logs, sand, planting, earth-forming, sculpture, musical items or other natural or man-made elements provided specifically for the purpose of play. The play space can also include open areas of lawn, a small forest, hard or soft surfaces for ball games, ping pong tables, mounds or walls, basketball hoops, etc. - if these are provided in the context of a park or children's play setting.

Play Elements

Play elements include man-made items such as play equipment, as well as natural items such as boulders and logs, sand, planting, earth forming, sculptures, grassy hills, etc., which may be living or have other purposes and sources, but have been brought into a play space to support and enhance children's play. In this context they become *play elements*.

Play Equipment

In this report, the term *play equipment* has been used to mean purpose-designed structures intended to support children's physical, creative, imaginative or social/dramatic play. In this context, this category does not include fitness equipment or sports facilities which may be found in conjunction with play elements.

Loose materials

These are literally things that can be manipulated or moved by the participant. These may include sand in boxes or trays and pebble areas, mulch or leaves and dirt in digging patches as well as water, and in more urban play spaces boxes and blocks that can be brought in and moved around.

'Dress circle' parks

These are parks which have residences closely surrounding them without have transitional space such as a road way between the space and the houses.

Nature Play

For the purpose of this document *Nature Play* is play that occurs in the natural environment.

Nature Play Space

A *Nature Play Space* is a purpose built space designed for play and social interaction where the overarching theme is nature and the area includes a number of play elements that can be found in nature or are living.

A Nature Play Space:

- Is a purpose-built outdoor space that includes natural materials including some that are able to be manipulated, moved around and that may change with the weather and over the seasons, etc.
- Should stimulate as many senses as possible, and encourage children to explore
- Includes natural elements such as durable timber, logs, rocks/stone, grass, water, trees and other plant materials, unsealed areas that may include dirt, sand, leaf litter and grass, as well as terrain, paths and other components
- Offers inherently open-ended play and therefore is adaptable for children's purposes
- Deliberately provides some loose natural materials with which children can engage (these may be sand in some cases; pebbles, dirt, flowers, gum nuts etc., twigs and small branches, water). Plants need to be selected to support or provide these
- Should encourage parents and carers to support and encourage children to feel comfortable in the natural environmental, develop their skills, self-reliance, and adaptability and take on challenges
- May require less intensive management (and commensurately reduces the expectations of the community for the more intense management found in other types of play spaces)
- Is managed with the expectation that children will interact with some loose materials, which may be messy, mean children may get damp or dirty, allow children to construct things, collect or gather or compile found objects, and that these may be spread about the space, and that this is acceptable behaviour.

Contact with nature

Contact with nature means access to living things in a relative natural environment, for example a diversity of plant material, or multiple storeys of vegetation and more than just lawn and specimen trees

Appendix 2. Core Service Levels (Provision of Infrastructure)

The following table outlines the recommended service levels for provision of access and infrastructure in play spaces, by catchment hierarchy. These will assist with aligning Council resources and community expectations and responding to requests from the public for additional facilities.

Table 2. Play Spaces Infrastructure; Desirable Levels of Service

ACCESS Hierarchy	Car parking immediately adjacent	Accessible car space	Bicycle parking	Accessible path of travel to car park	Site served by shared trail	Park perimeter path	Accessible path to seating, shade and equipment	Formed/sealed trail network linking all elements
Local	X	X	X	X	√	X	√	X
District	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Regional	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

O= optional C= When Colocated with sport or other community space

FACILITIES Hierarchy	Seating + tables	Water Drinking	Lighting	Fences	Built Shade / Shelter	Toilet	Fitness Equipment	BBO	Bins	Public Art	Address Signs	Interp's signs	Synthetic softfall	Synthetic pads under	Skateable surface	Hard Court	Kick to Kick/ goals	Nature Play elements	Treed Area
Local	√	X	X	O	X	X	C	X	O	O	√	O	X	O	X	X	X	√	
District	√	√	√	O	√	C	OC	O?	√	O	√	O	O	√	O	√	√	√	√
Regional	√	√	√	O	√	√	OC	√	√	√	√	O	√				√	O	√

VEGETATION and Nature Hierarchy	Canopy Trees	Boundary Tree Planting	Climbable Trees	Planting beds	Irrigated Lawn	Flowering plants	Other specimen trees soft landscape	Loose material s sand /	Water to play in
Local	√	√		X	X	O	√	√	X
District	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	X
Regional	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	O

Play elements	Nature Play	Kick to Kick	Trees	Seating + tables/ social area	Path circuit
Local	√	√	√	X	√
District	√	√	√	√	√
Regional	√	√	√	√	√