

3.4 Community engagement outcomes

Who we engaged

This consultation section summarises the outcomes from the community and stakeholder engagement conducted as part of the Northern Beaches Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Strategy. The consultation was conducted over a 28 week period, from December 2019 to June 2020, and consisted of a series of activities that provided a range of opportunities for community and stakeholders to contribute. The purpose of the consultation was to understand how the Northern Beaches community currently use open space including any emerging trends and what they see are the needs and gaps in the network.

A variety of consultation methods were undertaken to help maximise the opportunity for people across all different ages, abilities and locations to participate. The main consultation activities are summarised below. Written submissions were also received.



Social pinpoint mapping - December 2019 - February 2020

1,458 total comments

The site was open to the public and advertised via Council's Have your Say website, social media channels and the Manly Daily Newspaper. See Appendix C for a summary of comments.



Off road cycling rider survey - January 2020 - February 2020

1,770 responses

The survey was promoted via Council's social media and among key mountain biking and off road cycling groups.



Telephone survey - June 2020 - July 2020

403 participants

Participants were from a representative cross-section of the community. See Appendix B for a complete breakdown of participant data, methodology and responses.



Stakeholder meetings and workshops - February 2020 - June 2020

Workshops were conducted by Council with several key groups including:

- Disability and all abilities services
- Places for People Strategic Reference Group
- Manly Warringah War Memorial State Park Advisory Committee
- Narrabeen Lagoon State Park Advisory Committee
- Council's Youth services
- Off Road Cycling Stakeholder Group
- Headspace Youth Advisory Committee
- Seniors (via the Well to Wellbeing expo)
- Children - through Council's Vacation Care and Pre School programs
- Internal Council stakeholders
- Targeted stakeholder meetings with recreation clubs and resident and special interests groups



What the community value and appreciate

Across the consultation activities, respondents were asked to reflect on how they use open space and what they enjoy about it. The following key themes were identified as highly valued by Northern Beaches residents.

“Manly Dam is a gem; an oasis of natural beauty surrounded by suburbs. It’s possible to escape into this small wilderness and forget you’re in suburban Sydney.”

Social pinpoint participant

Diversity of opportunity

Community consultation showed the majority of people appreciated the diversity of the LGA's recreation and open space network, with 82% of telephone survey participants satisfied with the size of open spaces and 73% satisfied with the diversity of space. This diverse network was highly valued across social pinpoint responses, with many responses highlighting that the range of different open spaces provided a variety of opportunities to engage with the space - from swimming and surfing, to hiking and cycling, picnicking, playing, walking the dog and participating in a range of organised sport.

Access to nature

Consultation participants indicated they greatly appreciate the natural areas in the LGA, noting that these areas provide peaceful spaces to relax, observe wildlife and connect with nature in an otherwise urban environment. This was particularly evident with 90% of telephone survey participants selecting 'being in nature' as their main reason for spending time in open space.

“The friends I have made in my 17 years of walking my dogs here have made my transition into the community so much easier”

Social pinpoint participant

Proximity and views

The majority of consultation participants appreciated having open space close to where they live, with 87% of telephone survey participants satisfied or very satisfied with their proximity to open space. Social pinpoint respondents also indicated they valued views of natural areas, particularly beaches and bushland, so close to home.

Wellbeing benefits

The community greatly valued open spaces as areas which support their health and wellbeing, with fitness/exercise (94%) and mental health (82%) listed as some of the main reasons for spending time in open spaces in the telephone survey.

Other community members reflected that using open spaces for recreational activities not only supported physical health but also provided an opportunity to meet new people and feel part of a larger community, providing a broader social benefit.

Environmental sustainability

A common thread through all community consultation was the desire to protect, preserve and use the LGA's natural open space assets in a sustainable way. People valued the existing habitats and wildlife across the LGA's open space network and wanted to see it protected for future generations. Off-road cyclists also sought opportunities to develop sustainable trails which aim to protect bushland areas and minimise disturbances.



What could be improved

Across the consultation activities, respondents were asked to reflect on key priorities or needs for open space on the Northern Beaches. In addition to requests for new facilities, such as playgrounds, bike parks, basketball facilities and outdoor fitness equipment, the following key themes were identified.

Supporting infrastructure and amenities

Consultation indicated there is a desire for improved supporting infrastructure in open spaces, with only 54% of telephone survey participants satisfied with the current level of supporting infrastructure. Upgrading/expanding services/facilities (e.g. playgrounds, toilets) was also the top priority when telephone survey participants were asked what could be improved about the open space network.

This was also reflected throughout the social pinpoint and stakeholder workshops, with facilities such as water bubblers, taps and toilets commonly raised as important amenities that could help improve the functionality of open spaces.

Some suggested that this supporting infrastructure could be included at the entrances to walking and off-road cycle trails, such as Deep Creek (authorised for walking only), Manly Dam and the Narrabeen Lake loop, as well as at off-leash areas, beaches and outdoor exercise stations. Facilities such as charging stations, meditation areas, shade and study spaces were also suggested by representatives in the youth workshop for inclusion in open space areas.

“My main issue is that I need to hop in the car to get to most of these open spaces ... I would like to see more nice open spaces within walking distance of people’s homes and improve pedestrian access”

Social pinpoint participant - Davidson

Connected and walkable open spaces

Based on the telephone survey, walking is the most popular recreational activity in the Northern Beaches, with 87% of respondents having participated in this activity in the past year and 79% of respondents visiting walking and cycling tracks at least once every couple of weeks.

It was identified by a number of social pinpoint respondents that more walking trails and shared pedestrian/cycleways were needed to help improve connections between open space areas and key places (e.g. from homes and shops).

Representatives from the all abilities workshop also highlighted the importance of people with needs being able to walk to open spaces, noting that this is an important skill for personal development. Connections to local open spaces were preferred as it was viewed that these spaces were less overwhelming for users.

People suggested that new or extended walking and cycling paths could be provided between Five Mile Creek and Deep Creek, at Wakehurst Parkway and along Pittwater Road. It is recognised that Five Mile Creek and Deep Creek contain unauthorised trails which straddle Council managed land and National Park.

Higher quality, cleaner open spaces

While many participants were satisfied with the overall provision of open space in the LGA, others saw opportunities for Council to direct resources to improving and upgrading existing spaces. This is evident across the telephone survey, with upgraded/expanded services/facilities and increased maintenance/cleaning listed as the top two open space improvement priorities.

Providing quality open spaces across the Northern Beaches is also a key priority for the community, with 79% of telephone survey participants regarding this as very important to them.

Some suggested that Narrabeen Lagoon could be improved with regular maintenance to improve the water quality and local ecosystems. Others suggested regular cleaning of off-road and on-road cycling trails to remove debris, such as at Wakehurst Parkway, and along beach promenades.

More inclusive spaces

Representatives from the seniors, youth and all abilities workshops identified a need for inclusive open spaces and play spaces, where everyone has equal opportunity to use and engage in the space. It was suggested that subtle design improvements could be made which would enable greater inclusion and social interaction across all ages.

Suggestions included universally designed picnic tables, all-ages fitness equipment, spaces for carers or older people to sit, ramps, accessible toilets, for-hire wheelchairs and wide gates for prams.

Representatives from the all abilities workshop also highlighted that people with needs often visit places as a group and suggested open spaces be designed to support group activities.

“Clean open space is a valuable resource”

Social pinpoint participant

Greater education and signage for off-road cycling trails

The off-road cycling survey showed that the Northern Beaches is home to an experienced off-road cycling community, with most respondents having intermediate or advanced skills in this activity. However, education around authorised trails is lacking in the LGA. Approximately half (51%) of all respondents were not sure which trails were authorised for access and another 50% were not satisfied with the level of signage provided at trails. People suggested that clear signage and maps need to be provided at all off-road cycling trails to provide greater clarity around authorised routes and the type of skill level needed to complete the course.

“Proper signage and regular maintenance throughout the [off-road cycling] network would be great. Education to riders about endangered plants and animals etc. should be part of the plan”

Off-road cycling survey participant

Off-road cycling amenities and trail diversity

Similar to open space, consultation with off road cycling users indicated there is an opportunity to improve the level and type of supporting infrastructure at trails. Over half (53%) of off-road cycling survey respondents were either very dissatisfied or not satisfied with the existing provision of supporting infrastructure. Survey respondents suggested this provision could be improved by:

- providing bike stations at off-road cycling trails where users could service their bike (e.g. wash/pump tires), access drinking water and view emergency access information. The bike station at Terrey Hills was suggested as a good example which could be rolled out on other trails
- increasing access to carparking near off-road cycling trails
- providing a bus or chair-shuttle service for downhill riding trails
- investigating opportunities to locate a café or coffee van near popular off-road trails (such as Deep Creek) to provide spaces for people to relax and socialise.

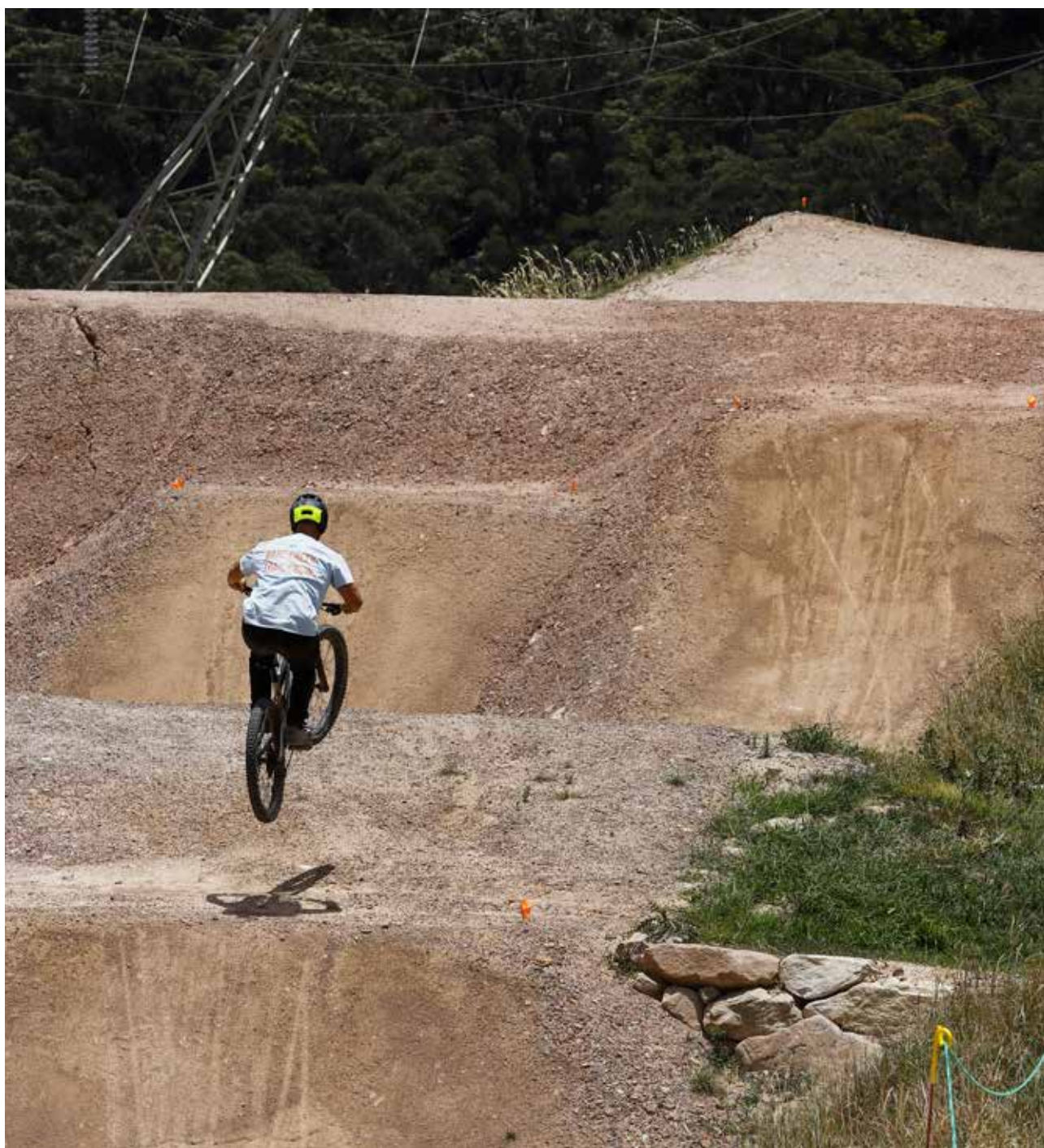
Off-road cycling survey respondents also commented on the need for a more diverse trail network, with 46% of users either very dissatisfied or not satisfied with the range of difficulty levels currently available. Given most respondents had intermediate - advanced skills across all off-road cycling activities, there is a likely to be increased demand for higher-order trails and skills parks. Off- road cycling survey respondents suggested a new mountain biking skills park (with parallel running jumps and drop lines) could be provided to help encourage skills progression in a safe and accessible environment, similar to Greenvaleys Bike Park in Tongarra, NSW

“We need trails that can be legally used for racing and that cover all disciplines. We need trails that allow for progression of skills and for an ever growing user group”

Off-road cycling survey participant

“...if there was a more formal network with more formalised infrastructure (e.g. car park, water stations, signage) it could be world class mountain biking. In terms of missing features, the ability to progress and ride technical features is a must have”

Off-road cycling survey participant



Ideas and opportunities

Across the consultation activities, respondents were asked about their current recreational activities and any new activities they would consider trying. Respondents were also asked for suggestions to improve the use and functionality of open spaces across the Northern Beaches. Below is a summary of some of the ideas and opportunities provided by the community.

“Open grassed parkland is flexible and used for so many different activities..”

Social pinpoint participant

Increased public access

Many social pinpoint respondents requested increased access to beaches and sportsfields for dog exercise.

Some suggested that access to sportsfields and beaches for dog exercise could be made available outside of peak and competition hours and other times where public usage is lower.

Across the responses there was strong support to allow dog- walking along Palm Beach, Mona Vale Beach, Newport Beach, Bilgola Beach and North Curl Curl Beach. Others suggested greater public access to sportsfields, such as LM Graham Reserve, for personal recreation outside of peak and competition hours.

Protect conservation areas and practice sustainable use

Consultation indicated the community highly value natural areas for their conservation role. Some suggested that these areas, particularly at Lakeside Reserve, Nolan Reserve and Manly Dam, should be protected further by increasing conservation areas and restricting the development of hard infrastructure (e.g. courts, cycle paths).

The telephone survey also showed that the top factor influencing open space satisfaction was the sustainable recreational use of natural areas (see Appendix C). This supports the continued need to integrate conservation and sustainability principles in future open space planning.

“...we need to protect and rehabilitate these natural areas so that we can enjoy them for generations to come”

Social pinpoint participant

Increased accessibility through information

Participants in the all abilities and disability sector workshops suggested that access could be improved by providing more detailed information on the LGA's open space areas. This allows users to choose if a space is accessible for them, rather than relying on disability standards which can be limiting and not aligned to individual ability.

Some suggested this information could be presented as an online catalogue or app, where people can easily see details about the size, layout and features of each area. Representatives from the disability sector suggested using the 'Naturally Accessible' guidelines, which provides directions on how to make bushwalking and natural areas more accessible for people with mobility based disabilities.

Embedding visual behavioural leads within playgrounds was also suggested by the all abilities sector. This may include arrows on the ground or signs to encourage sharing on play equipment, helping to support positive behaviour for all, including children with behavioural or intellectual needs.

The disability sector suggested for Council to use the 'Naturally Accessible' guidelines, which can be found at naturallyaccessible.org, to help increase the accessibility of bushwalking and use of natural areas.

Disability sector workshop

Managing commercial and community beach use

Beaches are one of the most visited open spaces across the LGA, with 82% of telephone survey participants visiting a beach at least once every couple of weeks. Unsurprisingly, the Manly catchment had the highest rate of beach use, with 90% of telephone survey respondents from the catchment visiting a beach at least once every couple of weeks (compared to 75% in Terrey Hills/Frenchs Forest).

Alongside general public use, many of Council's beaches support a range of recreational uses which require bookings from stakeholders, such as swimming clubs, organised fitness groups, adventure activities (e.g. hang gliding) and professional sporting competitions.

Workshop participants indicated that many of these groups compete for the same dates across Council's busiest beaches at Freshwater, Manly and Long Reef, creating pressure to ensure there is an equitable provision of commercial and public access.

To help with this, it was suggested that Council develop a clear guideline or policy for managing beach uses. It was suggested that this could outline which beaches are available for commercial hire, the maximum frequency and capacity of events, as well as recommendations for bookings to be undertaken at less popular beaches to help maintain public access.

Invest in strategic off road cycling linkages and authorised trails

While a popular activity, 68% of off road cycling rider survey respondents felt that the current network of authorised off road cycling trails on the Northern Beaches do not meet their needs. There were relatively high levels of dissatisfaction with the distance of trails (43% very dissatisfied - not satisfied), the variability in difficulty levels (46%) and supporting infrastructure (53%).

To help improve the off road trail network, there was strong support among survey respondents to increase the number of authorised trails in the Northern Beaches, with many commenting that these trails provided a better riding experience and difficulty level compared to Council's trails. These included informal or unauthorised trails at:

- Garigal National Park
- Deep Creek/Mt Narra
- Manly Dam

Others also suggested for Council to create more internal linkages between off- road cycling trails to reduce the need to cross busy roads and to enable safer access. Key linkages were suggested between:

- Manly Dam and Garigal National Park
- Narrabeen and Terrey Hills - particularly to reduce the need to cross Mona Vale Road and Wakehurst Parkway
- Seaforth and Frenchs Forest hospital precinct
- Manly to Dee Why

These linkages would be particularly important in the Terrey Hills and Frenchs Forest catchments, with the telephone survey indicating that most off-road cycling users (47%) resided in these catchments. This represents a considerably higher rate of users compared to Brookvale Dee-Why (13%) and Manly (18%).

Although not Council land, the Red Hill area is of high value to riders.

“There is a lot of potential to work with the local riding communities to develop the area for mountain biking and sustainable trail networks and facilities”

Off-road cycling participant