

Executive summary

With vast tracts of open space including parkland, beaches and bushland, Northern Beaches residents and visitors are spoilt for choice when it comes to opportunities to engage with open spaces and to participate in a wide variety of recreation activities. From swimming, surfing and hang gliding along our coast, to off road cycling and horse riding through bushland, from walking or running in a variety of settings, to enjoying our facilities such as playgrounds, outdoor courts and skate parks. Quiet time in nature and on our beaches is also much valued in our community.

Using a catchment planning approach consistent with other Council planning documents, this Northern Beaches Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Strategy (Strategy) and Action Plan analyses the current provision of open space and recreation facilities and makes recommendations to guide how we can continue to meet the recreational needs of residents and visitors over the next 15 years. Progress on the implementation of the Action Plan is dependent on available funding and planning approvals and is intended to be reviewed and updated every five years.

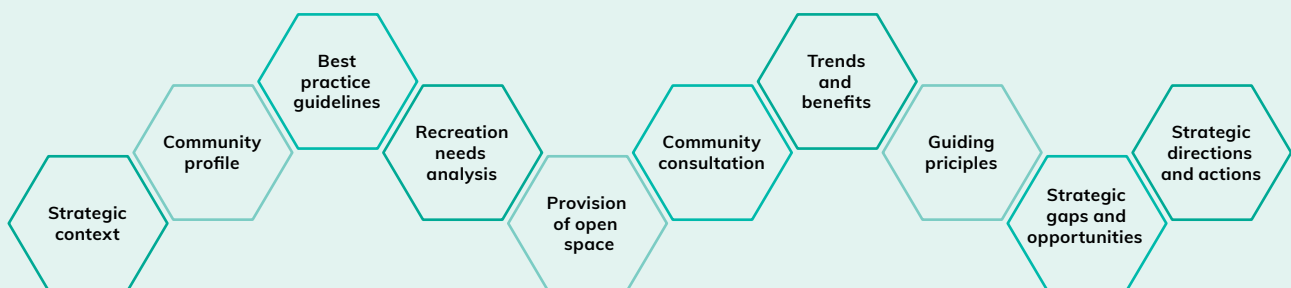
The Strategy considers the changing community demographics, best practice guidelines and trends and benefits that are unique to the Northern Beaches as well as those documented in relevant literature. Some of the key trends outlined include:

- providing a network of interconnected spaces
- supporting healthy living and mental and physical wellbeing
- multipurpose and flexible spaces and facilities
- consideration of quality and amenity in design, maintenance and management (e.g. look and feel)
- realising the full potential of existing open spaces

Although it is difficult to benchmark and compare against other metropolitan Councils with differing environments, research undertaken for this Strategy found that the Northern Beaches is well supplied in terms of quantity of open space and variety of recreation facilities.

Figure 1

Elements of the Northern Beaches Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Strategy and Action Plan



To assist with the gap analysis and to ensure a thorough understanding of recreational needs, a range of consultation methods were employed, including: Social Pinpoint idea mapping; resident telephone survey; off road cycling rider survey; targeted stakeholder workshops and meetings; online consultation via Your Say and written submissions. Consultation activities targeted children, youth, seniors, the disability sector, mental health sector, State Park advisory committees, Council Strategic Reference Groups, resident and special interest groups, various recreation groups as well as the general community.

Overall, engagement activities confirmed that residents' value and appreciate:

- a diversity of recreation opportunities
- access to nature
- environmental sustainability
- wellbeing benefits and
- proximity to open spaces, nature and views.

Suggested improvements include:

- higher quality of open spaces, supporting infrastructure and amenities
- better connectivity of walking and cycling trails
- more inclusive spaces
- playspaces that meet needs
- new and improved opportunities for off road cycling
- additional facilities such as more basketball hoops and outdoor fitness equipment
- cleaner and better maintained open spaces and facilities.

Results of the telephone survey (random stratified survey of residents aged 15 years and over), confirmed variations in participation of certain recreation activities according to where people live. People living in the coastal planning catchments (Manly, Brookvale-Dee Why and Mona Vale) go to the beach more often and are more likely to participate in water based activities. People living in predominantly bushland planning catchments (Frenchs Forest and Terrey Hills) recreate more often in bushland focused activities such as bushwalking and off road cycling. Most residents enjoy activities in both environments to some degree.

The review of facility provision also found variations in distribution across the different planning catchments compared to people's interests. A key focus that emerged was the growing participation in off road cycling and unmet needs of the varying disciplines and skill levels, particularly in the Mona Vale and Brookvale-Dee Why catchments where there are currently no authorised off road cycling facilities. The growing demand for off road cycling goes some way towards explaining the increase in unauthorised trail development which is often environmentally damaging, costly to remove and rehabilitate and Council's efforts to close the tracks are more often than not unsuccessful. Improved provision of off road cycling facilities as recommended in this Strategy is aimed at better meeting the needs of riders and reducing the need for the development of unauthorised trails.

A detailed analysis of the distribution and condition of Council's 217 public playgrounds has been undertaken to inform the Action Plan, with consideration given to inclusivity, diversity, quality and walkability. Again there were discrepancies found in the equity of provision of playgrounds across the five planning catchments. This ranged from a ratio of 0.7 playgrounds per 1,300 people in the Brookvale-Dee Why planning catchment to 2.0 playgrounds per 1,300 people in the Terrey Hills catchment. Manly, Frenchs Forest and Mona Vale planning catchments have 1.0, 1.8 and 1.1 playgrounds per 1,300 people respectively. While considering the differing needs and interests of residents living in each catchment, there is an opportunity to focus playground upgrades in areas that service a large number of people, while ensuring continued provision in areas with barriers to walkability (e.g. main roads or steep hills) and where alternate recreation opportunities are limited.

Through changes to living and working due to COVID-19, our open spaces and recreation facilities have become even more popular and more highly valued. This has put additional strain on the management and maintenance of facilities, including trails, beaches and associated facilities and amenities. In the context of COVID-19 and through the development of this Strategy and Action Plan our priorities have been reviewed.

This document is linked to the State Government and Council strategic planning frameworks and draws on the open space principles developed for the Northern Beaches Local Strategic Planning Statement (2020). The strategic directions and actions respond to the needs identified in this document as well as existing commitments from the three former Council's various plans and strategies as well as current Council initiatives, including the draft Northern Beaches Resilience Strategy which highlights that a resilient community is cohesive, connected and engaged. All actions fall under one of the following Strategic Directions:

- 1. Inform and Understand**
- 2. Links and Loops**
- 3. Better and Brighter**
- 4. Growth and Gaps**
- 5. Management and Planning**
- 6. Ongoing Maintenance**

With almost 200 actions, some of the key priorities identified include:

- providing 7 new playgrounds at: Parkes Road Reserve in Collaroy Plateau; Ashley Reserve in Fairlight; Brick Pit Reserve in Frenchs Forest; Fielding Reserve in Collaroy; Condoover Reserve in North Balgowlah; Forestville Park; and McDonald Street Road Reserve in North Manly.
- prioritising playspace upgrades to offer higher quality and diverse play experience that benefit a broad range of people, rather than smaller playgrounds/ playspaces that service a smaller catchment. This may include alternate facilities for older children and youth such as bike parks and basketball facilities
- developing new and improved off road cycling facilities for a broad range of interests and skills, including improvements to the Manly Warringah War Memorial State Park (Manly Dam) mountain bike trail, new bike parks, formalising some unauthorised trails and continuing to work with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) on additional cross tenure trails
- installing outdoor fitness equipment and basketball/netball/multi-use courts at appropriate locations and where there is demand
- improving maintenance regimes (particularly in key areas and during periods of high use) to increase the standard of service to provide a higher quality and more consistent experience e.g. toilet cleaning and maintenance, park furniture and facilities maintenance, rubbish collection, trail maintenance, management of long grass and weeds
- reviewing sportsground amenities and identifying opportunities for improved facilities
- Developing a Dogs in Public Places Policy (Dog Policy) in consultation with the community and identifying opportunities to improve to the provision of quality spaces for people to enjoy time outdoors with their dogs
- improving green/recreational grid connectivity between open spaces, town centres schools, public transport and other key locations
- continuing to support the sustainable recreational use of bushland and managing edge effects
- continuing supporting parks, garden and trail volunteers
- continuing to partner with the NSW State Government regarding shared access of school grounds and facilities and new parks
- undertaking an Indoor Sport and Recreation Needs Study.
- continue to seek funding from other tiers of government and explore corporate sector and other funding opportunities.