

# Recreation and Leisure Strategy 2015-2021

## Volume 2: Play Strategy

September 2015

*Adopted by Council on 2 September 2015*



# Moorabool Shire Recreation and Leisure Strategy 2015-2021

## Volume 2: Play Strategy (September 2015)

### About this document

This report is the Play Strategy for the Moorabool Recreation and Leisure Strategy. It has two accompanying reports:

1. Volume 1: Moorabool Facilities Strategy Plan
2. Volume 3: Background Report

The Facilities Strategy Plan incorporates an overview of all research information used to inform the facilities strategy plan, and includes a series of recommendations for new and upgraded sporting and recreation facilities, and recommendations for the development of a number of new policies.

The Background Report is a compilation of research carried out to inform the Recreation and Leisure Strategy. It was initially prepared as a discussion paper for the purposes of receiving feedback from Councillors and staff on the existing provision and management of recreation and leisure facilities, and interim directions proposed for the future delivery of recreation and leisure in Moorabool Shire.



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## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4.0 Vision and Planning Principles</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1.0 Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>	4.1 Vision	19
1.1 Aim of the Strategy	4	4.2 Planning Principles	19
1.2 Methodology	5		
1.3 Scope of the Study	5		
<b>2.0 Our community</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5.0 Existing Play Spaces within Moorabool Shire</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1 Shire Overall	6	5.1 Policy Context	21
2.2 Population Projections and Age Cohorts	6	5.2 Number of Play Spaces and Play Space Hierarchy	21
2.3 Implications for play space planning	8	5.2.1 Local Play Spaces	21
		5.2.2 District Play Spaces	22
		5.2.3 Regional Play Spaces	22
<b>3.0 The Value of Play</b>	<b>9</b>	5.3 Play Space Design Matrix	23
3.1 Definition of Play	9	5.4 Assessment of the Quality of Public Play Space Opportunities in Moorabool Shire	27
3.2 Types of Play	9	5.5 Gaps in Provision of Play Opportunities in Moorabool Shire	29
3.3 Definition of Play Space	9	5.6 Management and maintenance of play spaces	30
3.4 Benefits of Play	10	5.7 Marketing of play spaces	33
3.5 The Value of Play to a Community	10	5.7 Process for developing play spaces in new sub-divisions:	35
3.6 Creating Play Value	13		
3.7 Barriers to Play	14	<b>6.0 Distribution of Play Spaces in Moorabool Shire</b>	<b>37</b>
3.8 Trends in play spaces	16	<b>7.0 Analysis of Gaps and Opportunities</b>	<b>42</b>
		7.1 Gaps	42
		7.2 Opportunities	44
		<b>8.0 Recommendations and Guidelines</b>	<b>45</b>
		<b>9.0 Definitions</b>	<b>49</b>

## Executive Summary

Moorabool Shire Council recognises that play is a major contributor to a child's health, wellbeing, education and physical, social and cognitive development. It also recognises that play is an important tool in the development of strong community connections. Play helps children to learn about the world in which they live, learn how to get along with others, engage with nature, challenge themselves, learn new skills and to simply enjoy themselves alone or with family and friends.

Although we often attribute play simply to the world of children, in fact, parents, grandparents and carers can benefit enormously from play through their interactions with their children or children in their care during play. Playing together can help them to develop strong bonds and relationships. Parents and carers can also pass on skills and knowledge to children by teaching them about properties of materials, how to master certain activities and about the natural world. Much enjoyment can be gained by parents and carers from watching children play. Whilst at the play space, they may also develop social connections with other parents, grandparents and carers who are present at the same site.

It is wrong to think that play only occurs in designated playgrounds or play spaces. Instead, play can occur in parks, at recreation reserves, in the street, in a shopping centre, near a river, in the bush, in a school ground, in a backyard or anywhere a person chooses to play. It is therefore important to consider all areas of public space as potential play sites and design them in such a way as to encourage independent and spontaneous play.



Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises the importance of play at the international level. This key document recognises play as a right for all children. Council also recognises the important role play offers in relation to the development of children, their families and the broader community. It has therefore commissioned this Play Strategy to identify a strategic framework to guide play space design, development, management and maintenance throughout the Shire over the next ten years.



A vision and planning principles were developed to accompany this play strategy. The vision adopted by the Play Strategy is:

## Moorabool: creating playful communities

The eight planning principles to accompany the vision state that play spaces in the Moorabool Shire will:

- Be inviting and welcoming
- Be well designed and planned
- Encourage a diversity of experiences
- Be inclusive and accessible
- Be connected to communities and transport links
- Promote community interactions
- Respect and protect heritage, natural environment, biodiversity and cultural features
- Be well maintained.

There are currently 59 play spaces on Council's Play Space Audit, 47 of which are publicly accessible at all times, and 38 of which are owned by Council.

To assist Council to identify where to best invest in play spaces, it is recommended that priority be given to local play spaces and regional play spaces over district play spaces. Local play spaces are accessible to the whole community due to their location within residential neighbourhoods and they provide a range of play opportunities which children and their parents / carers can access independently or via active transport. These spaces provide valuable, inexpensive physical activity and socialisation opportunities in communities. It is important, nevertheless, that these spaces are well designed, inclusive, feature appropriate supporting

infrastructure and offer a diversity of play opportunities in an attractive setting. Regional play spaces, because of their size and catchment, can provide a much greater range of activities and experiences and may attract people from the entire Shire and beyond. High quality regional facilities can instil a sense of pride and unique character in communities and add to the sense of place. However, there is still a place for district play spaces within Moorabool's suite of play opportunities, especially in the larger rural townships and districts.



A design matrix has been developed to provide an indication of the type of experiences, opportunities and infrastructure that should be available at play spaces, depending upon the hierarchy in which various play spaces have been categorised.

Although Moorabool Shire has some high quality, much loved play spaces; the current system of managing play spaces appears to be primarily based on replacement of play equipment at the end of its lifespan, and regular risk assessments and audits. Whilst both of these tasks are important, there appears to be a gap in relation to the development of play value, diversity of play opportunities, inclusion and accessibility. Hence there is still room for improvement at many play spaces within the Shire. This Play Strategy has therefore identified opportunities to:

- Improve play value and the distribution of play spaces throughout Moorabool Shire.
- Improve play opportunities by focussing on developing a diversity of opportunities and creating informal, spontaneous play opportunities throughout the Shire for people of all ages and abilities.
- Improve inclusion for people of all abilities.
- Improve supporting infrastructure at play spaces, such as natural shade, seats and paths.
- Improve landscaping and public art at play spaces.
- Create better connections to cycling / walking networks.
- Identify appropriate resource levels to maintain and renew existing play stock.
- Provide play opportunities for under-serviced age groups, e.g. 0-2 year olds and young people over 8 years of age.
- Increase natural play opportunities and loose materials in play spaces.

- Increase the number of play spaces which offer tactile / sound / sensory experiences.
- Increase the number of play spaces that offer challenging activities.
- Improve marketing practices, including web based opportunities.
- Improve coordination of play space development through the establishment of an Internal-Council working group and identification of Council champions to progress the Strategy.



**Figure 1: Navigators Recreation Reserve Playground**

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Aim of the Strategy

The purpose of the Play Strategy is to provide Council with a plan for the provision of well located, well designed, fun and accessible play spaces across the Shire. It specifically aims to:

- ❖ Develop a **clear vision** in relation to a Council play strategy
  - ❖ Establish appropriate **principles and hierarchical structures** to inform Council in the location of, design, refurbishment, enhancement and management of public play spaces
  - ❖ **Promote the importance of play** as an essential part of children's development, health and wellbeing, social interaction, and creation of community connections for both children and families.
  - ❖ Establish processes to ensure that the **community is involved in the planning** of play spaces (including children)
  - ❖ Establish **guidelines** for the minimum provision and management of outdoor playground environments and associated infrastructure within Council owned facilities.
  - ❖ Provide a strong **commitment and leadership** to ensure that quality play environments and experiences are available for all children and families.
- ❖ Inform the process to develop appropriate **policies and procedures** to ensure maintenance and inspection regimes are consistently and routinely implemented to ensure that local playgrounds are safe and structurally sound.
  - ❖ Ensure that the Strategy **complements** relevant documentation such as Council strategies and the Australian Safety Standards for play equipment.
  - ❖ Provide an **equitable distribution of quality playgrounds** at facilities across the Shire and identify gaps or shortfalls in current playground provision which Council can work toward addressing over time.



Figure 2: Yendon Recreation Reserve Play Space



## 1.2 Methodology

In order to prepare the Play Strategy, the following methodology was utilised:

- Literature review
- Assessment of the value of play
- Trends analysis
- Spatial analysis
- Visual inspection and assessment of existing play spaces
- Development of play space hierarchy
- Identification and analysis of gaps and opportunities
- Development of a set of recommendations and guidelines.

## 1.3 Scope of the Study

Although play spaces can include a range of different types of places, both indoors and outdoors, for the purposes of this Play Strategy, play spaces refer to the following:

- Areas of public open space containing play equipment (including skate facilities and BMX facilities)
- Public sports reserves containing play equipment (including skate facilities and BMX facilities)
- Primary school playgrounds
- Pre-school playgrounds (owned by Council)

Open space areas such as bush land, conservation areas, and roadside reserves, although often used for play, have not been specifically identified as 'play spaces' in this Play Strategy. However such areas have been considered in the spatial analysis as providing important play opportunities where gaps exist in the provision of formal playground or other public open space.



**Figure 3: Mill Park Reserve, Ballan**



## 2.0 Our community

### 2.1 Shire Overall

The estimated population of the Moorabool Shire in 2011 was 28,125 people. This is an increase of 10.4% since 2006, being a marginally lower rate of population growth than for Metropolitan Melbourne (10.9%) over the same period, but significantly higher than Regional Victoria (5.5%).

Moorabool Shire has a relatively low level of cultural diversity compared to Metropolitan Melbourne, with 83.1% of residents Australia-born compared to 63.3%, but similar to Regional Victoria (84.3%). Of all people born overseas in Moorabool Shire (12.2% of the population), a majority were born in the English speaking countries of the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

Average weekly household income levels are lower in Moorabool Shire when compared to Metropolitan Melbourne but are significantly higher than all of Regional Victoria, as shown by the proportion of households earning less than \$1,000 per week at 38.0% in Moorabool Shire, compared to 34.3% in Metropolitan Melbourne but a high 47.1% in Regional Victoria.

In relation to socio-economic disadvantage, Moorabool Shire has a SEIFA Index<sup>1</sup> score of 1008.5, placing it 52<sup>nd</sup> of the 79 municipalities in Victoria. This places Moorabool Shire in the least disadvantaged 35% of all municipalities. However, there are pockets of disadvantage in the Shire, including Bacchus Marsh, Maddingley and Ballan.

There is a slightly higher proportion of Moorabool Shire residents who live in households with children (46.0%) compared to Metropolitan Melbourne with 44.0%, and 37.5% in Regional Victoria. This validates the 'younger' population profile and higher mid-age adult population.

### 2.2 Population Projections and Age Cohorts

The population of Moorabool Shire is projected to grow to more than 51,000 people by 2041 (an increase of 81% between 2011 and 2041)<sup>2</sup>. The projected population growth will not be uniform across the Shire, with a significant proportion of the growth to occur in the east, and this is one of the key considerations to predicting the future play space needs of Moorabool Shire. Table 1 shows that Bacchus Marsh and Surrounds will experience 76% of all projected growth in the Shire to 2041, whilst Moorabool Central (Ballan) will experience 21% and West Moorabool 3%.

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<sup>1</sup> SEIFA Index is the Socio-Economic Index for Australia and is derived from attributes such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, jobs in relatively unskilled occupations and variables that reflect disadvantage. The lower the index value, the greater the relative disadvantage of an area.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Moorabool Shire Council Retail Strategy, MacroPlanDimasi, 2014.

Table 1 – Comparison of Projected Population Growth between Bacchus Marsh and Surrounds, Ballan and the Rural Balance

Location	2014 Population	Projected 2021	Change '14 to '21	Projected 2041	Change '14 to 2041
Bacchus Marsh and Surrounds	20,280	24,920	4,640	35,870	15,590
Moorabool Central (Ballan)	7,350	8,190	840	11,590	4,240
West Moorabool	3,550	3,620	70	4,270	720
Total Shire	31,180	36,730	5,550	51,730	20,550

Another key factor in predicting future play space needs will be to understand the projected growth within specific age cohorts throughout the Shire. Table 2 shows that there is significantly more growth expected to occur in the age cohorts of 0-11 years and 5-39 years in Bacchus Marsh and Surrounds compared to Ballan and the rural areas of the Shire.

Table 2 – Comparison of Projected Population Growth by Age Cohort between Bacchus Marsh and Surrounds, Ballan and the Rural Balance<sup>3</sup>

Location	0-11 Years		5-39 Years		60+ Years	
	2014 Population	Projected 2041	2014 Population	Projected 2041	2014 Population	Projected 2041
Bacchus Marsh and Surrounds	2,942	4,885	8,156	13,447	3,276	7,243
Ballan	461	850	1,228	2,369	708	1,680
Rural Balance	1,559	2,446	4,200	6,378	2,266	4,574

The age cohorts of 0-11 years and 60+ years are important, as trends of growth or decline in these cohorts are important as indicators to assess how the profile of a population might change during the forecast period, i.e. is it ageing, or is it to remain young? The age cohort of 5-39 years is important as most people who are actively involved in organised sporting activities will fall within this age cohort, so the trend of growth or decline in this age cohort can be used to predict with some confidence if the overall demand for sporting facilities is likely to increase, be stable or decrease during the forecast period

<sup>3</sup> Source: Forecast id, Council's Website.

## 2.3 Implications for play space planning

The net projected population increase in Moorabool Shire to 2041 will result in a corresponding increase in demand for access to play spaces.

The areas likely to experience the most growth are Maddingley, with a projected increase of 3,115 people aged 5-39 years over the next 27 years, and Bacchus Marsh with an increase of 2,423 5-39 year olds<sup>4</sup>. These areas should be the focus of development of new play spaces within the Shire.

The increased number of older adults will also trigger new demand for parks, walking paths and open space with shade and seating. Good access to play spaces for residents will continue to be important, not only for young families but for areas in the Shire where older adults have a dominant profile, due to the increasing trend for grandparents to be a preferred carer during the day for families where both parents are working, or in the case of single parent families, the sole parent is working.

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<sup>4</sup> Forecast id, Council's Website.

## 3.0 The Value of Play

### 3.1 Definition of Play

*Play is spontaneous activity freely chosen by people as a way of expressing themselves; exploring the world in which they live; socialising with others; challenging themselves; and having fun.*

The importance of play is recognised at an international level as being an invaluable component of children's lives and their development. Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>5</sup> states:

"That every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts".



<sup>5</sup> United Nations – cited on International Play Association website:  
[http://www.ipaworld.org/ipa/ipa\\_article31.html](http://www.ipaworld.org/ipa/ipa_article31.html)

### 3.2 Types of Play

There are three main types of play:

Type of Play	Components
<b>Cognitive</b>	imaginative play, sensory experiences, creating and manipulation of objects – e.g. mazes, cubby houses.
<b>Social</b>	undertaken with other children – imaginative games, role plays, hop scotch, snakes and ladders, giant chess sets.
<b>Physical / active play</b>	running, jumping, balancing, rolling, swinging, climbing

### 3.3 Definition of Play Space

The term 'play space' refers to the entire site where play can occur, rather than just the site where play equipment or opportunities are located. Play spaces can be formal or informal and provide both structured and unstructured play opportunities. A play space may include landscaping, paths, lighting, fencing, open space for ball games, seating, shade structures, toilets, picnic areas, drinking fountains and BBQs as well as traditional play ground equipment (such as swings, slides and climbing structures) or other items which can be used for play, such as logs, rocks, sand, mounds, and water features. Play spaces can be located in parks, at recreation reserves, in early childhood settings, in the street, next to a river, in the bush, in natural settings, shopping precincts or anywhere a person chooses to play.



### 3.4 Benefits of Play

According to the International Play Association<sup>6</sup>, play is “one of the best means to ensure the maximum potential development of every individual and the communities in which they live. Play stimulates creativity and is essential to the emotional, cognitive and physical development of the whole child, regardless of their level of ability”. Play, particularly in centre-based settings, also has enormous potential to educate children about themselves, others and the world in which they live.



Best Play, produced by three UK organisations<sup>7</sup> identifies the benefits of play for children as:

- “Freedom, choice and control over their actions.
- Test boundaries and explore risks.
- Physical, social and intellectual experiences”.

Best Play also identifies the benefits of play developed over time for children as:

- “Independence and self-esteem.
- Social interaction and respect for others.
- Supports well-being, healthy growth and development.
- Increases knowledge and understanding.
- Promotes creativity and capacity to learn.”

### 3.5 The Value of Play to a Community

Whilst there is generally support for the provision of play opportunities within a local government area and recognition of the physical and mental benefits that play and physical activity can offer, the level of support is sometimes contested. Benefits of play and physical activity include:

- Improved balance and coordination, resulting in fewer falls.
- Stronger muscles, joints and bones.
- Improved motor skills.
- Greater sense of achievement.
- Higher energy and concentration levels.
- Less likely to become overweight or obese.

<sup>6</sup> International Play Association – website: <http://www.ipaworld.org/home.html>

<sup>7</sup> The National Playing Fields Association, The Children’s Play Council and PLAYLINK (2000)

- Improved confidence and self-esteem.
- Improved body image.
- Reduced risk of type 2 diabetes, colon cancer, heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure.
- Reduced likelihood of suffering from depression and anxiety.
- Reduced stress levels.
- Reduction in incidence and severity of illness and disability.
- Increased life expectancy.

But what is the cost of not providing such opportunities for physical activity? From a health perspective, physical inactivity is estimated to cost Australia \$13.8 billion annually, and the health sector alone \$719 million. 16,178 premature deaths can be attributed to physical inactivity each year (VicHealth: 2010).



**Figure 5: Bullarook Recreation Reserve Play Space**

Local play spaces that are accessible to neighbouring residents via foot or bicycle are key community assets where physical activity can occur (both as part of the journey and the destination), without having to pay fees, join a team or rely on a certain number of players to participate.

Play spaces also provide opportunities for people in a community to meet, socialise and get to know their neighbours. Such interactions help to strengthen community bonds and friendships and create social capital – thereby reducing the potential for social isolation, loneliness, depression, and associated mental health issues. If a community has been involved in the development of a play space, residents are more likely to develop a sense of ownership of the space and look after the site. The potential for vandalism and other anti-social behaviour is likely to be

lessened where there is genuine community involvement and ownership. The value of play spaces to the general community is significant.

Nature Deficit Disorder is a phenomena identified by Louv (2005)<sup>8</sup> after ten years of researching children's access to and participation in nature in the USA. He reported that children are spending less time outdoors than previous generations of children, resulting in a wide variety of behavioural problems such as "attention difficulties and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses".



**Figure 6: Water play at Muddy's Playground in Cairns, QLD**

Bagot (2005)<sup>9</sup> also identifies the value of natural environments over built environments to children's physical and mental health. She argues that natural based settings assist children to concentrate more effectively and to engage more effectively in both physical and creative play.

<sup>8</sup> Louv, Richard (2005), *Last Child in the Woods*, pg 36

<sup>9</sup> Bagot, Kathleen (Monash University) (2005), *The Importance of Green Play Spaces for Children – Aesthetic, Athletic and Academic*

### 3.6 Creating Play Value

According to best practice, well utilised play spaces are those that offer a high degree of play value, are generally those that:

- Are inclusive and accessible to all members of the community, using universal design principles.
- Are well designed and provide an inviting, welcoming and stimulating atmosphere.
- Involve communities in the design of the play space, including children.
- Balance safety with risk taking opportunities.
- Have been designed with the whole park and play precinct in mind and provide suitable amenities.
- Offer a range of different opportunities for play and interaction in a space that is sufficient in size for its purpose and allow for change and evolution.
- Provide opportunities for people to interact with the natural environment.
- Promote and protect cultural, natural and heritage features.
- Are well connected to homes via cycling / walking tracks, public transport and roads.
- Are designed with sustainability in mind and are well cared for from a management and maintenance perspective.
- Encourage interactions by the whole community and allow children of all ages to play together.
- Are well promoted to the community, i.e. there is strong public awareness.
- Often provide opportunities for the purchase of food and beverages nearby, e.g. coffee.

Underutilised play spaces, or those that offer limited play value, are generally those that:

- Only meet the needs of a limited number of people within the community and are unable to evolve or change with the community.
- Look and feel tired, run down and boring.
- Don't involve the local community in their design.
- Are considered unsafe or at the other extreme, not sufficiently challenging.
- Do not have sufficient amenities such as seating, shade or paths at the site.
- Provide limited play opportunities and limited play value.
- Do not enable opportunities to interact with the natural environment.
- Are not well connected to homes via cycling / walking tracks, public transport and roads (i.e. are tucked away).
- Have a sense of being uncared for, e.g. rubbish, overgrown grass, graffiti, and dog faeces.
- Do not allow opportunities for the community to interact.
- Are not known by the general community.
- Have too much interference from local neighbours.
- Are located next to major barriers such as busy roads or railway lines without sufficient access or buffers.
- Are not well sited and not easily visible.



### 3.7 Barriers to Play

The lack of information about appropriate play spaces may be a factor that prevents families and young people from accessing play spaces. Similarly, if the closest play space is some distance from a child's home, it may be difficult for him / her to access a place to play. These are two areas in which Council can make a difference.

Whilst the Play Strategy focuses on improving play opportunities across the Shire, it needs to be recognised that there are broader barriers to play at a societal level that impact on how well utilised play spaces are and how often and where children play in general outdoors. Some of these barriers cannot be addressed by the Moorabool Shire through the Play Strategy, but need to be identified nevertheless.

'Stranger danger', or the fear that a child may be harmed by someone unknown to them, who may be lurking around a play space or en route to the play space is one of the key barriers that discourages parents from allowing their children to play outdoors outside the home.

A critical part of growing up and play is to explore boundaries and risks; however the litigious society in which we live has also reduced the challenging components of many play spaces to a point where children are no longer interested in using some play spaces and may view them as sterile and boring.

Fear of bullying by other children, often older children, also prevents some parents from allowing their child to visit a play space or some children from wanting to visit a play space alone or with similar aged friends.

Parental lifestyle whereby parents are increasingly both working and working long hours, limits opportunities for parents to take their children

to play spaces. Instead, there has been a growth in organised junior sport in recent years. Whilst this keeps some children physically active, it does not promote opportunities for creative play or self-driven play. Rather, it is highly programmed and regimented by adults, thereby restricting a child's control over their preferred type of play.



**Figure 7: Organised Junior Sport**

Similarly, the play opportunities in the school environment are far more controlled than they were in past generations. Play time or recess is closely monitored by teachers, who have been given an increased duty of care in recent years to ensure that children do not have serious accidents in the school yard. Through no fault of their own, teachers have to supervise play more and more in the schoolyard, thereby inadvertently taking control and creativity away from children in relation to the type of play they choose to engage in.

The traditional quarter acre housing block is rare in urban Australia now. Many homes now built on much smaller blocks than they were in the past, with the house taking up most of the block and only a very small backyard available. This limits the space that children have to play outdoors.

Our high reliance on vehicles has resulted in more and more traffic in streets, and has consequently made it difficult for children to play games such as cricket, football, hop scotch or chase in the street. The increasing amount of traffic then has an impact on how children access play spaces. Parents may feel that roads have become too busy and that there are no safe access routes to a play space, so they in turn will drive their children to play spaces, which in itself exacerbates the traffic problem. It also takes away the opportunity for children to develop their skills and enjoyment in terms of accessing play spaces independently.

An increasing reliance on electronic games and computers for entertainment may also diminish demand for play spaces by young people. Such activities discourage physical activity and will often restrict interaction with others. Use of these devices needs to be monitored carefully so that children have the opportunity to develop and explore the natural environment.

Finally, the lack of awareness of the value of unstructured play in the lives of children by the general community in terms of physical, social, cognitive and emotional development is one of the major impediments to promoting opportunities for young people to play.

This Play Strategy can therefore have an impact upon the quality and distribution of play spaces as well as identifying ways in which to promote greater awareness of the location of play spaces, but is limited in terms of its ability to change societal attitudes and trends.



**Figure 8: Bungaree Recreation Reserve Play Space**

### 3.8 Trends in play spaces

Play spaces are continually evolving and changing to meet the needs of the community. According to observations within the Australian play industry and USA based Recreation Management<sup>10</sup>, some of the trends currently impacting on play spaces at both a national and international level, are a growth in the following:

1. Play spaces designed and constructed by developers and built into new residential areas, generally handed over to Local Government Authorities to manage when lots are developed and after a pre-determined maintenance period.
2. Play spaces designed and driven by landscape architects as opposed to standard off the shelf play equipment purchases.
3. Partnerships between designers of play spaces and playground suppliers to produce more custom made or individualised equipment that reflects local needs.
4. Using artists to help create a sense of place or to develop a prominent theme in play spaces through sculptures and other forms of art.
5. Play spaces as part of a larger park master plan.
6. Integrating plantings within play spaces so that the landscape becomes part of the play space and part of the overall experience.
7. Educational or interpretive components within play spaces, e.g. cementing faux fossils into the bottom of a sandbox.
8. Physically challenging components.



**Figure 9: Mural at Muddy's Playground, Cairns, QLD**

9. Site specific design (i.e. working with the environment, such as existing trees, and the slope of the site) as opposed to an equipment-centric design approach.
10. Play spaces featuring water play outside aquatic centres (e.g. misters, sprayers, oscillating sprinklers, in-ground geysers, stationary water guns and cannons, and sculptures that emit water).
11. Designs incorporating multiple levels, intimate spaces, creative entry and exit points and imaginative interiors as opposed to flow through playground designs that soon lose the interest of young people.

<sup>10</sup> Klingensmith, Dawn in Recreation Management – *Play Hard: the latest in playground philosophy, design and components*: <http://www.recmanagement.com/200607fe02.php>





**Figure 10: Water Park in Germany**

12. Electronic play components incorporated into the outdoor play space, e.g. a device that records voices and plays them back in a distorted manner or a device that answers children's questions in a similar manner to the Magic 8 Ball, or projection of images into play space.
13. Play spaces which incorporate natural materials, indigenous vegetation and pre-existing landforms with environmentally inspired structures, e.g. water features, low tree houses, tree stump climbs, rock gardens, and boulders, as opposed to brightly coloured components that don't complement the surroundings.

14. Universally accessible play spaces which incorporate items such as ramps that go to the top of a structure, sand boxes raised to table height, swings with high backs and contemporary equipment to suit people of all abilities.
15. Spontaneous play opportunities in the urban environment.
16. Freestanding structures and spinners in play spaces.
17. Features that can be scaled, such as realistic rock structures, climbing walls, spatial net climbers, and geodesic or geometric climbers.
18. Sand and water tables.



**Figure 11: Woodend Playground featuring natural play opportunities**

19. Play spaces that incorporate opportunities for ball games and running games as well as equipment based activities
20. Privately operated indoor play spaces.
21. Play opportunities for 0-2 year olds incorporating equipment such as short tunnels, sliding beads, and mirrors, on a surface that allows infants to crawl, lie or roll.



22. Development of skate parks within a broader youth hub incorporating performance space, halfcourt basketball / netball courts, meeting places and flexible space for other physical activities.
23. Activities for young adults such as parcour, whereby people use existing fixed structures in the urban environment as part of an obstacle course (e.g. fences, walls, seats, and trees).
24. Provision of supporting infrastructure such as toilets, seating, lighting, signage, viewing areas for carers, shade, drinking water, bicycle racks, as well as connections to walking and cycling paths.
25. Involving communities in the design and management of play spaces.
26. Urban sporting reserves being used for informal play.
27. Interaction with nature.
28. Promotion of dramatic play.
29. Employment of play workers in some parks in the UK.
30. Fixed outdoor fitness equipment in parks or along linear trails, which can be used by all age groups.
31. Less informal play occurring in residential streets.
32. People accessing play spaces by car.
33. The number of indoor play spaces where participants pay to play and parents can sit, watch and buy a coffee.
34. Risk avoidance strategies due to fear of injuries to children and fear of litigation.



**Figure 12: Spinners and spatial net climber, Laguna Park, Palm Beach, QLD**

## 4.0 Vision and Planning Principles

### 4.1 Vision

The vision adopted for the Play Strategy is: **Moorabool: creating playful communities.**

### 4.2 Planning Principles

Eight key play space principles have been developed to assist Moorabool Shire Council in its decision making regarding future play space developments. Each of these principles is explained in further detail in the following table.

Planning Principle. Play spaces will:	Description
<b>Be inviting and welcoming</b>	All play spaces will be developed and maintained in such a way as to create a welcoming and inviting atmosphere for all potential users of the site. Sites will be aesthetically pleasing, clean, well maintained and will have relevant signage. Play opportunities available will encourage exploration and fun.
<b>Be well designed and planned</b>	All play spaces will be designed in partnership with the community and experienced play space designers, taking into consideration best practice guidelines for such facilities. All play spaces will be regularly inspected and well maintained according to relevant regulations and standards, but will focus on balancing risks and benefits by providing challenging and stimulating environments, which allow people to explore their boundaries. All play spaces will be designed and managed in such a way as to minimise the environmental footprint of the play space. Recycled materials will be used wherever possible and environmentally sustainable design principles used in terms of construction, management and maintenance. Play equipment and opportunities will also be selected based on their longevity and durability.
<b>Encourage a diversity of experiences</b>	Each play space will be different to every other play space in some way. Equipment will be purchased from a range of different suppliers to ensure that play opportunities vary. Some play spaces will feature natural materials and loose materials and others will feature specific play equipment, open space and opportunities for creative play.
<b>Be inclusive and accessible</b>	Play spaces will be designed to promote inclusiveness for people of all abilities and ages both in accessing equipment and play opportunities and in being able to navigate and enjoy the site. Universal Design Principles and Access for All Abilities Principles will be considered in designs of play spaces. Public play spaces will be provided free of charge to the community and open at all times to the community (except during periods of maintenance).

Planning Principle. Play spaces will:	Description
<b>Be connected to communities and transport links</b>	All play spaces will be connected to the communities in which they are based by cycling / walking networks, roads, public transport links wherever possible and will be located within 400 metres (approximately 5 minutes walk) of all urban households.
<b>Promote community interactions</b>	All play spaces will be designed in such a way as to encourage community interactions on play equipment, in areas of open space, in seating areas, and in BBQ picnic areas. Play spaces will also be designed in partnership with the community.
<b>Respect and protect heritage, natural environment, biodiversity and cultural features</b>	All play spaces will ensure that heritage, natural environment, biodiversity and cultural aspects of sites are respected and protected. Activities such as interpretation and incorporation of themes will be included where appropriate. All play spaces will be in sympathy with and enhance the existing natural assets of the site. Supplementary vegetation may be established to ensure that the play space achieves this objective.
<b>Be well maintained</b>	All play spaces will be well maintained and designed in such a way as to minimise maintenance requirements wherever possible, without compromising the play value of a park.

## 5.0 Existing Play Spaces within Moorabool Shire

### 5.1 Policy Context

Council has produced several documents related to play spaces:

- Playground Management Policy – this document provides a framework to guide Council’s decision making processes around playgrounds.
- Standard Operating Procedures for Playgrounds – this document identifies a hierarchy for play spaces, i.e. local, neighbourhood, regional and specialised; safety issues; audit schedules; play equipment; risk management; accessibility checklist; and audit inspection template
- Playground Register – this document contains details about each play space, including its components and inspection records. The Standard Operating Procedures for Playgrounds calls this register three different names: Playground Register, Playground Equipment Register and Playground Equipment Inventory. Some clarification is required around this terminology.

### 5.2 Number of Play Spaces and Play Space Hierarchy

There are currently 59 play spaces listed on Council’s audit of play spaces. These play spaces include:

- ❖ 38 play spaces owned by Council
- ❖ 6 play spaces owned by Department of Education and Training
- ❖ 11 play spaces owned by Department of Environment and Primary Industries
- ❖ 2 play spaces owned by Southern Rural Water
- ❖ 1 private play space owned by a fast food restaurant
- ❖ 1 play space owned by Catholic Education

Importantly, the Shire features a number of state parks and national parks, many of which comprise tracks and trails to encourage natural and nature-based play. These areas have not been specifically included within the scope of this strategy, however, have a broader role as legitimate locations for play.

The characteristics of local, district and regional play spaces are as follows.

#### 5.2.1 Local Play Spaces

These play spaces are located within walking distance of homes and are particularly important given the decreasing size of house blocks, rising levels of childhood obesity and the increasing cost of fuel. Local play spaces can be easily accessed by young people (as well as other people in the neighbourhood such as older adults and people with disabilities) by foot or bicycle, hence promoting active transport and reducing the need for vehicular transport. Although the activities offered are not as extensive as those offered in district and regional play spaces, the activities are free of charge and can help to improve health and fitness levels, as well as providing creative outlets. Additionally, there is potential to meet with and play with other people in the neighbourhood, which can result in strong community connections, independence and a sense of community belonging. Local play spaces are particularly important to people in the community who have limited transportation options. Smaller townships generally only contain local play spaces.

These play spaces have a catchment of approximately 400m, or 5 minutes walking. They tend to contain opportunities for solitary, parallel and group play, designed for 3-7 year olds. Where possible, these playgrounds should provide some open space for informal games such as tiggy, chasey, kite flying, kicking a football as well as multi-activity play



equipment. Seats on swings should be fitted with toddler straps and strap seats and carers should be provided with a seat. A tree planting plan is essential for all new local playgrounds in order to provide natural shade and to improve the amenity and natural values of the site.

### 5.2.2 District Play Spaces

Generally there will be fewer District play spaces throughout a municipality, but their value lies in drawing a larger number of users from a greater catchment area. They may provide a wider range of play opportunities than local play spaces or be single purpose and are usually located within a 15 minute cycling trip or a short car trip from most people's homes in the urban area (a catchment area of 500m – 2km). Hence they are relatively accessible, particularly for older children.

They are larger than local play spaces and service a number of neighbourhood areas. Usually they are strategically located within larger reserves, adjoining sporting reserves or close proximity to large open space areas suitable for ball games and contain a range of amenities including seating, shade, car parking, paths, bins, drinking fountains. In terms of play opportunities, these spaces may contain several different items of play ground equipment for each age group, offering a range of different play opportunities. Skate parks and BMX parks have been included in this category as these installations generally have a larger catchment given the mobility of users. They can also service areas where there are gaps in the special distribution service a larger area than local play spaces.

### 5.2.3 Regional Play Spaces

These spaces are generally fairly large and provide a broad mix of different play opportunities and experiences for all ages and abilities or may be larger, single purpose facilities. With a catchment of 10km or more, there is a tendency for longer visits, family outings and family / community celebrations by both local residents and people from further afield. Generally there are only a few regional play spaces in a municipality, but usage is high. The majority of people visiting regional play spaces will travel by car; however, the provision of networked non-road transport such as bicycle paths may encourage cycling or walking. Regional play spaces not only provide health and social benefits, but also provide economic benefits by attracting people from other areas.

Regional play spaces are often designed by play space experts or landscape architects and where possible, retain natural features of the site and incorporate these into the overall design. These play spaces are generally located in close proximity to open space suitable for ball games.

Amenities typically found at regional play spaces include: toilets, paths, seats, shade (trees and / or shade sails), bins, lighting, drinking fountains, picnic tables, shelter, BBQs, car parking and connections to cycling / walking paths.

### 5.3 Play Space Design Matrix

The following table provides a summary of how play space planning principles and design considerations can be used in practice across the various types of play spaces in Moorabool Shire. This matrix recognises that it is not possible to provide every type of opportunity at each local play space, but rather opportunities are spread across each town. It also recognises that local play spaces will predominantly cater for people who may not have access to vehicles, such as parents with young children in prams, older adults, and people with disabilities, as well as local community events, e.g. picnics. District and regional play spaces will cater for the whole community, but will have a greater focus on young people from 3-18 years of age from a play perspective. A summary of each of these play spaces follows:

<u>Hierarchy of Play Space</u>	<u>Features</u>
Local Play Space	Walking distance from homes (400m radius); some open space and some equipment / natural features for play.
District Play Space	500m-2km catchment or 15 minute bicycle trip; service a number of neighbourhood areas; more extensive play opportunities and amenities than local play spaces; may be linked to recreation reserves.
Regional Play Space	10km+ catchment; will service the region; wide range of play opportunities and high standard of amenities; high level of visitation.

**Key:** ✓✓ = Must have      ✓ = Might have      X = Should not have      XX = Must not have

	Local Play Spaces	District Play Spaces	Regional Play Spaces
Play space principles			
Inviting and welcoming	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Well designed and planned	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Diversity of experiences	As part of the town	✓✓	✓✓
Inclusive and accessible	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Connected to communities and transport links	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Promote community interactions	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Respect and protect heritage, natural environment, biodiversity and cultural features	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓

	Local Play Spaces	District Play Spaces	Regional Play Spaces
Be well maintained	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Type of play			
Cognitive play (role plays, drama)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Creative play (free, imaginative, manipulative)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Active play on equipment (slides, swings, climbing apparatus)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Active games (bike riding, football, basketball, skating, chasey, Frisbee)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Location			
Walking time	5 mins	10-20 mins	2 hours+
Driving time	1-2 mins	Up to 5 mins	15 mins+
Distance to homes	400m maximum	2-4km	10km+
Target user groups			
Toddlers (0-2)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Young children (3-5)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Mid range children (6-8)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Older Children (9-12)	✓	✓	✓
Young people (13-18)	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Parents / carers	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Older adults	✓	✓✓	✓✓
People with disabilities	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Whole of community (social space)	✓	✓✓	✓
Minimum infrastructure			
Linked to walking / cycling paths	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Access to play space from street	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Compacted path within play space	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Natural shade	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Shade sails	X	X	X Only where there is good passive surveillance

	Local Play Spaces	District Play Spaces	Regional Play Spaces
Shaded seating	✓	✓	✓
Picnic tables	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Fence	X Only as a barrier near a source of potential danger	X Only as a barrier near a source of potential danger	✓
BBQ	X	✓	✓✓
Shelter	X	✓	✓✓
Bike racks	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Signage	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Drinking fountain	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Landscaped areas	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Grassed areas	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Artificial grass	X	X	X
Art work	✓	✓	✓✓
Toilets – including family change and disabled	X	✓	✓✓
Designated car parking (incl. Disabled car parking)	X	✓	✓✓
Lighting	X	✓	✓
Minimum play opportunities			
Swinging elements	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Sliding elements	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Spinning elements	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Balancing elements	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Climbing elements	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Creative play elements, e.g. cubby house	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Loose play material (sand*, leaves, branches, pebbles)	✓	✓	✓
Natural play elements (boulders, trees, logs, water*)	✓	✓	✓✓
Sound / tactile / sensory elements	✓	✓	✓✓
Ball games area	✓	✓	✓✓
Sand Pit	✓	✓	✓✓



	Local Play Spaces	District Play Spaces	Regional Play Spaces
Basketball or netball ring	✓	✓	✓✓
Play value – what each play space should achieve			
Site is accessible	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Site provides a choice of different activities	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Site is complementary to other sites in town / suburb	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Opportunity to master skills and challenges	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Opportunity to enjoy physical activity and movement	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Opportunity to experience sensory qualities of the outdoors	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Opportunity to use the environment as part of the play experience	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Opportunity to engage in social and imaginative play	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Opportunity to learn new educational skills	✓	✓	✓✓
Opportunity for carers and older adults to enjoy watching others play in comfort	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Opportunities for staff, parents and carers to provide clear lines of surveillance and supervision	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Opportunities for people of all ages to meet and play together	✓	✓✓	✓✓

\* Sand and water features to be provided only in some district, sub-regional, regional, state, national play spaces and in all centre-based play spaces.

## 5.4 Assessment of the Quality of Public Play Space Opportunities in Moorabool Shire



**Figure 13: Darley Park Play Space**

Each play space within the Shire has been assessed against specific criteria to determine the quality of experiences available at the site. The assessment involved reviewing Council's existing Playground Management Policy and Standard Operating Procedures for Playgrounds documents, checking each play space against aerial and land-based photography images and also physically visiting a sample of play spaces. Based on this assessment, the following observations are made of public play spaces:

- ❖ There are several excellent examples of well designed district, and regional play spaces that are very attractive, well utilised by

children and their parents / carers in the Shire and provide access for all abilities, e.g. Maddingley Park.

- ❖ From a physical development perspective, the majority of play spaces in Moorabool provide facilities for sliding, climbing and balancing as well as some open space suitable for ball games. Swings and spinning apparatus are less common.
- ❖ There are very few play spaces in Moorabool that offer creative play in the form of sandpits, sound / tactile opportunities, access to loose materials (e.g. branches, twigs, leaves, gumnuts, stones) and natural play features (e.g. logs and rocks). Similarly, very few places provide a social area for children to play with others and just chat.
- ❖ Most of the play equipment in Moorabool Shire has been purchased in the last 15 years or so – there are not many examples of play spaces featuring old equipment well beyond its lifespan.



**Figure 14: Example of Loose Play Materials at a Play Space**

- ❖ There are few components within township streetscapes that could be considered a play opportunity or that encourage informal and spontaneous play by people of all ages and abilities.
- ❖ There seems to be a gap in play opportunities for young children between 0-2 years of age. This gap may be filled to some degree by commercial indoor playgrounds and/or playgroups.
- ❖ Many play spaces provide play opportunities for children from approximately 3 years of age to around 8 years of age. There is little for young people over 8 years of age, except in some district play spaces where there are activities such as skate parks.



**Figure 15: Example of a sculpture in public open space outside Chinese Museum Precinct in Bendigo that encourages spontaneous and creative play**

- ❖ Not many play spaces, particularly local play spaces have paths within the play space leading to seats and play opportunities. This may not provide adequate access for people with disabilities or mobility issues.
- ❖ More natural shade is required in play spaces overall.
- ❖ Some play spaces need additional seating for children to rest on and for parents / carers to watch their children playing.
- ❖ Some local play spaces in particular lack landscaping amenity and could be vastly improved with modest effort and expenditure.



**Figure 16: Dunnstown Recreation Reserve Play Space**

## 5.5 Gaps in Provision of Play Opportunities in Moorabool Shire

Spatial mapping of each town was undertaken in order to gain a visual understanding of gaps in the distribution of play spaces. The spatial distribution of play spaces across Moorabool Shire is generally quite good. Spatially, it is desirable to provide at least one play space within 5 minutes walk (400m) of all residential dwellings in urban areas, which may be approximated by a circular 'catchment' of 280m radius.

Detailed analysis of spatial distribution of play spaces within each town reveals that the majority of urban residential areas are well catered for, in fact, an analysis of the current distribution of play spaces throughout the Shire reveals that approximately 15,000 residents are within walking distance (280m) of a play space (or 50% of all residents)<sup>11</sup>. Some of the smaller towns or districts, however, may not have access to play spaces.

It is recommended that Joint Use Agreements be sought with schools that have accessible play spaces; this will serve to fill many gaps in the spatial distribution of council play spaces alone. Many informal parks, reserves, sports fields and other areas of public open space provide play opportunities and these also help to fill the gaps where formal playgrounds do not exist. Notwithstanding this observation, most towns also contain gaps of various sizes where provision of play spaces is less than perfect. In an ideal world '100% coverage' would be achieved, however in reality this is not possible due to cost constraints or the paucity of suitable/available land parcels. Where new residential developments are occurring, an imperative must be stipulated to the land developers (through the Planning Scheme and their permit) to incorporate adequate play spaces such that the above criterion is

satisfied. Established residential areas are sometimes poorly serviced by play spaces but often opportunities exist to establish new play spaces on vacant council land or private lots (which must be purchased).

Other gaps may be filled by creating new play spaces on land already owned by council and this would be the preferred option wherever possible.

As mentioned, the importance of school play spaces in the spatial distribution of play opportunities in the Shire is very apparent. Without access to a school play space in certain areas, some people in Moorabool Shire have to travel significantly further than 400 metres to their nearest play space. However, access to play spaces is dependent upon whether or not school principals and school councils allow such access to occur. A change in management and / or governance of a school can also alter previous access arrangements as there is no requirement or legislation that states that school facilities must be accessible to the general community after hours.

The Department of Education and Training nevertheless recognises that there can be significant benefits achieved by the sharing of facilities, such as play spaces, with the community after hours, including:

- Stronger social networks between schools and communities.
- Better availability of facilities.
- More community involvement in school activities and young people's learning.
- Financial savings by sharing costs.
- Improved school security and reduced vandalism.

<sup>11</sup> Source: Council's Social Infrastructure Planner (2015).



It has produced two sets of guidelines to assist schools to understand the benefits of shared arrangements and to set up appropriate structures to enable this to happen<sup>12 13</sup>.

## 5.6 Management and maintenance of play spaces

Council is responsible for managing and maintaining play spaces on land that it owns such as parks, reserves, and most child care centres and kindergartens. Schools are responsible for managing and maintaining playgrounds on Department of Education and Training owned land, and community based Committees of Management are responsible for maintaining play equipment located on Crown Land (controlled by Department of Environment and Primary Industries) or land owned by water authorities such as Southern Rural Water.

In recent years, Council has progressively replaced equipment at Council owned sites so that all equipment now meets Australian Safety Standards. It also subjects each play space to a three part safety audit regime, which includes:

- Level 1 Audit - Removal of sharps and obstructions which could cause injury; and the raking of softfall to ensure looseness and adequate depth at key locations
- Level 2 Audit - Checking of the safety of all equipment
- Level 3 Audit - Checking the continued appropriateness of the equipment.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2005) *Schools as Community Facilities – Policy Framework and Guidelines*:  
<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/propman/facility/SACF-PolicyFramework-Guidelines.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2007) *Shared Facility Partnerships – A Guide to Good Governance for Schools and the Community*:  
<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/propman/facility/sharedfacilities.pdf>

Council has supported community groups and kindergartens to undertake their own Level 1 Audit (where such groups have a relationship to a particular site), but Council is responsible for undertaking Level 2 and Level 3 Audits. The frequency of audits depends upon the time of year (i.e. more often over summer and during school holidays) and the level of use a play space receives (i.e. high, medium or low). Council also has a documented process to respond to maintenance requests from the general community when reported. A playground register is maintained by Council detailing information about each play space including equipment and inspection notes. It is important that inspections, follow up works and maintenance of records continues to occur as documented in Moorabool Shire's *Standard Operating Procedures for Playgrounds* document.

Council has a policy of only installing equipment that meets Australian Safety Standards. When a Committee of Management seeks approval from Council to install second hand equipment, approval will only be given if a Level 2 auditor is satisfied that the equipment meets Australian Safety Standards or can be brought up to these standards for a fee less than the cost of new equipment and that the equipment is installed by a professional playground installer. These two areas of policy should be continued.

In terms of taking on ownership and responsibility of play spaces in new residential developments, Council requires certification from the developer that the equipment complies with Australian Standards and has been installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. This policy also needs to be continued. Ideally Council will also have some say in what is developed in new residential areas so that it can ensure that the suite of play opportunities across a town provides a high level of play value, diversity and inclusion.

Moorabool Shire's *Standard Operating Procedures for Playgrounds* document provides details of Council's processes for closure of playgrounds. It states that community members must have the opportunity to make written representation to Council if a play space is identified to be closed. However, the document also states that Council will not normally close a playground as it recognises that community demographics can be cyclical. It identifies the following factors as potential considerations in the permanent closure of play spaces:

- Poor location and very low use
- Repeated vandalism
- Evidence of continuing unsafe behaviour
- Permanent change in demographics.

Council also states that it has the right to relocate play equipment from one site to another, based on audit reports, equipment safety or appropriateness, or to changing usage and requirements, without the need for public consultation, as long as the playground itself is not earmarked for closure. It is important for communities to have the opportunity to express their needs if a play space is identified for potential closure and vitally important to involve the community in any planning and design around new play spaces, or significant upgrades.



**Figure 17: Elaine Play Space**

Different types of equipment and play opportunities have a different lifespan, depending upon the type of material they are constructed of, their exposure to weather, the quality of material used in construction and the amount of use the site receives. Wherever possible, it is recommended that rather than assuming equipment or opportunities need to be replaced in a certain year because that is how long they are reasonably expected to last, that an assessment is undertaken each year to identify ways in which to prolong the lifespan of items. This may mean re-painting steel poles, replacing a play panel on a combination unit, replacing a swing seat, or installing a new slide. It may also mean swapping some equipment around from one play space to another in order to create some change and diversity in play spaces. Not only will this reduce the costs required on an annual basis to replace assets, it will

also ensure that the environmental footprint of Moorabool Shire is reduced through the use of recycling. This process is undertaken by a number of local governments in Victoria and has yielded an additional five years from play spaces in areas such as City of Greater Bendigo. For the purpose of this Strategy, the following lifespan can be reasonably expected (noting that it may be possible to extend the lifespan through targeted maintenance and minor upgrades):

Type of Play Space	Expected Lifespan
<b>Regional</b>	10 years
<b>District</b>	10-15 years
<b>Local</b>	15-20 years
<b>Basketball Backboards</b>	10 years
<b>Basketball concrete pads</b>	20 years

Estimated costs of upgrading play equipment, excluding supporting infrastructure are:

- Local: \$28,000
- District: \$75,000 - \$100,000
- Regional: \$500,000 - \$750,000

Play spaces are also influenced by changing fashions and standards. Thirty to forty years ago, many play spaces consisted of a swing and a slide and perhaps a few other items such as monkey bars and poles. Twenty to thirty years ago combination units featuring a slide, climbing

structures, bridges, play panels and various other items were popular. Currently play equipment in strong demand by young people includes climbers, spinners, 'spraygrounds' (playgrounds featuring water sprays), flying foxes and climbing walls, although swings and slides continue to remain popular.



**Figure 18: Spinners and climbing wall**

Moorabool Shire's Asset Management Policy identifies an equipment replacement strategy.

From a budgetary perspective, Council makes provision in its Capital Improvement Program and Annual Budget for the progressive replacement or upgrading of playground equipment, subject to competing priorities. It also makes available funds to enable regular

inspections and audits of play spaces to be undertaken. The replacement value of Council play equipment and supporting infrastructure is estimated to be in the vicinity of \$2.1m. Further, Council allocates an annual amount of approximately \$60,000, or \$2,000 per playground per year to audits, repairs and graffiti removal). The *Standard Operating Procedures for Playgrounds* document identified that insufficient funding was available in the Council budget to undertake maintenance works and upgrades. A review of allocations therefore needs to occur to enable suitable maintenance of all play assets.

Triggers that will alert Council that new play spaces are required in the Shire or when an upgrade is required include:

- New residential developments are planned
- Existing play space is considered well located, but under-utilised due to poor play value and lack of supporting infrastructure such as seats, shade and paths
- Play space is not inclusive
- There are gaps in distribution of play spaces, i.e. areas where no play spaces are accessible within 400m (a 5 minute walk) in urban areas or there are no play spaces within 10km of a town
- Play equipment is at the end of its lifespan
- Play equipment does not meet Australian Safety Standards, or contains equipment that is not considered appropriate.

## 5.7 Marketing of play spaces

A key aspect in determining how well a play space is utilised is related to how well it is marketed. If the community is not aware of a particular space, they will not use it. Hence awareness of the play opportunities that are available in the community is important to maximise usage and for the community to achieve the benefits of play. There are several ways in which play spaces can be promoted. These include:

**Brochures and maps** – printed brochures for the whole Shire or specific sections of the Shire could be developed to list the location of play spaces and describe (either in writing or in symbol format) the key features present, such as BBQs and toilets. These brochures could be made available at Council offices, libraries, visitor information centres, maternal and child health centres, pre-schools, childcare centres and play groups. Positives: can easily distribute information to key target groups and visitors to the area. Negatives: costly to produce, become quickly outdated as new play spaces are developed and are not accessible for people with vision impairments or low literacy skills.

**Signage** – many play spaces throughout the Shire do not have any signage directing people to the site, at the site or within the site. Signage in nearby streets can inform people that there is a play space in a particular area and signage at a play space can help to create a sense of arrival, help people to feel welcome and also create a sense of place. Positives: signage is visible to people travelling around in the local area and is not reliant on people receiving or reading brochures or maps that may only be sent to households once. Negatives: signage can be damaged / vandalised, does not display the same amount of information as printed material and relies on people already being in the local area in order to see and read signs.



**Guidebooks** – guidebooks can be sources of information on play opportunities within a Shire. Positives: books are more likely to be stored in a place where they can be easily retrieved, such as a bookcase or glove box in a car. Negatives: books can be costly to purchase and print and therefore may not be accessible to all; and information contained within books can become outdated quickly due to the sometimes lengthy turnaround from research to publishing and sales.

**Websites** – websites can convey a significant amount of information to the target audience about play opportunities in Moorabool Shire. A link could be developed to Council's website or links could be provided to other websites such as Playground Finder ([www.playgroundfinder.com](http://www.playgroundfinder.com)) and Melbourne Playgrounds ([www.melbourneplaygrounds.com.au](http://www.melbourneplaygrounds.com.au)). Websites can be designed in such a way so that people can do a search by inserting the name of a suburb or their postcode or search for a particular requirement such as access for people with disabilities, and receive a list of all relevant play spaces. Positives: a large amount of information can be provided; tapping into an existing website is inexpensive; information can be provided in different community languages and in formats suitable for people with vision impairments or those who are hard of hearing; information can be easily updated; web access is available for free at community facilities such as libraries, community Neighbourhood Houses and some shopping centres. Negatives: not everyone has access to the internet and someone needs to be given responsibility for updating the website on a regular basis.

**Mobile Phone Applications** – mobile phones, particularly 'smart phones' are used by an increasing number of people to access information through specific applications (apps). There is potential to develop or link into existing apps that provide information about the location of play spaces. An American example of such an application is MomMaps, which

provides information on the location of playgrounds: <http://kidsplayguide.com/>. Some apps are free, whilst others need to be purchased – usually only for a few dollars. Positives: this type of technology is being embraced by people as a means to access information and will become more and more common. Negatives: Not everyone has access to smart phone technology and not everyone is willing to pay for apps.



Figure 19: Children at play in a community garden in Brecon, Wales

### 5.7 Process for developing play spaces in new sub-divisions:

This process described below for development of new play spaces by developers, has less involvement from Council staff in terms of budgets, and procurement issues than if Council staff were to develop or upgrade a play space, as the responsibility for installation rests with the developer. There is also less community consultation involved as presumably the site to be developed for housing may not be in an area where there are many residences. However, to ensure that the needs of local communities are represented, there will be greater involvement by Council staff in terms of approving the proposed design.

	Task	Lead Role	Support	Comments
1	Developer submits application to planning unit to develop residential housing.	Planning		
2	Planning unit to advise on key requirements of the proposed play space (including landscaping).	Planning	Recreation, Parks	Provide developers with a copy of the Play Strategy and any best practice documentation. Also assess any flora and fauna values on the site.
3	Developer to provide Council with a draft concept plan of the play space and a maintenance plan.	Planning		
4	Conduct internal meeting to review draft concept plan and suggest any necessary changes.	Planning, Recreation, Parks		
5	Planning unit to meet with developer to identify required changes to plans.	Planning		
6	Developer to submit amended plans.	Planning		
7	Relevant Council units to sign off on plans.	Planning, Recreation, Parks	Rural Access Worker	

	Task	Lead Role	Support	Comments
8	Planning unit to issue a permit to the developer to proceed with works.	Planning		
9	Check progress with onsite visits.	Planning	Recreation, Parks	
10	Sign off completion of installation and landscaping.	Planning	Recreation, Parks	Developer may agree to maintain site for a specified amount of time.
11	Handover Process.	Planning	Recreation, Parks	

## 6.0 Distribution of Play Spaces in Moorabool Shire

Currently play spaces are dispersed throughout the Shire, with the bulk of play spaces located in urban areas of Bacchus Marsh and Ballan. Smaller townships typically feature one play space, generally located in a recreation reserve. However, there are some areas where no formal playgrounds exist. There are several residential areas within Bacchus Marsh that are not within 400m (or a 5 minute walk) of play spaces, e.g. Underbank Boulevard and other streets on the edge of town. With strong residential growth predicted in Maddingley and Darley, a focus will need to be given to investing play opportunities in these areas, most likely in partnership with developers.

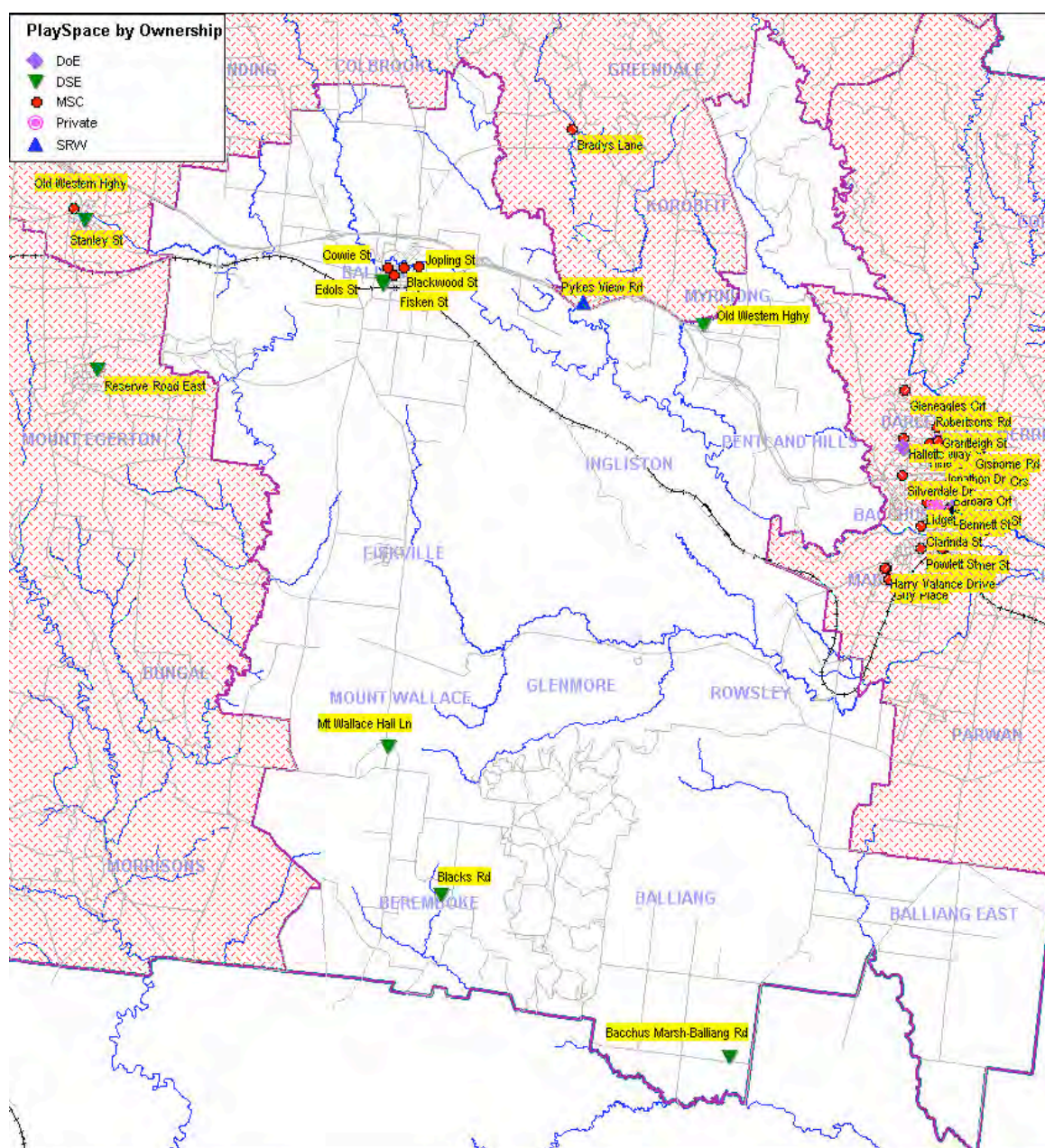


Figure 20: Play spaces central Moorabool



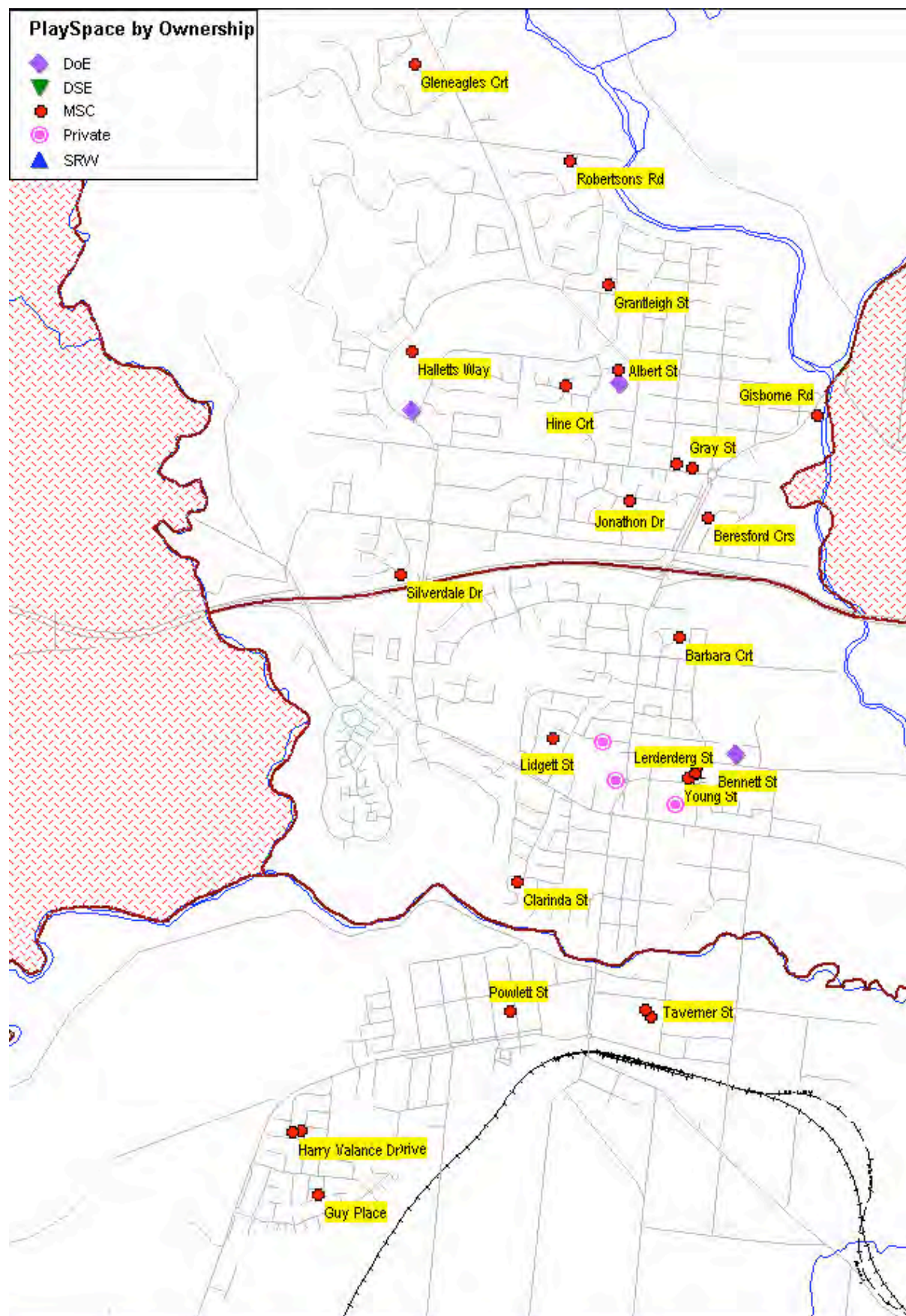


Figure 21: Play spaces in Bacchus Marsh

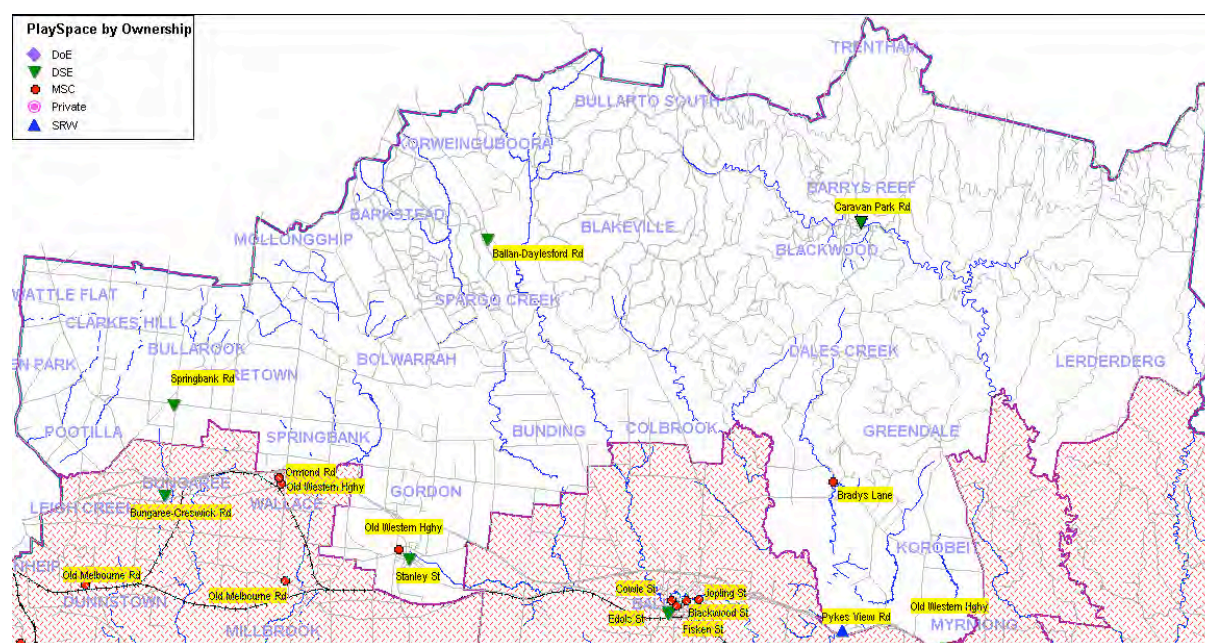


Figure 22: Play spaces Woodlands



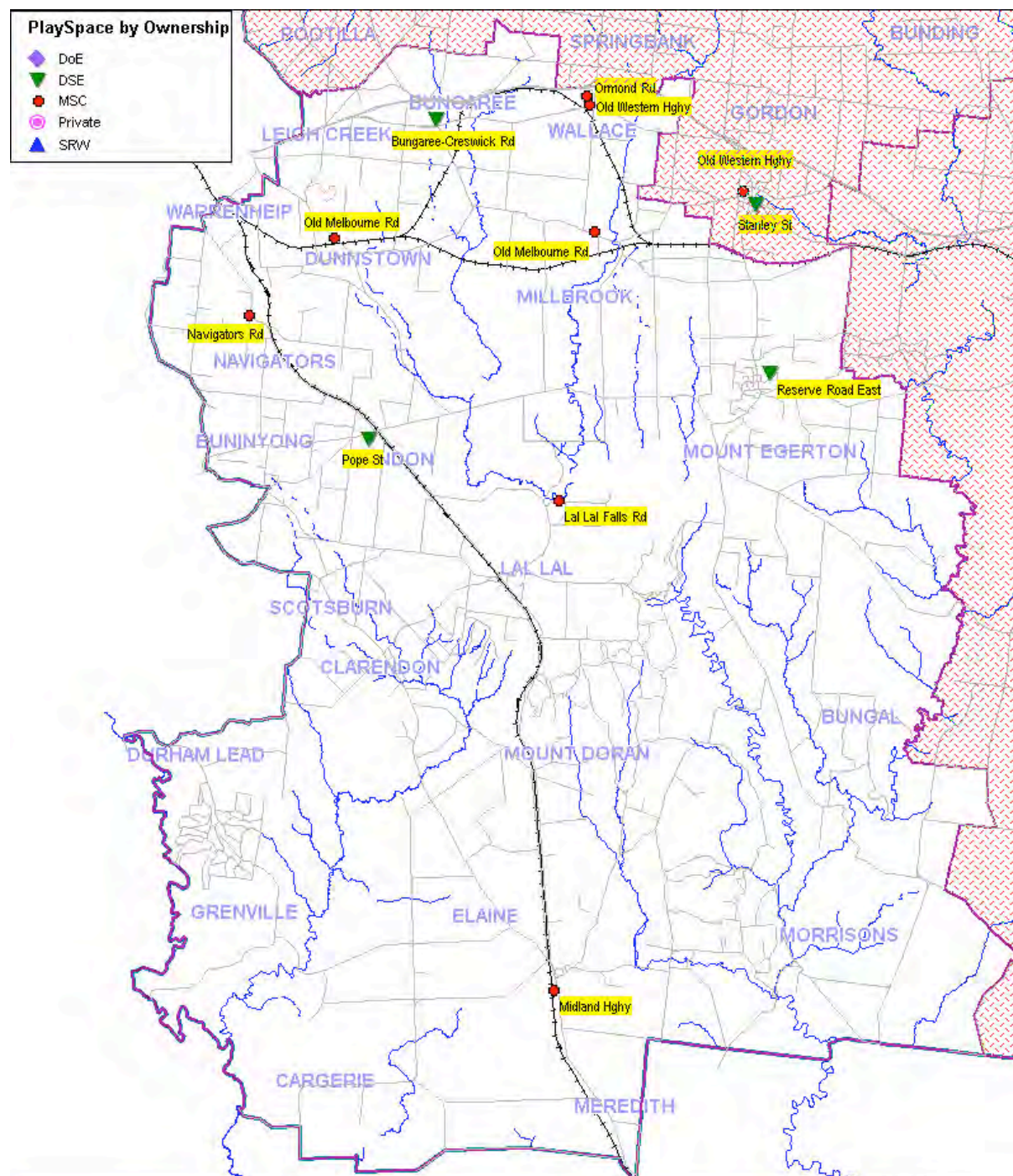


Figure 23: Play spaces in West Moorabool



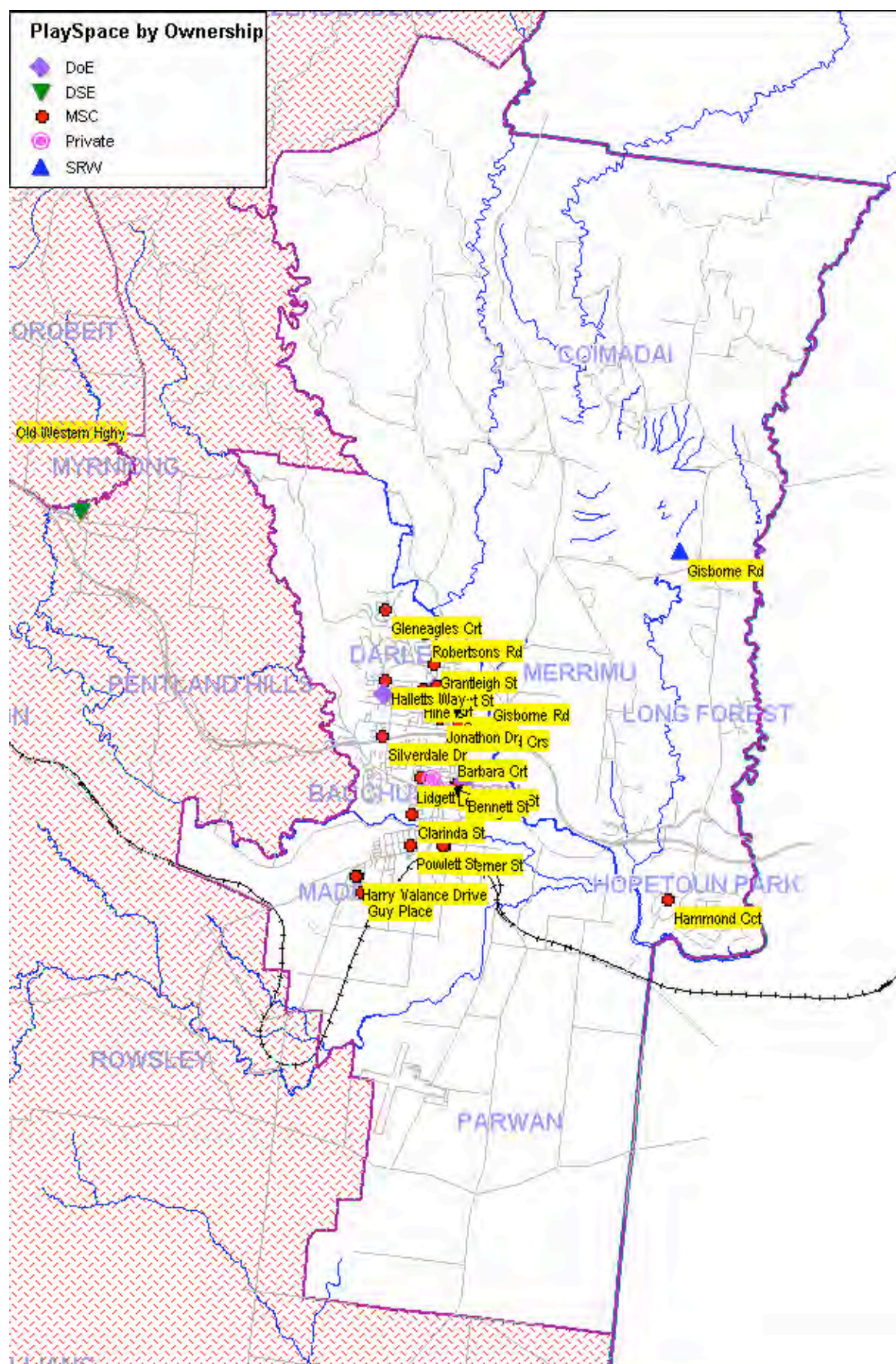


Figure 24: Play spaces in East Moorabool

## 7.0 Analysis of Gaps and Opportunities

An analysis of existing play opportunities in Moorabool Shire reveals that there are a number of gaps which need to be addressed to improve both play opportunities and play value.

### 7.1 Gaps

These gaps include:

1. A **lack of shade** over seating and play equipment in some play spaces to protect children and their carers from too much sun exposure. The preference is for tree-based shade. It also needs to be recognised that it may not be desirable for the entire play space to be covered by shade or by full shade, particularly in the cooler months.
2. A **lack of compacted / firm paths** within play spaces leading to play equipment and to other areas such as seating. This reduces accessibility to the site by people with mobility issues and those using wheeled transport such as prams and bicycles.
3. **Poor landscaping** in many play spaces; which results in a bland, sterile environment that is neither welcoming nor inviting. Landscaping can provide a whole suite of additional play opportunities and materials, as well as improving the overall look and feel of a play space.
4. **Limited opportunities for people of all abilities** to access and use play spaces. The focus needs to be on using Universal Design Principles and ensuring that play spaces are designed in such a way as to be inclusive of people of all abilities. Sometimes this will require the construction of fences or barriers.
5. **Lack of diversity of play opportunities** throughout the Shire. The focus of most local play spaces is on plastic commercial equipment featuring a climbing frame with slide and various other items, a swing set and a bouncing critter. It is important to ensure that a broad range of different opportunities are provided within each suburb and town and that a variety of different play space suppliers are used to ensure that equipment varies from place to place.
6. **Limited natural play opportunities and loose materials** in play spaces. Natural play spaces (i.e. those which feature rocks, logs, mounds, sand, and water) and loose materials (e.g. twigs, leaves, and pebbles) provide important opportunities for children to connect with nature and to manipulate their environment to create a variety of different play structures and imaginative games (cognitive play).
7. **Limited number of play spaces which offer tactile / sound / sensory experiences.** Such experiences can greatly enhance play opportunities and young people's enjoyment and understanding of a site. These types of experiences are particularly important for young people with disabilities.
8. **Limited number of play spaces which offer challenging activities** or activities that are perceived to be challenging or risky by participants, e.g. flying foxes. Learning to take risks is an important part of childhood development and helps children know how to deal with different situations. Play spaces that do not provide any activities that at least are perceived to be risky by young people may not hold the interest of young people for long and do very little in respect to teaching them about how to deal with uncertainty in the wider world. Council's current play policies place a high degree of emphasis on risk management, less emphasis on play value and children's development.



9. **Some urban areas which are not serviced by a play space within 400m of homes.** Locally accessible play spaces are particularly important, given the decreasing size of house blocks, rising levels of childhood obesity and the increasing cost of fuel. Local play spaces can be easily accessed by young people (as well as other people in the neighbourhood such as older adults and people with disabilities) by foot or bicycle, hence promoting active transport and reducing the need for vehicular transport. They also provide opportunities for social interactions with neighbours. Wherever possible, houses in urban areas should have access to a play space within 400m (the equivalent of a five minute walk). Ballan has several residential pockets where gaps in provision exist, based on this benchmark.
10. **Lack of resources to effectively maintain play spaces.** As new play spaces are developed and existing play spaces reach the end of their lifespan, even greater demands will be made upon maintenance staff and maintenance budgets. Hence an increased resource allocation (both financial and staff) will be required.
11. **Lack of signage both to play spaces and within play spaces.** Signage at the entrance of a play space assists people to develop a connection to the site and signage within play spaces assists with way finding.
12. **Lack of play opportunities for 0-2 year olds and young people over 8 years of age.** Most play spaces in Moorabool Shire focus on children between two to eight years of age, particularly the four to seven year old age cohort.
13. **Lack of seats** for carers and spaces for young people to meet and chat with their friends in some play spaces. Seats encourage parents, grandparents and carers to visit sites more often or to stay at a play site longer to enjoy the benefits that such sites can offer. Attractive seating areas can also provide a setting whereby young people can meet, socialise with their peers and develop strong community connections.
14. **Lack of artwork in play spaces.** Artwork can help to brighten up a play space, help to develop a theme and help to create a sense of place. It can help people to understand their environment, their culture and their heritage.
15. **Lack of connections to walking / cycling networks.** In order to encourage active transport and ease of accessibility, play spaces should be connected to the existing walking / cycling network.
16. **Lack of play opportunities in the urban environment.** Rather than restricting play to designated places in the community, play should be all encompassing and spontaneous. It should be readily available to people of all ages. The development of playful elements in urban design (in public places such as streets) can help people to develop a sense of connection to their local environment and provide opportunities for people of all ages to connect and have some fun. Examples of such opportunities include sculptures, rocks, water features, lighting, items that can be moved, items that can make sounds. It is recommended that all major urban developments in Moorabool Shire consider the inclusion of features that encourage spontaneous play by people of all ages.

## 7.2 Opportunities

Whilst a number of gaps have been identified, there have also been some opportunities identified.

These include:

1. **Integration of Play throughout Council Strategies and Policies.** A key outcome of the Play Strategy is to educate and inform various departments within Council about the value of play and the importance of integrating formal and informal play opportunities for people of all ages and abilities into infrastructure developments, facilities, programs and services.
2. **Provision of diverse, quality and accessible play spaces.** By using best practice guidelines Council officers, developers and community-based organisations will be provided with tools to help develop diverse, quality, spontaneous and accessible play opportunities.
3. **Establishment of an Internal-Council working group.** In order to improve processes around design, development, management, maintenance and marketing of play spaces, it is important that all parties are aware of their responsibilities and meet to discuss play space developments. It is therefore recommended that an internal-Council working group comprising of all relevant units be established to meet two times per year. From this working group, it is anticipated that a group of champions can then incorporate aspects of and reference the Play Strategy into their own departmental projects and strategic documents.
4. **Development of community partnerships.** In order to ensure that limited resources are maximised, it is recommended that where appropriate, suitable partnerships are developed to develop and maintain play spaces. Examples of suitable partners include schools, community centres and sometimes businesses.
5. **Development of a risk-benefit assessment** to ensure that children have the opportunity to be exposed to activities that are perceived by them to be somewhat risky or challenging (but still meet Australian Standards for safety) so that they are able to learn to deal with different situations. This will need support of Council, Council officers and Council insurers.
6. **Improved marketing practices.** If people are unaware of play spaces, they will not utilise them. Hence it is important to promote the existing play spaces in the Shire. There is a place for traditional marketing methods such as maps, brochures and signs, but particularly for websites. Smart phone applications may be considered too.
7. **Integration of Play Spaces into Surroundings.** By taking into consideration the whole site, rather than just an area that play equipment is to be sited in, play spaces are more likely to utilise the natural contours and shape of the site as part of the play experience, be connected to transport links, feature appropriate supporting infrastructure such as trees, shade and path in suitable locations and provide increased play value.

## 8.0 Recommendations and Guidelines

A series of recommendations and guidelines have been developed, based on an analysis of:

1. The literature review
2. Demographic projections
3. Trends in play spaces nationally and internationally
4. Future growth areas of the Shire
5. Current supply and distribution of play spaces
6. 'Play value' of existing spaces
7. Vision and planning principles
8. Gaps and opportunities in play space provision.

Some key priorities include:

1. Ensure that play spaces are well designed and offer 'play value' to all who use the site.
2. For existing developments, Council should identify suitable areas for play spaces based upon the best practice standard (400 m radius of residences) and progressively acquire and equip suitable spaces so that at least 75% of all residences will have access to play spaces by 2021.
3. For any new residential developments, Council to ensure that developers either provide play spaces, or are charged accordingly and Council undertakes the play space development.
4. Ensure that Moorabool Shire makes an ongoing commitment to reducing the barriers to accessibility wherever possible and using Universal Design Principles to create more accessible play spaces.



5. Ensuring that play spaces meet Australian Standards and other relevant regulations and legislation.
6. Ensuring that play is considered in other non-recreational based projects.

**Figure 25: Activating a play space in Cardiff, Wales**

The recommendations and guidelines are as follows:

#	Recommendation/ Guideline	Action Name	Cost Estimate	Priority	Funding Source	Dept. Responsibility	Responsibility Other
1 Recomm	Adopt the Play Strategy.	Play Strategy	None	High	None	Recreation	Parks; Environment and Natural Resources; Community Development; Capital Projects; Risk Management
2 Guideline	Ensure that Moorabool Shire recognises the value of play in children's development, especially natural play opportunities and incorporates this value into strategic documents and actions.	Recognition of Value of Play	None	Ongoing	None	Recreation	Family Services; Parks; Environment and Natural Resources; Capital Projects; Risk Management;
3 Recomm	Develop opportunities for informal and spontaneous play for people of all ages and abilities through their infrastructure developments (including urban design in public places), facilities, programs and services.	Opportunities for Informal and Spontaneous Play	Staff time	Ongoing	None	Recreation; Community Development; Family Services; Urban Design; Arts and Culture.	Parks; Environment and Natural Resources; Capital Projects; Risk Management
4 Recomm	Educate the community of the benefits of play and how appropriate risk can enhance children's opportunities to explore, experiment and learn within a play space.	Risk Management	None	Ongoing	None	Recreation	Parks; Environment and Natural Resources; Family Services; Capital Projects; Risk Management
5 Recomm	Ensure maintenance audits and equipment inventories at all Council owned play spaces are undertaken on an annual basis.	Maintenance Audits	Refer to recommendations 18 and 24.	Ongoing	Rec and Open Space, Parks budget	Recreation	Parks; Family Services Community Development
6 Guideline	Ensure that play spaces are planned in consideration of the surrounding environment (built and natural) to integrate and complement the existing landscape.	Whole of Site Planning	Staff time	Ongoing	None	Recreation	Parks; Environment and Natural Resources; Capital Projects; Family Services



#	Recommendation/ Guideline	Action Name	Cost Estimate	Priority	Funding Source	Dept. Responsibility	Responsibility Other
7 Recomm	Consult with residents, service providers, users of the facility, and committees (where appropriate) when planning for new/ upgraded play spaces.	Consultation	Staff time	Ongoing	None	Recreation	Family Services; Capital Projects
8 Guideline	Continue to recognise that high quality play spaces have potential value to the Shire from a tourism and economic development perspective.	Investment	None	Ongoing	None	Recreation; Capital Projects	
9 Recomm	Ensure that local area structure plans, strategies and policies reflect the content of the Play Strategy where relevant.	Policy Relationship	None	Ongoing	None	Recreation	Parks; Environment and Natural Resources; Family Services; Capital Projects; Risk Management
10 Recomm	Establish an internal Council working group that meets twice per year to discuss play developments and to oversee and update the Play Strategy.	Internal-Council Working Group	Staff time	Medium	None	Recreation	Parks; Environment and Natural Resources; Family Services; Capital Projects; Statutory Planning; Social Planning; Arts and Culture, Youth; Risk Management
11 Guideline	Focus marketing efforts for play spaces on signs and printed maps to increase awareness of the benefits of play and to identify locations.	Marketing	\$2,000 per annum	Medium	Recreation and Open Space budget	Recreation	Marketing; Family Services
12 Recomm	Develop a risk-benefit assessment approach to play spaces whereby Council officers and Council insurer's work together to identify both the risks and the benefits of risks in public play spaces with a view to providing more challenging play spaces which still meet Australian Standards for safety.	Risk Management	Staff time	Medium	N/A	Recreation	Parks; Environment and Natural Resources; Family Services; Capital Projects; Risk Management

#	Recommendation/ Guideline	Action Name	Cost Estimate	Priority	Funding Source	Dept. Responsibility	Responsibility Other
13 Guideline	Develop a group of champions who can incorporate the Strategy within their own departmental projects and strategic documents.	Internal Council Working Group	Staff time	High	None	Recreation; Parks; Family Services; and Community Development Departments	
14 Recomm	Provide staff responsible for maintenance of play spaces suitable training on a regular basis to ensure that equipment, materials and infrastructure meet Australian Safety Standards.	Staff Training	\$1,500 per annum	Ongoing	Recreation and Open Space, and Parks budget	Recreation; Community Development	Parks; Family Services
15 Recomm	Ensure that equipment and play opportunities are upgraded / renewed in existing play spaces and that all play spaces meet minimum standards for infrastructure (i.e. shade trees, seats and paths) according to the works schedule.	Play Equipment / Opportunity and Infrastructure Upgrade / Renewal	Amount to be determined (increasing by CPI annually)	Ongoing	Capital budget	Recreation	Parks, Environment and Natural Resources
17 Recomm	Develop individual Joint Use Agreements with schools and a Common Heads of Agreement to enable this form of access to occur, particularly in areas where there are obvious gaps in distribution of play spaces and infrastructure at present.	School agreements	Staff time	Medium	None	Recreation	Family Services

❖ Note that as the number of play spaces in the Shire increases, so too does the maintenance costs of Council.

#### **Moorabool play spaces that do not meet good design or location standards:**

1. Barbara Court Reserve Playground (Bacchus Marsh) is at the back of a pocket park located off a court bowl, and is enclosed on three sides by houses – community access to this site is restricted, and a lack of visibility into the park creates a personal security risk. There is no playground at Masons Lane Reserve – Council could consider relocating this playground to the Young Street side of the reserve, and potentially sell the pocket park.
2. Grantleigh Reserve Playground (Darley) has little landscaping and other amenities – requires vegetation and landscaping to provide an improved setting.

## 9.0 Definitions

Term	Definition
<b>Accessible Play space</b>	A play space that considers and responds to the needs of people with accessibility issues (not just focused on traditional play space equipment), e.g. people with disabilities, people with prams, people with walking frames, and people with mobility scooters, so that these play spaces become more inclusive.
<b>Amenities</b>	Supporting infrastructure found within play spaces that help to promote a comfortable and accessible environment, e.g. landscaping, paths, lighting, fencing, seating, shade structures, BBQs.
<b>Capital Works</b>	New – creation or acquisition of new assets that previously did not exist in the Shire Upgrade – works to refurbish or replace existing assets with assets of a greater capacity or performance capability Renewal – works to refurbish or replace existing assets with assets of equivalent capacity or performance capability.
<b>Community</b>	Social or cultural groups or networks that share a common purpose, heritage, rights and responsibilities and / or other bonds.
<b>Maintenance</b>	All actions necessary for retaining an asset as near as practicable to its original condition, but excluding renewal of asset.
<b>Natural Surface</b>	A natural surface in play spaces refers to substances such as timber, rocks, dirt, grass and sand
<b>Play</b>	Spontaneous activity freely chosen by people as a way of expressing themselves; exploring the world in which they live; socialising with others; challenging themselves and having fun.
<b>Play equipment</b>	Equipment found in playgrounds specifically designed for play, such as swings, slides, and climbing structures.
<b>Playground</b>	A site such as a park, reserve, small block of land or land adjoining other recreational or community-based facilities, specifically designated for play and including playground equipment

Term	Definition
<b>Play space hierarchies</b>	<p>Play spaces can be categorized into a hierarchy of five different tiers, depending on its purpose, size, catchment and the opportunities available. The hierarchy is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local / Neighbourhood – smallest play space, located close to homes, providing smaller range of play opportunities and amenities, with a catchment of 400m.</li> <li>• District - provide a wider range of play opportunities than local play spaces and cover a greater catchment area (up to 2 km). They are strategically located within larger reserves or sporting reserves and cater for a range of age groups</li> <li>• Regional – largest play space, providing a broad range of play opportunities and amenities, with a catchment of 10km or more.</li> </ul>
<b>Play opportunities</b>	<p>The provision of an environment that encourages people to play and / or interact with others and their surroundings. Such spaces may include traditional playground equipment, engaging in or utilising various forms of play, or alternatively, opportunities for play with naturally occurring features such as logs, rocks and water.</p>
<b>Play space</b>	<p>The entire site where play can occur, rather than just the site where play equipment or opportunities are located. A play space may include traditional playground equipment or other natural features which can be used for play, such as logs, rocks, sand, and water features. It may also contain a range of amenities, e.g. seats, a shelter, paths, shade, toilets, and bins. A play space can also be part of the built environment (without traditional play equipment) featuring sculptures, plazas, paved areas, and water features.</p>
<b>Play value</b>	<p>An assessment of the quality of the play experiences and opportunities provided at a site.</p>
<b>Synthetic Surface</b>	<p>A synthetic surface is a man-made substance such as rubber or artificial grass / carpet.</p>