

Open Space and Recreation



North Sydney's next ten years
HAVE YOUR SAY

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Recognition of the Cammeraygal People

*We respectfully acknowledge the
Traditional Custodians of the land
and waters of North Sydney local
government area (LGA), the
Cammeraygal people*

We recognise the Cammeraygal people as the Traditional Owners of the area known today as North Sydney. We acknowledge that the alienation of Cammeraygal Country occurred with a land grant in 1794 without consultation, treaty, or compensation.

Western archaeological evidence shows that Aboriginal people have been in North Sydney at least 5,800 years, and likely for thousands more. We treasure and seek to preserve Cammeraygal connection to Country.

In 1890, when North Sydney Council was formed through the merging of three boroughs, the word Cammeraygal was included on its coat of arms. Today it holds a central position in the Council's logo as a reminder of the long and ongoing Indigenous heritage of this place.

In recent years the spelling of Cammeraygal has varied to include Gammaraigal and Gai-maragal as our community has sought to reflect and honour the heritage of First Nations people in a more culturally appropriate manner.

Purpose of this paper

The purpose of this discussion paper is to present information (facts, figures, research) to guide comprehensive engagement regarding open space and recreation in North Sydney. It highlights some of strengths, challenges and strategic opportunities within our LGA and encourages thought on where we are now, where we want to be and how we will get there.

The information collected through the consultation will help identify the needs and aspirations of North Sydney over the next 10 years and will be used to develop our Open Space and Recreation Strategy.

The Open Space and Recreation Strategy is one of eight Informing Strategies that together will consider needs and priorities in the following key areas:

- Culture and Creativity
- Economic Development
- Environment
- Governance
- Housing
- Integrated Transport
- Open Space and Recreation
- Social Inclusion

Once prepared, these eight Informing Strategies will be combined to form our new 2025-2035 Community Strategic Plan, Delivery Programs and Operational Plans. They will determine our priorities and ensure that Council's resources are focused on delivering outcomes needed and wanted by our community.

Get involved

We have a number of opportunities for the community to provide feedback, including:

Complete an online survey

Complete our 10-minute online survey to provide your feedback and ideas about open space and recreation in North Sydney.



Attend a community forum

Join us for the Open Space and Recreation Community Forum where a panel of experts will provide insights and encourage evidence-based discussion about the future of Open Space and Recreation in North Sydney.

Wednesday 22 May | 6pm-7.30pm

Hutley Hall, North Sydney Council

Drop in for a chat

You will find Council staff at local markets and CBD pop-up stalls in the coming weeks listening to your feedback and answering questions.

For more information about the project or the engagement activities visit: yoursay.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/our-next-ten-years

What is open space?

Open space is land that is publicly accessible and used for recreation, leisure and outdoor entertainment purposes. This includes parks, foreshore areas, sports grounds, civic and urban plazas as well as bushland and natural areas. For the purpose of understanding needs and deficiencies, open space areas may be classified as core or non-core.

Core open space

Core open space includes our recreational parks and sports parks. Recreational parks provide a setting for informal play and physical activity, relaxation, and social interaction. Sports parks include grassed and synthetic playing fields and courts that are used for formal structured sporting activities and informal play.

Non-core space

Non-core open space includes specialist sports facilities (such as indoor courts, lawn bowls, tennis courts and golf courses), access and amenity areas, bushland, civic spaces and encumbered open space areas such as drainage reserves and cemeteries.

A new approach

As detailed in this discussion paper, we have limited opportunities to deliver new open space areas due to land availability and high land costs, therefore we need to consider new ways of getting the most out of what we already have.

We also need to start thinking about open space and recreation more broadly, with consideration given to how our 'grey' public spaces such as roads and carparks can be used to offer innovative new recreational offerings.

Why is open space important?

Benefits to personal health

There is considerable evidence that demonstrates access to public open space and participation in sport and recreation develops physical, social, and decision-making skills and can significantly improve mental and physical well-being.

Benefits to communities

Public open space provides a focal point for community gathering and can combat social isolation. Recreation paths through open space can link residential areas with open space and other community facilities. Participation in sport and recreation can also build cultural tolerance and support for seniors and people with a disability.

Benefits to the environment

Public open space can help maintain a sustainable environment by reducing water-runoff, offsetting carbon emissions and filtering pollutants. It can provide a cooler environment, offer habitat for wildlife and act as a corridor linking larger areas of environmental value.

Benefits to the economy

Quality public open space hosts many events and can attract businesses, employees, and tourists.

Did you know?

Recent Australian research led by Monash University (2024) has found that living in areas with shorter distance to greenspace are associated with having fewer modifiable dementia risk factors.

“Living close to greenspace may encourage or permit people to exercise more (e.g. walk or run) and also socialise (e.g. talk with locals in a park”).

The study also found that

“proximity to greenspace was more important than the absolute amount of greenspace in an area. In other words, having lots of little parks that are closer to more people might potentially be better than having one big park that is further away”.¹

¹ Marina G. Cavuoto, Liam Davies, Ella Rowsthorn, Lachlan G. Cribb, Stephanie R. Yiallourou, Nawaf Yassi, Paul Maruff, Yen Ying Lim, Matthew P. Pase, Cross-sectional associations between neighborhood characteristics, cognition and dementia risk factor burden in middle-aged and older Australians, Preventive Medicine Reports, Volume 41, 2024



About North Sydney



Sources: **1.** Australian Bureau of Statistics Estimated Resident Population 2023
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021

OUR COMMUNITY



72,014

Estimated resident population (2023) ¹

79,442

Forecast population (2036) ¹

38 yrs

Median Age ²

0.4%

Population who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ²

40%

Residents born overseas ²

16.8%

Population engaged in some form of voluntary work ²

89.3%

Population living in high/medium density housing ²

80,652

Working population (13.3% live in the LGA) ²

OUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA



10.49 km²

Land Area ²

169 ha

Public open space

58.7 ha

Bushland

11.8 km

Publicly accessible foreshore

OUR SPORT AND RECREATION FACILITIES

33

Playgrounds

1

Aquatic centre

1

Indoor sports centre

1

Skate plaza

1

Trike track

1

Outdoor ping pong table

2

Harbour swimming sites

4

Boat ramps

15

Small watercraft storage facilities

10

Outdoor fitness stations

7

Sports grounds

1

Golf course

5

Tennis facilities*

* Council owned

Open Space and Recreation in North Sydney



Core open space

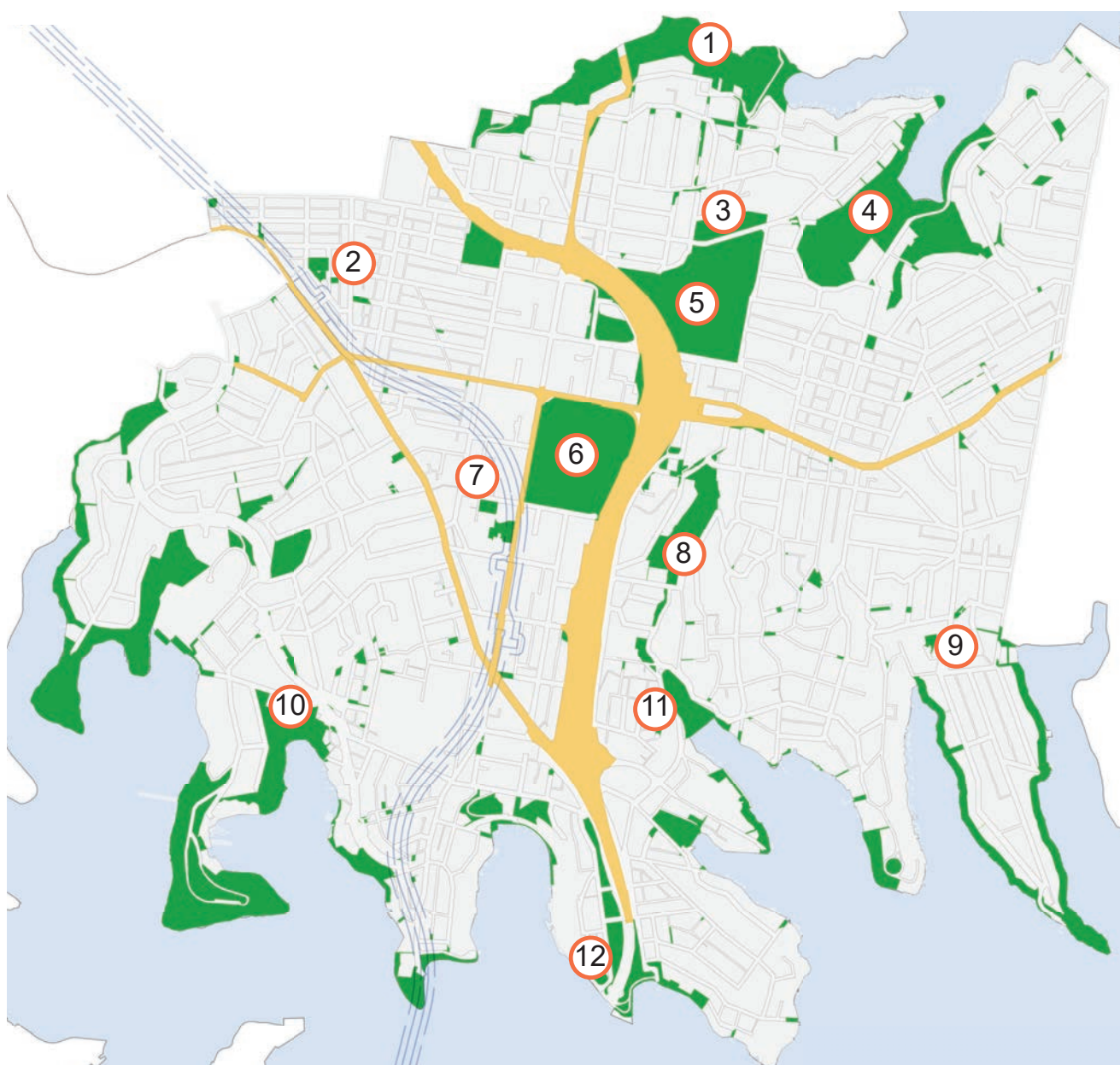
Recreational park	Provides a setting for informal play, physical activity, relaxation and social interaction
Sports park	Provides a setting primarily for formal structured sporting activities. Includes grassed or synthetic playing fields and courts

Core open space

Specialised sport	Provides a setting for formal sporting activities within a purpose-built facility. Includes indoor courts, lawn bowls, tennis courts and golf courses
Access and amenity	Includes open space generally dedicated to providing pedestrian access or visual amenity, or to protect the character/history of the area. Includes walkways, monuments, memorials and lookouts
Bushland	Reserves that contain biodiversity features of local, regional, state or federal significance. As the primary use of bushland is for environmental protection, the area may not permit unrestricted public access
Civic	Provides a setting for civic ceremonies or passive recreation, and contributes to the amenity of a town or village
Other	Encumbered open space that is often associated with areas for stormwater, drainage, utility infrastructure and cemeteries, or is owned and managed by others

Note: While most public open space in North Sydney is owned or managed by Council, some space in the 'other' classification is owned or managed by other entities such as the Harbour Trust and RailCorp.

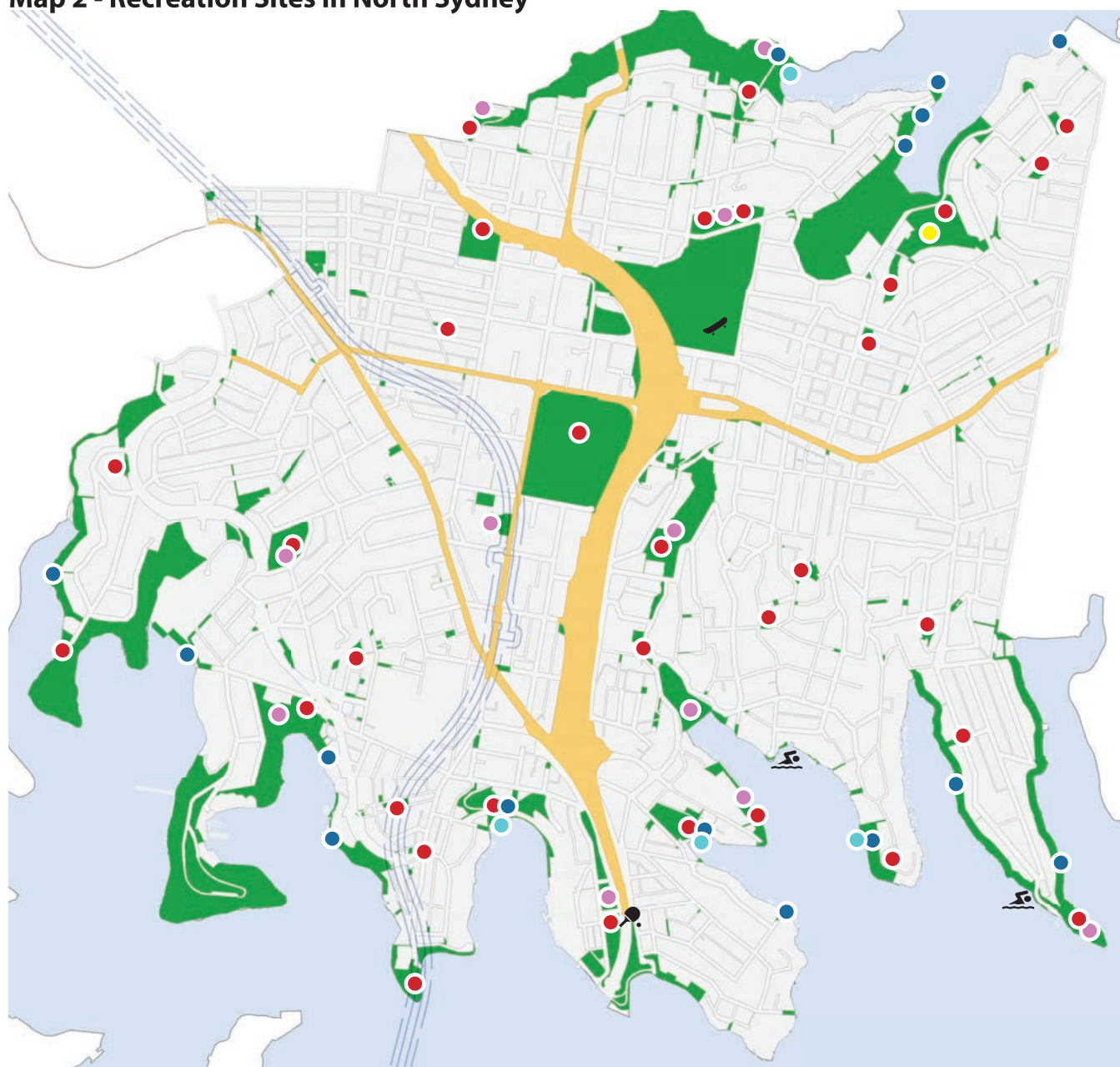
Sports Sites in North Sydney



1	Tunks Park Sportsfields	7	Ridge Street Tennis Centre Four lit tennis courts
2	North Sydney Indoor Sports Centre Four indoor courts primarily used for basketball	8	Forsyth Park Two sportsfields with lighting
3	Green Park Two tennis courts	9	Prior Avenue Reserve One tennis court
4	Primrose Park Sportsfields with lighting, 4 lit tennis courts and cricket nets	10	Waverton Park Sportsfield with lighting
5	Cammeray Park Synthetic sportsfield with lighting, 4 lit tennis courts, croquet green, 9 hole golf course	11	Anderson Park Sportsfield with lighting and cricket net
6	St Leonards Park Two sportsfields with lighting (Oval 1 and Bon Andrews Oval), 2 netball courts, cricket nets	12	North Sydney Olympic Pool 50m Pool, 25m pool, leisure pool, program pool

Recreation Sites in North Sydney

Map 2 - Recreation Sites in North Sydney



●	Playgrounds	●	Small water craft storage
●	Outdoor fitness equipment	●	Learner trike track
●	Boat ramps	●	Cammeray skate plaza
🏊	Swimming sites (Hayes Street Beach and MacCallum Pool)	🏓	Bradfield Park outdoor ping pong table



Focus areas to guide discussion

This paper presents four focus areas to guide the conversation with our community about open space and recreation in North Sydney:

1

Dealing with
our open
space deficit

2

Management
and use of
our open
space

3

Providing
opportunities
for organised
sport

4

Increasing
participation

1

Dealing with our open space deficit

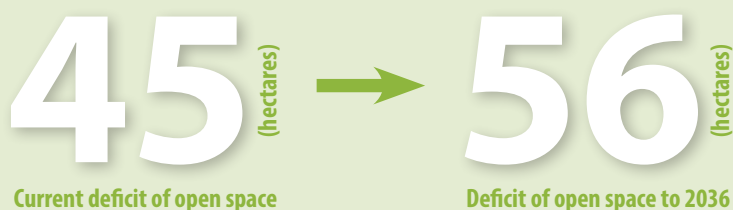
What is this theme about?

North Sydney has a current estimated open space deficit of approximately 45ha*. This deficit is expected to increase as our population grows. The greatest areas of deficit are in St Leonards and Crows Nest.

There is also a high reliance on public open space due to 89% of our community living in high and medium density housing. In the North Sydney area, Council's network of parks and reserves are very much our community's backyard.

Unfortunately, high land prices makes purchasing additional land for open space cost-prohibitive.

This theme therefore explores whether there are alternatives that might be available to increase opportunities for open space and recreation outside of traditional public parks and sporting fields.



*Based on a conservative demand of 1.8ha/1,000 people as detailed in the North Sydney Local Infrastructure Contributions Plan 2020

Did you know?

- To purchase enough land to build one soccer field in North Sydney, would conservatively cost an estimated \$80-100M and would require the compulsory acquisition of private property.
- Given the general size of development sites in North Sydney, communal areas of open space in new apartment developments tend to be somewhat limited and often constrained to rooftop areas or small pockets at ground level.

Discussion prompts

- 1** Based on our current population, we have an open space deficit of approximately 45ha and this is expected to increase as our population grows. Given the small size of our LGA and high land prices, purchasing additional land is not a viable option.



Do you find lack of open space an issue? If so, what types of open space are you missing?



Does the quality and/or location of the available open space compensate somewhat for the deficiency in quantity?

2

In areas where open space is in short supply, we need to think creatively about how we can meet demands.



Do you know of any under-utilised community spaces that could be re-purposed for open space and recreation?



Are there any non-council owned facilities that could potentially provide for community access to recreation or sport facilities, through partnership or agreement with Council?



Would you be open to using some of our roads and/or car parks as additional open space either temporarily (e.g. for play streets) or permanently?



Given the high cost of land, do you agree that we need to re-consider how we use our existing open space areas?

Loss of open space

The following photos show the land currently lost to the Western Harbour Tunnel project - St Leonards Park



CASE STUDY 1

Play streets

North Sydney Council ran a trial play street program in 2021 and 2023 that allowed communities to temporarily close their streets to traffic on a Sunday afternoon. The program sought to facilitate community connections, encourage active lifestyles, and improve wellbeing by adaptively reusing 'road space' for 'open space' and promoting a range of games and activities. Six streets across North Sydney have held street play events, which have included outdoor cricket, bike repair, giant boardgames and places to sit, relax and socialise.



CASE STUDY 2

Jakarta Downtown Car Free Day

At a different scale, Jakarta, a city of more than 10 million people, suffers from extreme traffic congestion and a lack of open space. Every Sunday, some of its CBD streets are closed to traffic and this provides residents with a weekly opportunity to use these spaces to walk, cycle, jog and socialise. The city's inhabitants embrace this weekly opportunity with enthusiasm and in large numbers.



2

Management and use of our open space

What is this theme about?

With limited open space available, it is important that we take an equitable and balanced approach to its management and utilisation. This theme explores the various competing uses and the conflict that can occur within our passive open spaces.

Did you know?

- There are 14 schools in North Sydney. Many rely heavily on our open spaces for sport and play.
- 10,714 dogs call North Sydney home and most parks allow off leash dog walking and play.
- Social gatherings of under 60 people can use open space in North Sydney without a permit or financial contribution.
- Increasingly, our harbour foreshore parks are being used for a variety of commercial uses free of charge including curated picnics, weddings, and other celebrations.
- Personal trainers do not require a formal permit or fee. They currently operate under a code of conduct with no limit on the number of trainers that can operate in any one park.
- The cost of managing crowds on NYE is approximately \$1M. This cost is rising each year.

Discussion prompts

- 1 Over 12,000 students attend school in North Sydney LGA each day. Currently, fourteen schools operate in the area, with another planned to open in the North Sydney CBD. To cater for increasing populations, our schools continue to grow, and this places pressure on the school grounds. Therefore, public open space is often relied on for school sports and play. Schools are exempt from paying rates and Council does not charge government schools for use of open space or sports fields. Independent schools are charged only for use of sports fields and when using St Leonards Park for cross country events.



Should large groups that regularly use our spaces (such as schools) contribute to ongoing maintenance?

- 2 10,714 dogs call North Sydney home. Given the high-density nature of many of our dwellings, open spaces are important for dogs and their owners. While our dogs are generally well behaved and are loved within the community, conflict can arise, whether it be through dog-related fears, small children, or over-excited pets.



Should consideration be given to increasing the number of parks that require dogs to be on-leash? If so, which ones should be considered?



Dogs at St Leonards Park

3 Our picturesque harbourside location means that our foreshore areas are in high demand for both land and water-based activities and events. Our community shares our open space areas with private events such as weddings and commercial activities like curated picnics. There are no permits or fees required for open spaces for community or commercial gatherings involving less than 60 people.



Do you feel that there is conflict between community and commercial use of our passive open spaces?



Should the size of a social gathering that is permissible without a permit (currently 60 people) be lowered?



Events at Blues Point Reserve

4 Personal trainers play an important role in keeping our community fit and active, however, their use of public open space, footpaths and structures can create conflict with other users. Across the state, councils manage personal trainers in different ways. Some local government areas (LGAs) manage this use through area-based and/or roving licenses, which are assessed considering the intensity of use and competing demands. In our neighbouring LGAs of Mosman, Lane Cove and Willoughby, personal trainers who are operating for commercial purposes are required to apply for a permit and pay appropriate fees.

We do not currently apply any limits to the use of open space by trainers and do not charge user fees, relying solely on a code of conduct to regulate these activities.



Do you think Council should develop a formal policy to manage where and how personal trainers operate in our open space areas?



Personal trainer in Civic Park

5 Cammeray Golf Course is the only golf course in North Sydney. It has recently been significantly reduced in size by the extensive road upgrades which remain ongoing to its west. It does remain highly valued by its members and users who would not like to see it changed. In the context of the significant deficit of public open space in North Sydney, it is difficult to ignore the wider community use opportunities that such an unusually large and contiguous area of public land presents. The site offers a unique opportunity to explore other activities and uses that would be assisted with further consultation and design work.



Should we consider re-purposing or multi-purposing Cammeray Park to allow greater community use and/or other forms of recreation?



Cammeray Golf Course

6 North Sydney Oval is one of Sydney's premier sporting venues. The Oval's capacity is 15,000 and the high-quality playing surface is surrounded by grandstands and a grass hill. Associated facilities include the Mollie Dive Function Centre, light towers, and broadcast facilities. The primary role of this facility is to accommodate the players of first-class organised sport and the spectators who come to watch.

The Oval needs significant renewal investment to ensure it remains fit for purpose as a premier sporting facility. Council has advocated to both State and Federal Government for sports funding, however the level of investment required does not fit within existing grant programs.

Whilst some non-elite sporting events and large-scale community events such as the Sunset Cinema are also held at the Oval, general community use of the space is restricted due to the need to preserve the oval as an elite playing surface. This includes the closure of gates outside of scheduled Oval events.



North Sydney Oval



Given the lack of available open space available in North Sydney, should we consider re-purposing North Sydney Oval to allow greater community use and/or other forms of recreation?

7 North Sydney is fortunate to enjoy some of the best vantage points on Sydney Harbour. On 31 December each year, we welcome over 100,000 people to our open spaces to watch the iconic Sydney New Year's Eve fireworks. The fireworks are a celebration for all. Despite best efforts to manage crowds and facilitate access to the display, many travel to North Sydney only to wait outside the fences. A debrief of last year's event identified that additional capacity may be accommodated within Bradfield Park, but this would require more funding. Management of the New Year's Eve crowd already has direct costs to our community of approximately \$1 million each year, and this figure is rising.



Do you believe Council should increase the funding allocated to management of New Year's Eve to allow for increased access to Bradfield Park?



New Year's Eve fireworks

8 While Council manages access to several key sites, other sites are unmanaged and unsupervised. In 2023/24, unrestricted access to Balls Head Reserve resulted in significant damage to years of bushland rehabilitation efforts by Council's Bushland team, volunteers, and contractors, with some revellers simply tearing down branches and lopping trees to improve their view of the fireworks. With sustainability being a key value of the community, it is important to consider management of the conflict created.



Would you support restricting or prohibiting access to Balls Head Reserve on New Year's Eve to protect its environmental value to our community?

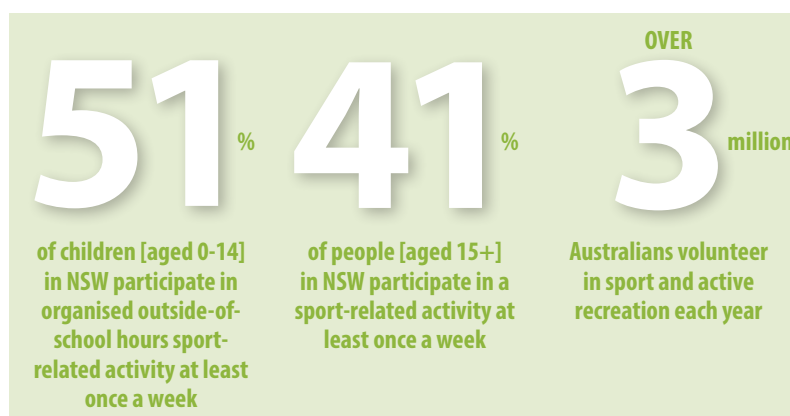
3

Providing opportunities for organised sport



What is this theme about?

Organised sport is a key part of community life.



Source: Ausplay data portal, Australian Sports Commission, accessed April 2024

Councils play a key role in supporting organised sports through the provision of sportsgrounds and specialist sporting facilities.

According to the 'Review of Supply and Demand for Sports Facilities in the Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC) 2023', (commissioned by NSROC), the supply of land for organised sports in the North Sydney LGA is low with a deficit of over 60 ha (or 40+ playing fields). This deficit is the highest of all NSROC Council's and is forecast to increase to over 110 ha by 2036.

Unfortunately, the majority of North Sydney's playing fields are located on long, narrow sites at the heads of bays, precluding future expansion.

Council is pursuing opportunities to increase capacity through partnerships with schools and reviewing the design and configuration of playing fields, however, this will not resolve the significant shortage.

With increasing demand for sports facilities, and lack of space for new playing fields, we need to consider how we can use our existing facilities more efficiently. Playing surfaces, irrigation, drainage, lighting, maintenance, type of use and weather conditions are all levers that can alter the capacity of a playing field.

Did you know?

- The supply of land for organised sports in North Sydney is low. According to a report commissioned by NSROC, our current deficit is over 60 ha.
- Traditional sports like football, soccer and cricket require 1-2 ha of open space for each field.
- The maximum recommended play time for a natural turf playing field is 25 hours/week (although our fields are typically used for up to 32 hours/week). Synthetic fields can sustain 60 plus hours/week.
- Maintenance and management of North Sydney Oval results in an annual operating deficit of \$600,000.



Discussion prompts

1 For a natural turf playing field, the NSROC report suggests that the recommended maximum play time is 25 hours per week. Most of our existing natural turf fields are at or near capacity based on current design and use, with some already exceeding the maximum recommended play time. Overuse of turf fields will result in poor surfaces and increased remediation costs, along with higher closure periods due to risk and/or safety concerns. Winter is a particularly challenging time of year, with wet weather impacting play time.

Between 2018 and now, to combat the undersupply of playing fields, synthetic turf fields have increasingly been installed. In 2022, there were more than 180 synthetic turf playing fields in NSW, a rise from 20 in 2018. North Sydney LGA has one synthetic field located at Cammeray. Since its installation, use of the field has almost doubled, and sport has been able to proceed despite wet weather conditions. According to Football NSW, synthetic fields can sustain 60 plus hours of play per week.

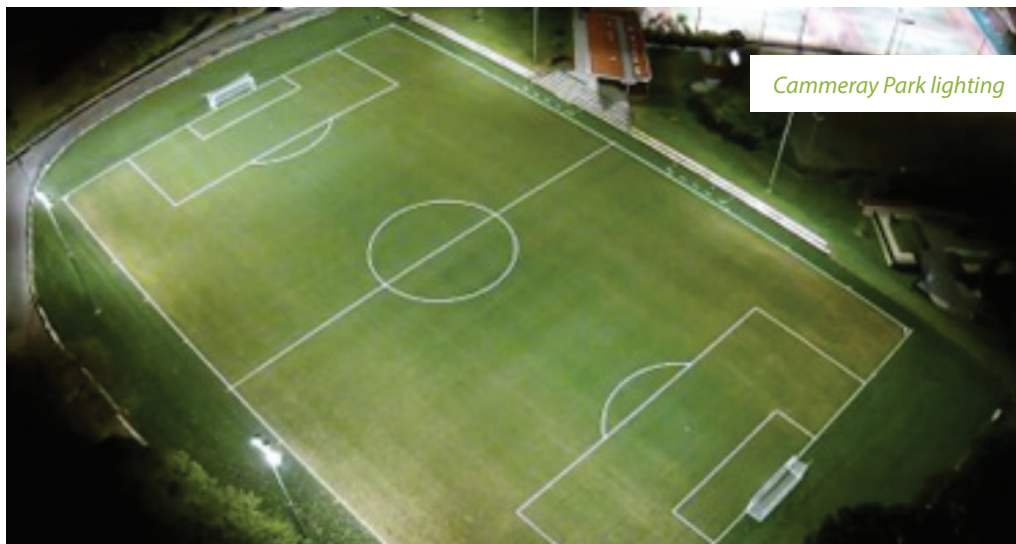
Despite the benefits of increased capacity, conflicting views are held across the community, with groups protesting the loss of natural green space and environmental concerns regarding microplastics.

The NSW Government commissioned an independent review into the design, use and impacts of synthetic turf in public open spaces. The Chief Scientist and Engineer publicly released his **“Independent review into the design, use and impacts of synthetic turf in public open spaces”** in June 2023. The review makes recommendations to guide the use and improve the management of synthetic turf in NSW.



Would you support the installation of synthetic surfaces as a way of increasing sporting field capacity?





- 2** Installation of lighting is another way to increase the capacity of a sports site. Appropriately designed lighting will provide additional evening training and competition opportunities, and ensure a safe level of lighting for sport all year round. There are also benefits associated with pushing play time out of the heat of the day.



Would you support the installation of lighting to get more from our sports sites?

- 3** In locations where a sportsground accommodates multiple fields or sports courts, there may be opportunities to reconfigure the layout to provide additional fields and/or courts and maximise use.



Do you have any ideas for how we could maximise the use of current sportsgrounds?

CASE STUDY

Reconfiguration of sporting fields

The following images show the main sporting field in a large town in country NSW, and the proposed new layout to increase the site's flexibility and usability in delivering field sports.



Image courtesy of Ross Planning

4 Traditional sports like football and cricket require large areas of open space to be dedicated specifically for those uses. While demand for these and other traditional sports is high, there is limited availability of large sporting fields.

To facilitate additional sporting opportunities, consideration may be given to exploring less traditional sports that require less investment of space. Some of these include futsal, pickleball, pop or paddle tennis, and half-court basketball. This would satisfy the desire of some members of the community to play organised, competitive sports but with a smaller footprint.



If you play organised sport, would you consider trying a smaller field format sport (such as futsal, pickleball, pop or paddle tennis or half-court basketball)?



Do you have any ideas for alternative sporting or recreational uses of public open space?

5 North Sydney Oval is one of Sydney's most iconic sporting venues and a much-loved local landmark by the North Sydney community.

While there is some community use of this space, the predominant use of North Sydney Oval is for regional, national and international sport. The requirement to maintain the facility for this level of sport restricts community access and incurs significant cost (the annual operating deficit excluding depreciation is currently over \$600,000).



In the context of North Sydney's limited open space, do you see a role for elite sporting facilities in our local area?



Do you enjoy attending elite sporting events at North Sydney Oval?



Should Council consider re-purposing the oval from an elite facility to wider community sporting use?



North Sydney Oval

4

Increasing participation

What is this theme about?

The benefits of access to open space and recreational opportunities are well documented. It is therefore important for our open spaces to be as inclusive as possible, fostering participation from as many community members as they can.

Our community demographic is diverse, with differing ages, abilities, preferences, needs and motivations to access open space. In addition to a general lack of open space, the design, location, topography and other factors may preclude or discourage some members of our community, who may have different access needs, from being able or willing to access our open space environments.

A 2023 study (the ParkWatch Report prepared by Make Space for Girls) in the United Kingdom, asked people to count the number of teenagers using local park facilities, and their gender, to collect data for a citizen science project. Youth parks or facilities designed for teenagers often include skateparks, BMX tracks or multi-use games areas (MUGAs) such as basketball half-courts or similar modified sport facilities. These types of facilities are anecdotally known to be primarily used by boys, however, this project sought to collect data to assess this notion. The results revealed that overall, 88% of the teenagers using these facilities were boys, and for MUGAs, the most common facilities, this was 92%. These results reinforced previously held beliefs about this gender inequity.

This theme seeks to explore opportunities to increase participation by better understanding the experiences and ideas of our community.

Did you know?

- Industry best practice suggests that residents should be able to access open space within 400m of their homes.
- Most playgrounds in North Sydney contain some inclusive elements, however constraints such as topography and parking make fully inclusive design difficult and expensive.
- Walking is by far the most popular sport or activity which Australians regularly participate in (Roy Morgan Research 2022).
- 31% of women over 15 in NSW, participate in organised sport (Clearing House for Sport 2022).



Discussion prompts

- 1** While Council ensures that many playgrounds contain at least some inclusive items and elements, constraints such as topography, lack of parking, other physical elements or even funding constraints, mean that not all of North Sydney's playgrounds are fully inclusive.



What prevents you from participating more regularly in sport and recreation activities?



Are there any existing open spaces or recreational areas or facilities that you or someone you know, is unable or unwilling to use because of mobility, gender, age or other characteristics?



What suggestions do you have for enhancements, however small, to increase your use of our open space areas?

- 2** Walking, jogging, running, and cycling continue to be some of the most popular recreation activities in North Sydney. Providing off-road paths and trails to connect open spaces serves our residents, workers, students, and visitors. Off road paths encourage physical activity, provide active transport, and enable younger and older people to get around safely. The paths also bring the community into contact with nature and provide restorative benefits.



Are there any missing links in our network of walking trails/paths that impact on your ability to access and enjoy our open space areas?

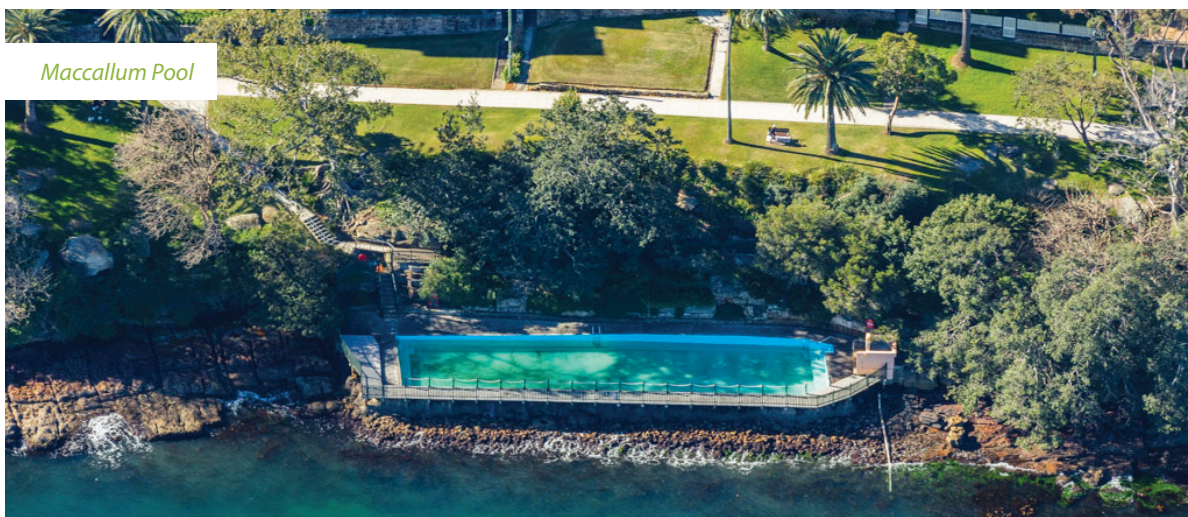


Hunts Lookout footbridge in Cremorne Reserve connects the North Sydney and Mosman LGAs

- 3** Our foreshore location and the environmental quality of the harbour mean that water-based activities are a significant form of recreation in North Sydney.



What do you think can be done to make our foreshore more accessible to everyone?



Maccallum Pool

