

2021

Playground Strategy

2021 to 2026



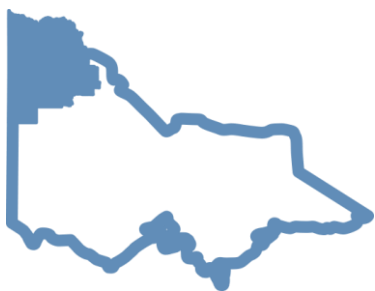
Mildura Rural City Council



Mildura Rural City Council

Acknowledgement

Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land which now comprises the Mildura Rural City Council area, and to those of our neighbouring municipalities. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, we celebrate and respect their continuing culture and connection to the land.



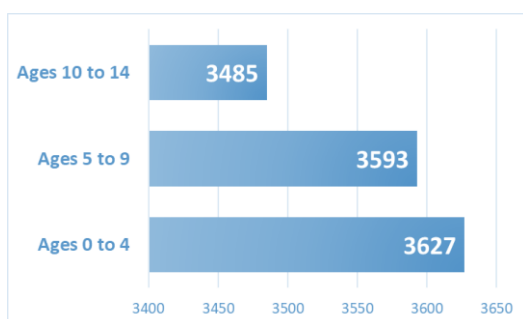
22,300 Square Kilometres

Mildura Rural City Council covers almost ten per cent of Victoria



55,515 Population

We have the ninth largest city in Victoria



Age profile

There are 10,705 children, or 19.3% in our community that are aged 14 or under



Physical Benefits

Outdoor play is fun and also improves kids flexibility, balance and motor skills



Social Benefits

Playgrounds are a great place for kids (and adults!) to meet and socialise



The importance of play

Playgrounds are great environments to stimulate kids imaginations and experiences

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Vision

An integral part of Council's vision of 'making this the most liveable, people-friendly community in Australia' is the development and maintenance of playgrounds. Playgrounds are vitally important for the physical, emotional, social and intellectual wellbeing of children. The Playground Strategy 2021 - 2026 documents how we will develop our playground network and how will ensure that our community has access to new and innovative playgrounds.

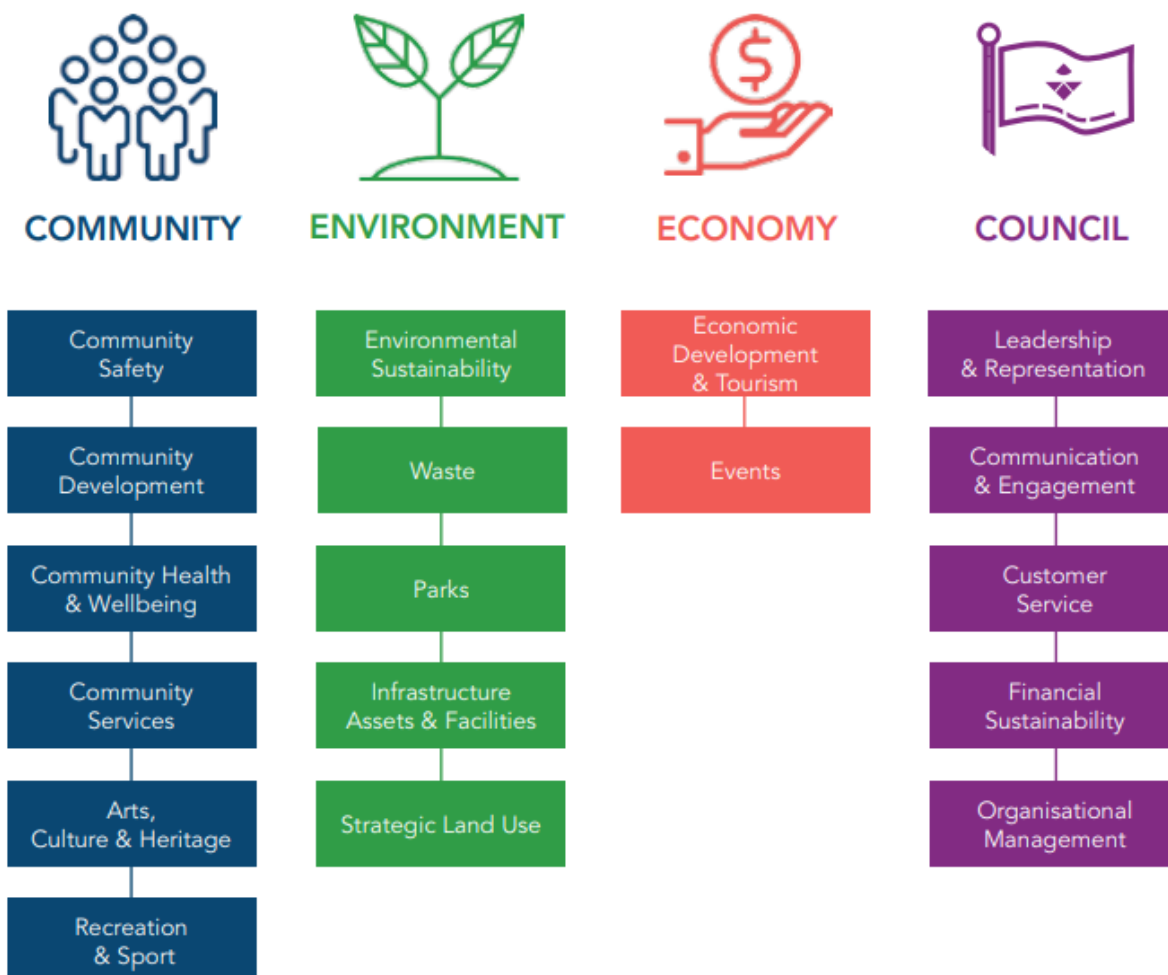


Figure 1: Community and Council Plan Strategic Areas

Executive Summary

The Playground Strategy 2021-2026 outlines the actions that are key to helping achieve our vision of 'making this the most liveable, people friendly community in Australia' (*Community and Council Plan 2017-2021*).

This strategy outlines the current and planned actions Council undertakes with regards to how we manage and develop our playgrounds. The strategy focuses on provision of playground facilities and infrastructure in public open space in Mildura Rural City Council.

Five priority areas have been identified including:

1. Health and wellbeing
2. Access and inclusion
3. Environment and sustainability
4. Design principles and innovation
5. Connection to the community

Our vision is to establish a clear and inclusive direction in the design, provision and maintenance of playgrounds in the municipality through:

- Improved accessibility for all
- Promotion of high levels of community health
- Responsiveness to community input



Figure 2: Ornamental Lake Playground

Introduction

Mildura Rural City Council is a place with a diverse range of accessible play-spaces that provide opportunities for all children and their families to play safely and creatively in public open space. Playgrounds and associated infrastructure are a key component of our public open space and all future development will need to reflect the high expectations from the community as well as the complex needs of the end users in the municipality.

This Playground Strategy is intended to guide the provision, design, standards, management and maintenance of playground facilities and outdoor fitness equipment in public open space in Mildura Rural City Council for the next five years.

It will demonstrate responsible management of council's playground and fitness assets and will contribute to outcomes in the Community and Council Plan which include:

- **KRA 1.2 Community Development** to improve accessibility to facilities, services and activities and improve the level of inclusion and active participation in the community.
- **KRA 1.3 Community Health and Wellbeing** with direct links the Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017 to 2021
- **KRA 1.4 Community Services** where Council advocates that children have opportunities for the best start in life and linkage to the Municipal Early Years Plan 2019 to 2023
- **KRA 1.6 Recreation and Sport** to increase access to a diverse range of quality sporting and recreation facilities and programs
- **KRA 2.3 Parks** to provide clean, attractive and sustainable parks, gardens, streetscapes, reserves and wetlands

Objectives

This strategy will assist in the long term development and maintenance of Council's playgrounds and outdoor fitness equipment. It will detail the design principles and guidelines to allow Council to manage these assets in a sustainable manner. It will assist in the planning for innovative and diverse play and recreation areas and provide a framework for future capital works programs. By implementing the strategy it will allow Council to make decisions, set priorities and respond to requests for new or upgraded facilities.

The strategy will highlight distribution and design issues surrounding the provision of playgrounds and establish a long term program of works. Finally, the strategy is designed to produce a method to measure asset condition, risk exposure, maintenance performance and financial sustainability.

Focus

The scope of the strategy is limited to public accessible playground facilities that are on Council owned or managed land that may cater for:

- Children primarily between the ages of 0 – 12
- The provision of fitness equipment or fitness circuits
- Adult equipment designed for sensory, dexterity or cognisance therapy
- People of all abilities who may require special needs equipment

Playgrounds are defined as a built play space, containing equipment or structures which enable or encourage play.

The strategy deals specifically with public access playgrounds, and excludes playgrounds in schools, child care centres or other commercial premises. Other facilities such as recreational sporting precincts, skate parks, basketball rings and BMX tracks are included in other relevant Council strategies.

The strategy will include a review and strategic planning process for facilities targeting youth and children, including the provision of equipment for play, outdoor exercise, youth activities (i.e: skating, BMX/bike skills, parkour) and community courts¹

Outdoor exercise equipment is the perfect tool to help increase physical activity in the community and has the potential to service almost everyone in the community without restriction. As a person ages they trend towards unstructured physical activity and away from organised sport. The Australian Sports Commission identified walking as the most popular physical exercise with 42% of the population participating. To capitalise on this activity there is an obvious synergy for outdoor fitness equipment to be incorporated in the existing infrastructure assets that council controls, such as walking trails, playgrounds, bike tracks, parks and recreation complexes.

Links to the Community & Council Plan 2017 – 2021

The Playground Strategy will form part of a suite of asset management plans that support council objectives regarding infrastructure, assets and facilities. Community and Council Plan and associated strategies and plans are listed as follows:

- Community Safety Plan 2015 to 2020
- Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017 to 2021
- Municipal Early Years Plan 2015 to 2018
- Public Open Space Strategy 2021
- Asset Management Strategy 2017 to 2022
- Community Access and Inclusion Plan 2014 -2018
- State of Mildura Rural City's Children and Young People report 2014
- Youth Engagement Strategy 2020-2023
- Recreation Strategy 2021 – 2031

¹ Mildura Rural City Council Open Space Strategy

Development of the Playground Strategy

Due to the significant environmental, social and economic impacts that affect all sectors of the community, it is very important that our playgrounds are managed well. The Playground Strategy 2021 - 2026 was developed following extensive research and consultation with Councillors, Council staff, key stakeholders and the residents of our community. The following table outlines the consultation activities undertaken to create this strategy.

Phase	Details
Community survey	A playground survey was undertaken in June 2020 to help inform the priorities and actions in this strategy Annual community satisfaction surveys. Reference to applicable community surveys undertaken by Council departments – Voices of Mallee Children survey, Draft Recreational Strategy survey, Homestead Activation survey, Ornamental Lake Play space survey.
Data analysis	In depth analysis of Council data and benchmarking alongside other Councils strategies.
Internal consultation	Project control group, relevant Council areas.
External consultation	Stakeholder consultation on playground results and results from community satisfaction surveys.
Draft strategy	Internal review.
Final strategy	Approved by Council
Implementation	Implementation of the <i>Playground Strategy 2021 - 2026</i> priorities and action plan.
Monitoring and evaluation	Monitor and evaluate the delivery of the <i>Playground Strategy 2021 -2026</i> action plan.

Table 1: Process for developing the Playground Strategy 2021-2026

Playground Survey Results

In May 2020, a survey was undertaken by Council to obtain community feedback about our current playgrounds and what the community would like to see in future developments. 144 community members responded with the majority of playground users being on site for 1 - 2 hours and priorities for them ranked shade, variety of equipment, toilets and seating as the most important aspects.

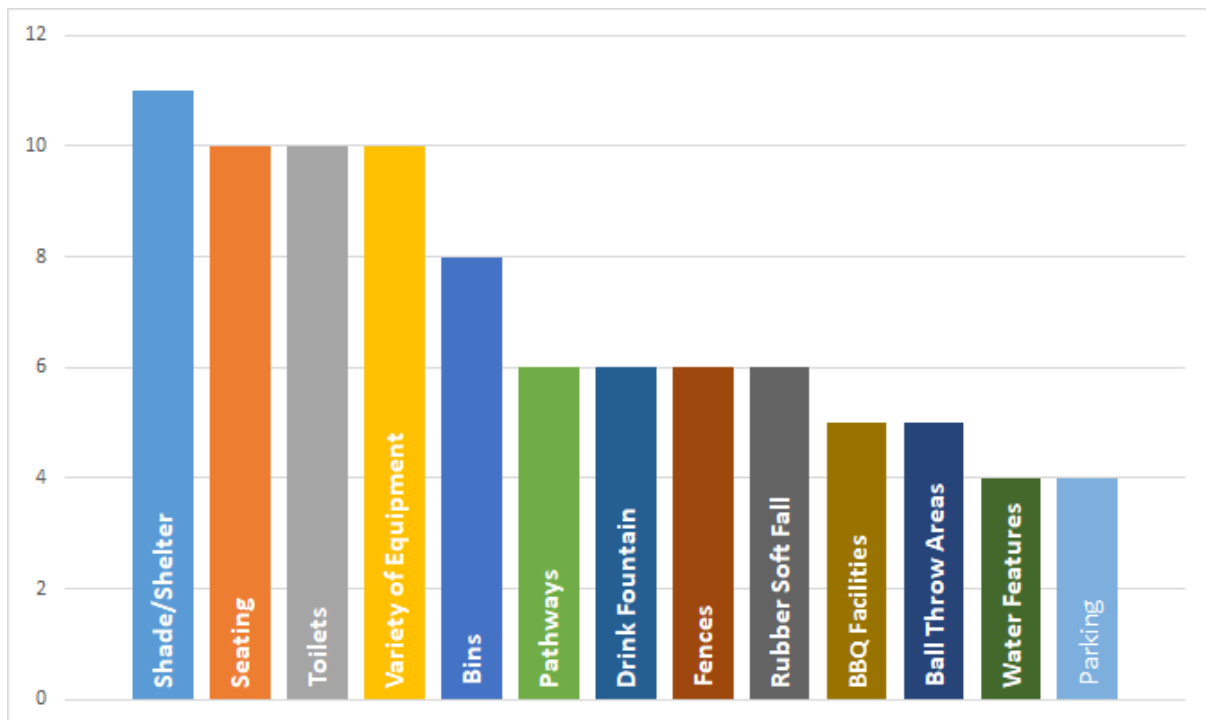


Figure 3: Playground Survey – Community priorities

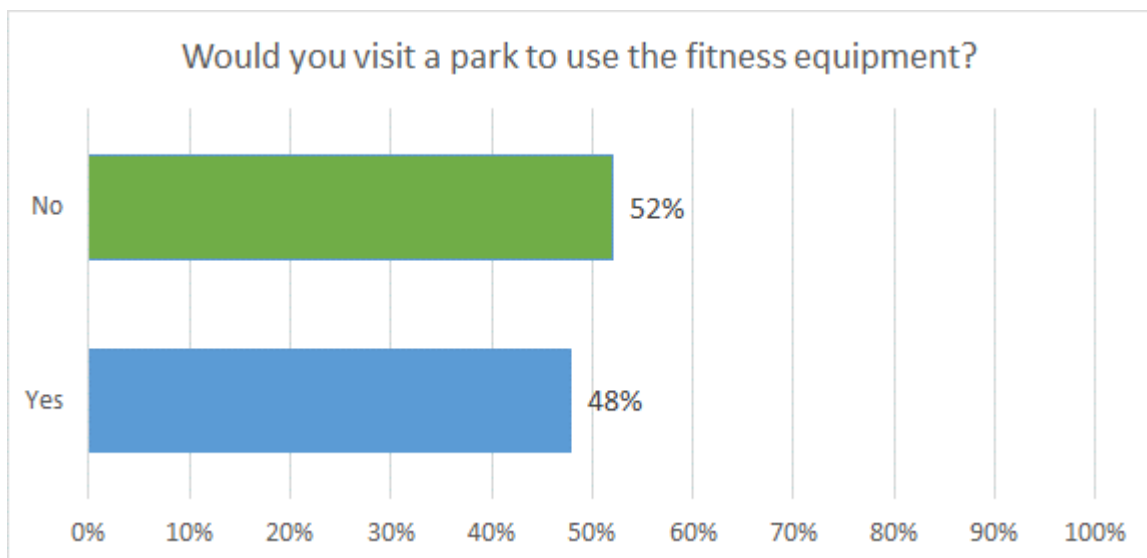


Figure 4: Playground Survey – use of fitness equipment

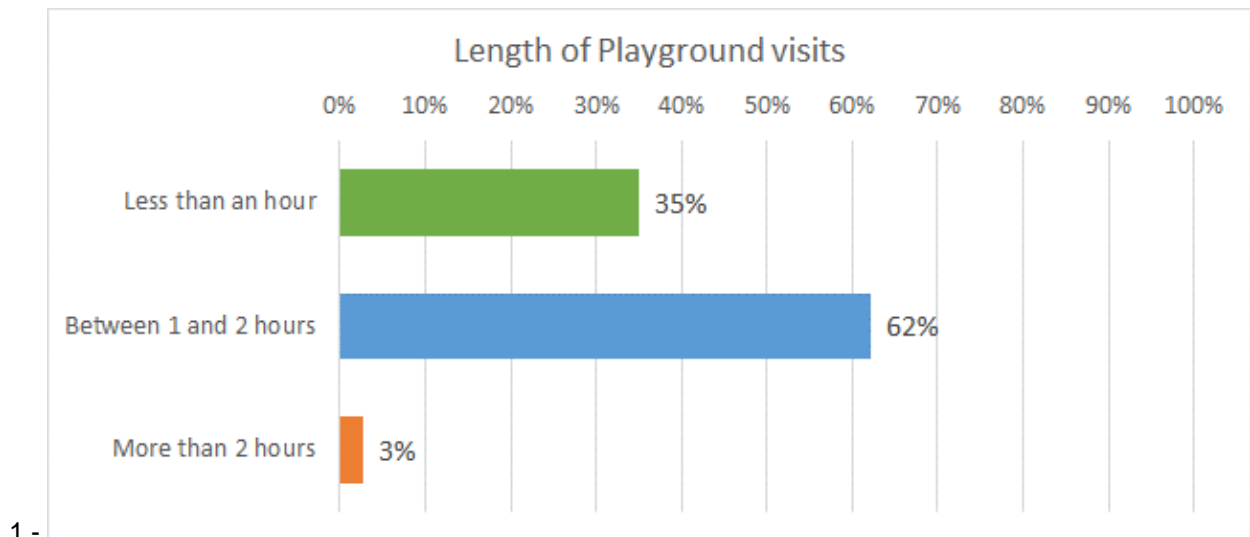


Figure 5: Playground Survey – length of playground visits

Ornamental Lakes Playground upgrade

In August 2020, MRCC conducted a survey via Social media, email and a ballot box onsite to source community input prior to the development of the upgrade to this playground. With responses from 72 community members including children, feedback was consistent with that of the playground survey in that shade, variety of equipment and seating were priorities.

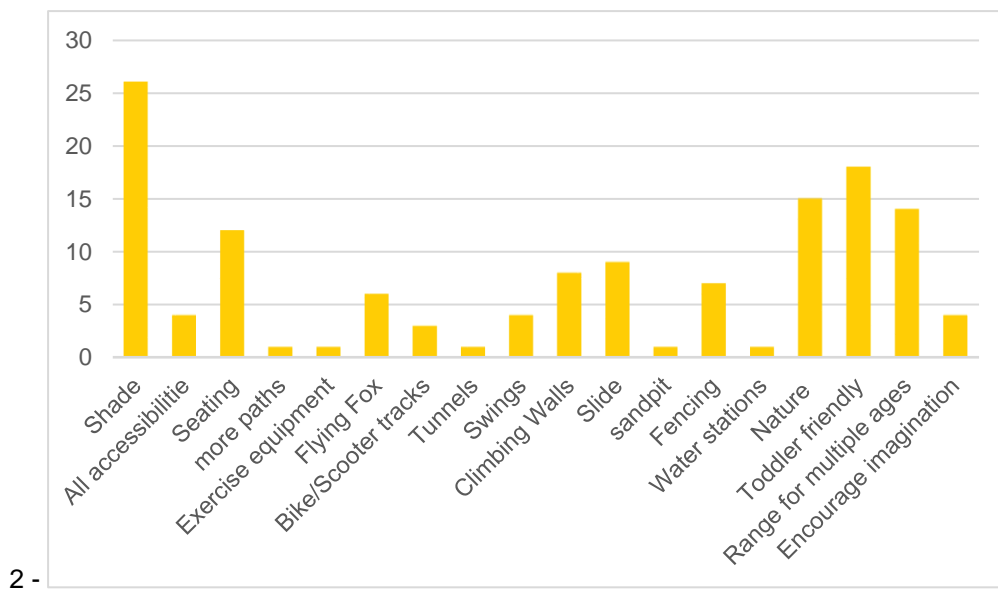


Figure 6: Ornamental Lakes Playground survey – community priorities

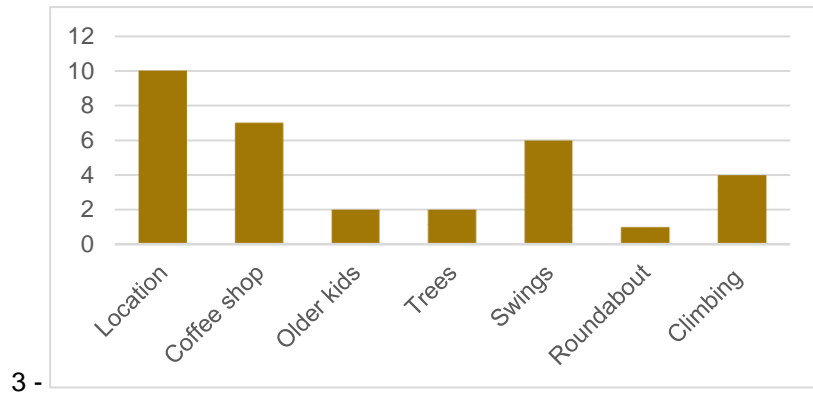


Figure 7: Ornamental Lakes Playground survey – what works

Community Satisfaction Survey

Community Satisfaction survey is undertaken by MRCC annually and the results of the 2021 survey for playgrounds is illustrated in the below table:

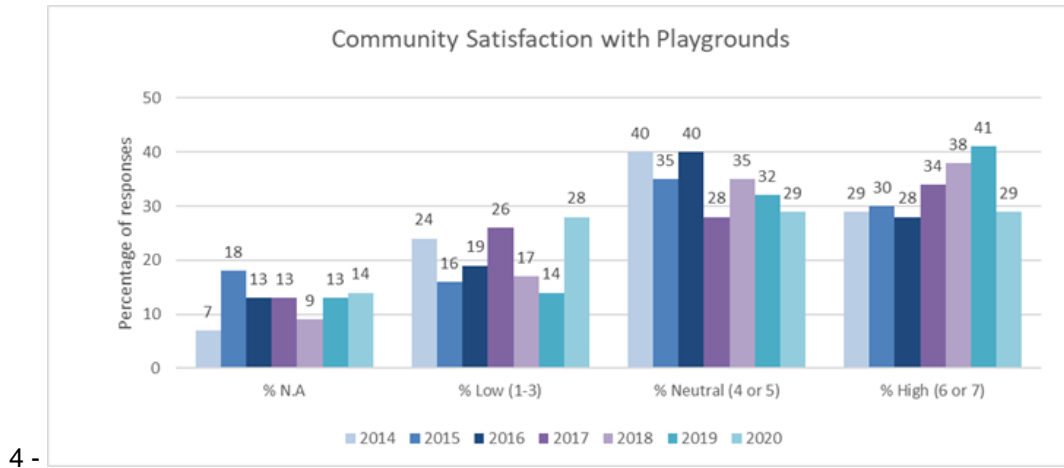


Figure 8: Community Satisfaction with Playgrounds 2020 – annual comparisons

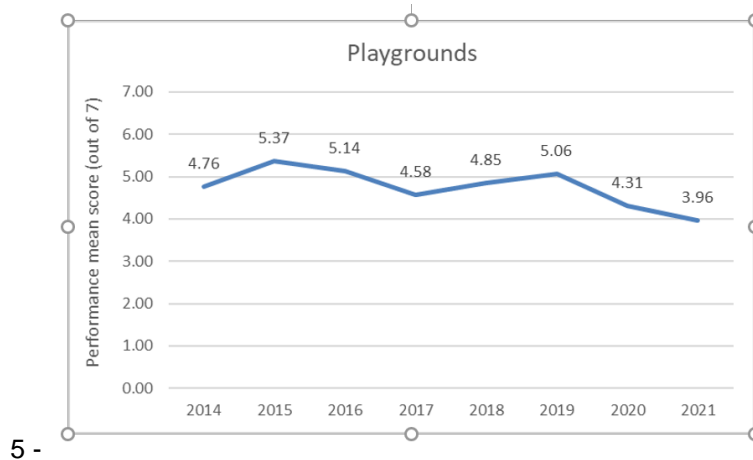


Figure 9: Community Satisfaction with Playgrounds 2021

Policy, legislation and strategic context

The following section outlines those policies, legislation, standards and strategic context relevant to the strategy.

The current Australian Standards that need to be considered as part of Playground design include:

AS/NZS4486.1:1997: Playgrounds and Playground equipment – Development, installation, inspection, maintenance and operation

AS4685.1: General safety requirements and test methods

AS4685.2: Additional safety requirements and test methods for swings

AS4685.3: Additional safety requirements and test methods for slides

AS4685.4: Additional safety requirements and test methods for runways

AS4685.5: Additional safety requirements and test methods for carousals

AS4685.6: Additional safety requirements and test methods for rocking equipment

AS4685.11: Additional safety requirements for Spatial Network

AS/NZS4422:1996: Playground surfacing – Specifications, requirements and test methods

AS 1428.1-5 2001: Design for Access and Mobility Parts 1-5

AS/NZS ISO 31000: Risk management – Principles and guidelines

The Australian Standards are not retrospective so any equipment produced before AS4685 (October 2004) should meet AS1924 or undergo third party testing as part of an annual inspection process.

Internal Council documents that have been considered include but are not limited to:

- Risk Management Framework
- Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Community and Council Plan
- Asset Management Plan
- Community Access and Inclusion Plan
- Municipal Early Years Plan
- Urban Tree Strategy
- Public Open Space Strategy
- Gender Equality Policy and Gender Equality Act 2020

Mildura Rural City Council profile

Knowing our population demographics and environment is key to understanding what direction our Playground Strategy should take to provide the best level of service for the future. Mildura Rural City Council municipality is located in the north west of Victoria and covers an area of 22,300 square kilometres, making it the largest local government area in the state. The Murray River runs along the northern border of the area. A map of the Council area can be seen in the following figure.



Figure 10: Boundary map of the MRCC municipality

Major townships of the area include Mildura, Irymple, Red Cliffs and Merbein. Other rural townships include Ouyen, Meringur, Werrimull, Cullulleraine, Cardross, Nangiloc, Colignan, Murrayville, Nichols Point, Cowangie, Underbool and Walpeup. The area supports a population of around 55,515 and this is only expected to increase over time. Approximately 32,738 of these people reside in Mildura.

Guidelines for Playgrounds

The Importance of play

Play assists in the physical activity, emotional stability, social inclusion and intellectual wellbeing of a child. It encourages children to increase the number of social interactions as well as developing their cognitive and problem solving skills. Physically it assists with balance, flexibility and motor skills. Emotionally, play helps with self-awareness, resilience and risk assessment.

The United Nations has stated that:

“....every child has a 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 arts”²

The role of the playground is to provide the perfect environment to encourage children of all ages to explore their surroundings and test their physical capacity as well as stimulate their imaginations. It can promote spontaneous and structured play that develops self-expression and creativity as well as social interaction with the freedom of unsupervised activity.

Council has made a commitment that young children have opportunities for the best start in life. Easy access to a playground to express themselves in play partly fulfils that commitment.

People of all ages share common benefits with children from participation in play and recreation. These benefits include improved mental and physical health and wellbeing from participating in physical activities and the benefits associated with social interaction and spending time with friends and family.

Council has made a commitment to design play spaces so that they cater to diverse groups.

Types of Play/Recreation	Children			Young people	Adults	Older Adults	Adults as Carers
	0-4	5-8	9-11	12-17	18-59	60+	
Physical play involving basic to moderate challenges (i.e. climbing, sliding, swinging, rocking, rotating, etc.)	✓	✓	✓				✓
Physical play involving complex challenges and high degrees of risk (i.e. skating, BMX)		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Cognitive play (i.e. using imagination, manipulating objects to construct/create, sensory experiences, etc.)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social play/interaction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sport (formal competition, training, informal ball games)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Exercise and fitness activities.			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 2: Types of play and age ranges³

² United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31

³ <https://www.casey.vic.gov.au/policies-strategies/playground-strategy>

Key Priority Areas

The role of the playground is to provide the perfect environment to encourage children of all ages to explore their surroundings and test their physical capacity as well as stimulate their imaginations. It can promote spontaneous and structured play that develops self-expression and creativity as well as social interaction with the freedom of unsupervised activity.

Council will continue to work with the community to provide outdoor spaces and public facilities where people of all ages and abilities can go to exercise and relax.

This Playground Strategy 2021-2026 identifies the following five priority areas:



Priority 1: Health and Wellbeing

Play spaces will be safe and secure and promote the physical health and social connectivity of the users.

Council is committed to providing quality playgrounds throughout the municipality that meets or exceeds the needs and expectations of our community.

An audit of existing playgrounds is required to determine whether they meet relevant safety standards. Equipment that does not comply poses a potential hazard to users.

If it is determined that certain playgrounds do not comply, they should be prioritised for redevelopment.

Council recognises the importance of play and the role of the playground to act as a conduit to the health and well-being for all members of the community.

Council will investigate the provision of fitness equipment to enhance opportunities for community members from a diverse range of age groups to benefit.

This addresses two key barriers that restrict participation from many community members in this form of physical workout. Access to this type of equipment and providing it free of charge are contributions council makes to encourage healthy wellbeing

These can be stand alone or incorporated into current sites.

Council will investigate improving access to drinking fountains, path access and toilets, these have been identified as key amenities to encourage participation across diverse groups. Other contributing factors include shade, car parking, seating, proximity to other community recreational areas and possibly some lighting to extend usage

Australian Standards

Australian Standards have been developed to provide guidelines for the design, installation, maintenance and operation of playgrounds. These standards are not mandatory and do not have the status of law, but set a minimum benchmark for council to follow as part of the basis for its total risk management operations. They are not intended to provide totally risk free play spaces, but focus on the elimination of hazards likely to cause serious or life-threatening injuries.

PRIORITY 1 – WHAT WE WILL DO

1. Complete an annual safety audit of all municipal playgrounds to comply with relevant Australian Standards
2. Prioritise and re-develop playgrounds identified as non-compliant by the audit
3. Develop a plan to identify opportunities for fitness hubs
4. Explore opportunities for additional amenities and facilities at existing sites in line with relevant strategies and plans

Priority 2: Access and Inclusion

Convenient access to play spaces will be provided through the appropriate placement of Regional, Neighbourhood and Local playgrounds. These facilities need to be designed to be inclusive to people of all ages and genders and with varying interests and abilities.

A diverse choice of play opportunities makes it more likely that everyone can find some way to participate, and children can maximise their development potential. Inclusion requires a high level of attention to detail and multiple access options and a combination of elements suitable for people with different abilities.

The level of play experience offered will be derived from the guidelines classification but will at all times strive to accommodate children of all abilities.

Gender Impact Assessments will be carried out on new and reviewed policies, programs and services related to this strategy that directly and significantly impact our community. This process aims to identify and remove causes of gender inequality and facilitate progress toward the achievement of gender equality in our community.

Wherever possible playgrounds need supporting infrastructure such as roads, paths, parking and bike tracks to make the playground more accessible.

Access for all

The mission of inclusive play is to unite everyone, regardless their abilities, through play.⁴

People of all ages and abilities have a right to play. Play is fundamental to health, well-being, learning and social inclusion. Play is a way that people learn and interact and a way they get to understand themselves as a valuable and part of the community.

An inclusive playground should be accessible and enjoyed by all.

Council will endeavour to design the playgrounds to be inclusive of all ages and abilities and to encourage participation while providing an appropriate level of risk and challenge. They should be deliberately designed to allow minor elements of risk.

A degree of risk in playgrounds is beneficial. Providing children opportunities to enjoy challenging, adventurous play, encountering hazards and taking risks will assist in their development and give them capacity to manage risks for themselves. Council will implement a risk management approach in the design of all new and replacement play spaces.

While we look to build playground that are safe to use we should also include equipment that are challenging and have an acceptable degree of risk.

*"Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time playing... In play provision exposure to some degree of risk may be of benefit because it satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about risk and consequences in a controlled environment. Children need to learn to cope with risk and this may lead to bumps and bruises and even occasionally a broken limb."*⁶

"Play provision should aim at managing the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from serious harm... The aim of this standard is first and foremost to prevent

⁴ <https://www.kompan.com.au/inclusive-play>

⁵ <https://www.kidsafensw.org/imagesDB/documents/ARiskManagementApproach2021.pdf>

⁶ AS4685.1:2021

*accidents with a disabling or fatal consequence, and secondly, to lessen serious consequences caused by the occasional mishap that inevitably will occur in children's pursuit of expanding their level of competence, be it socially, intellectually or physically."*⁷

What this means is that acceptable risk could be termed as risks that are easy for children to assess themselves; any risk that engages and challenges children; supports growth, learning and development; and, if an incident were to occur, it is unlikely to lead to a serious or permanent injury.



Figure 11: Park for Play

Playground classifications

The level of play experience will ultimately vary according to the facilities that are available. This can be significant depending on a number of factors, such as the terrain, the natural features, the amount of age specific equipment, soft fall, shade, seating, bins, toilets, barbeque access and drink fountains.

A playground classification system provides a framework that can assist in determining the type and scale of experience that can be developed at the playground. The accepted classification levels across most councils are Regional, District and Local and have been adopted in this strategy.

Regional playgrounds/sites should be large spaces with specially designed playgrounds featuring a diversity of play opportunities and with the relevant support services to meets the needs of large numbers of people arriving by car/public transport/foot. They are considered destination sites with well-known features that reflect something of the unique nature of the city

Neighbourhood playgrounds/sites cater for the local community and provide a range of play experiences and be supported by adequate services

Local Playgrounds/sites should meet the needs of the immediate community and are within walking and cycling distance of their homes

Civic Playground/sites Parks which fulfil a range of civic functions with unique infrastructure. Often located within town centres.

⁷ AS4685.1:2021

✓✓ Must have ✓ May have × Should not have ×× Must not have

		Regional Park	Neighbourhood Park	Local Park	Civic Park	Township Sporting Reserve	Local Sporting Reserve
Catchment		5km	1km	400m	400m	5km	1km
PLAY	Grassed 'Kick-about' Area	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓
	Play Equipment*	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
	Skate park / Youth facilities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Exercise Equipment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recreational Court / Hard Surface	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
STRUCTURES	Picnic Facilities	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Park Furniture (i.e. Seating)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓
	BBQ	✓✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
	Shade / Shelter	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓
	Drinking Fountain	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Public Toilets / Amenities	✓✓	✓	××	✓✓	✓✓	✓
	Security Lighting	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
	On Site Car Parking	✓✓	✓	×	✓✓	✓✓	✓
	Dog Off-Leash Area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×
	Sport Facilities	××	××	××	✓	✓	××
	Perimeter Fencing	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
FEATURES	Pathways / Trails (Sealed)	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Pathways / Trails (Unsealed)	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓
	Landscaped areas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓
	Public Art / Memorials / Heritage Features	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
	Shade Trees / Feature Trees	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓
	Bike Rack/s	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
SIGNAGE	Information signage (e.g. Civic Signs)	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
	Directional/Wayfindings Signage	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
	Interpretive Signage	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
DESIGN	Access for All	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
	Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
	Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓

Table 3: Playground hierarchy and design framework⁸

⁸ Mildura Rural City Council Open Space Strategy

PRIORITY 2 – WHAT WE WILL DO

1. Audit existing playgrounds for pathways and equipment to suit all abilities and all ages
2. Carry out gender impact assessments as required by the Gender Equality Act 2020
3. Ensure that all new playground design caters for all ages and all abilities
4. Develop an approach to risk management that considers the benefits as well as risks of challenging play experiences.

Priority 3: Environment and Sustainability

Council will review its regular maintenance schedule of all playgrounds with the emphasis on removing or fixing any unsafe equipment.

All safety inspections and forthcoming maintenance and repairs will be recorded in a Playground Condition Register. The frequency of inspections will depend on the classification of the playground. The Register will contain a comprehensive inventory for each playground asset. It will require an up to date description of each piece of playground equipment, date of installation, supplier name, total cost, maintenance history and expected redundancy date. The individual apparatus will then be rated and attributed an estimated duration cycle whereby Excellent would be 95%, Good 75%, Fair 50%, Poor 25% and Very Poor 5%. This will provide an improved asset knowledge as well as data and risk management. It will give a clear indication of replacement timing and cost commitment. This makes the register a reliable reference for long term management of playground equipment that council can use as an accurate budgeting tool beyond the life of this five year strategy.

There also needs to be a focus to create informal play spaces within playgrounds to encourage imaginative play while ensuring efficient use of the budget. On a value for money basis naturally constructed play areas grafted into the landscape tend to be cheaper and much more durable than manufactured equipment. Recycled materials used to manufacture basic equipment would be a positive message to the community.

Value for Money

This document represents a strategic approach to the development of play spaces in parks, aiming to deliver the maximum value to the community through carefully considered programs of planning, design and maintenance. This approach allows Council to avoid misplaced or ad hoc expenditure, to get the best value from its investment for the community and to provide the most equitable access to play in open space.

Council's playground assets represent a significant capital investment and as a result we need to ensure that the development and replacement of playground sites represent value for money. While their benefits are never completely measured in any monetary sense, they are a major asset to individuals, the community and the environment in a variety of ways.

The role of the Public Open Space Strategy ensures we provide an appropriate level of service and range of facilities throughout our townships. The Public Open Space Strategy classifies sites based on location, proximity to other parks and accessibility to parklands. This ensures that we do not over capitalise through over provision of playgrounds.

The community's views and opinions are a valuable and essential contribution to the success of any playground renewal or playground design process, providing local knowledge and reflecting the needs of local communities. By taking local issues into account, playgrounds and parks are likely to represent better value for money and increase resident satisfaction.

But how do you get the best value from playground design?

Great playground design includes:

- Locating play equipment to create useful space for other activities in the park, such as ball games and seating areas. Ideally we should not dominate the entire park with one group of equipment right in the centre.
- Avoid locating elevated play equipment too close to houses where residents' privacy may be compromised as a result.
- In smaller parks, generally avoid noisy forms of equipment.
- Understanding that connections between elements within a park or play space may be as important as the play equipment itself. Where elements are located and how they relate to one another will have a major bearing on how well they will be used for play.
- Grouping 'like' activities for particular age groups together.

- Where possible making sure that the play on some equipment can be extended by locating it close to simple objects which children incorporate into their games. Items such as a nearby tree, a large boulder, a tree stump, or some stepping stones will need to be outside fall zones but will often extend the play value.
- The impact absorbing surface ('softfall') under play equipment accounts for a considerable amount of the cost of a playground. As each elevated item is required to have softfall underneath, better value is obtained by grouping equipment, to lessen the area and expense of soft fall, and maximise access.
- Developing a multipurpose space which can be used by everyone.
- Including physical elements that can be used by any aged child, and by individuals and groups, can provide good play value. Different ages might use equipment in different ways. For example a hammock swing may be used for gently rocking a young child, while a group of older children might swing it wildly to see who falls off, and teenagers might gather together and talk.

Funding and Life Cycle

Funding playground projects requires a constant balance between providing new assets and prolonging and eventual disposal of existing assets. As part of its annual budget process council will need to allocate funds for capital expenditure for any planned new playgrounds according to the framework matrix. The amount of funds necessary would depend on the classification level allocated to the new development.

This amount would then be in addition to the funds required annually for ongoing maintenance, repairs and replacement of the current assets. A lifespan of 10-15 years is typically expected for most modern playground equipment pieces for depreciation and budgeting purposes but can change depending on the extent of the use and changes to Australian Standards.

By adopting the Playground Strategy Council will have a clear and precise strategic direction to allow the appropriate funding for playgrounds.

PRIORITY 3 – WHAT WE WILL DO

1. Maintain a playground condition register
2. Explore funding opportunities via State and Federal grants
3. Endeavour to use natural and recycled elements in the construction of new playgrounds and equipment
4. Use more natural shade elements in playgrounds

Priority 4: Design principles and innovation

It is important to ensure the development of play spaces coincides with the description allocated to each classification level. A planning framework will then allow a spread of different quality playgrounds across the municipality so users can choose the level of play experience they wish to undertake. For this reason it is also necessary to maintain a uniqueness in the design of every level of playground so that they complement each other, rather than duplicate, with different experiences within that framework.

Fencing around playgrounds considers a number of factors including the location of the playground and the intended user design. Other considerations include such things as the playground's proximity to high volumes of traffic and the speed of the traffic on roads bordering the site. The need for fencing will be determined by conducting a risk assessment, where each case would be considered on its own merits.

Shade is an essential element to the playground design. Structured shelters can be erected, especially if seating and tables need direct protection. However, these are easily vandalised and expensive to repair and maintain. Trees are the preferred form of shade and outweigh the use of artificial shelters or sails due to their sustainability and longevity. They also provide excellent protection from the wind and a natural habitat for local bird species. Adequate natural shade from trees needs to be provided at all levels of playgrounds for the comfort of the patrons, aesthetics of the park and protection of the equipment.

Soft fall will vary according to the prominence of the park. There are generally two types of soft fall – synthetic rubber and natural bark chips which are determined requirements of the site.

Effective use of the environment and landscape will also minimise future maintenance requirements.

“Nature play actively engages children with nature and its elements. Accessing nature is an important strategy for building resilience, buffering stress and recovering from adversity”⁹.

Outdoor fitness equipment can be configured in different ways to specifically suit a location and the needs of the end user. The two main types of configuration are equipment clusters and equipment trails.

An equipment cluster is a collection of fitness equipment placed in a single location. A cluster has the advantage of providing options for circuit training for a full body workout. Equipment trails are small groups of fitness equipment separated along a trail, typically laid out to provide a progression of exercise activity.

From a survey conducted during the development of this strategy respondents indicated a number of key aspects that needed to be considered as part of playground design, this included:

That a variety of equipment was a major factor in choosing to attend playgrounds in general

Diversity enhances the probability that a child will be motivated to seek the play experience that stimulates their interest

Wherever possible utilise the surrounding landscape and natural elements such as rocks, hills and logs to ensure a unique play experience that has longevity. These features add a new dimension and encourage children to use their imagination in unstructured play.

Shade elements both natural and built should be incorporated into all future playground designs

⁹ https://www.kidsafensw.org/imagesDB/documents/NaturalPlayspaces2020_1.pdf

Toilets and drinking water stations have been identified as a necessary design inclusion at regional playgrounds as they are considered destination spots away from proximity to user dwellings

Studies have shown that children sometimes tire and lose interest in structured equipment as they quickly master it. Manufacturers then produce more complex equipment, but as a consequence this is also more expensive. There is currently a strong trend towards less equipment and a broader, nature based play experience to encourage children to devise the activities for themselves. No built structure can provide the depth of diversity and creativity to play and interaction that nature can.

In line with Mildura Rural City Councils Public Open Space Strategy, Council will continue to explore opportunities to enhance play value, such as nature play and parks for play (rather than equipment for play).¹⁰

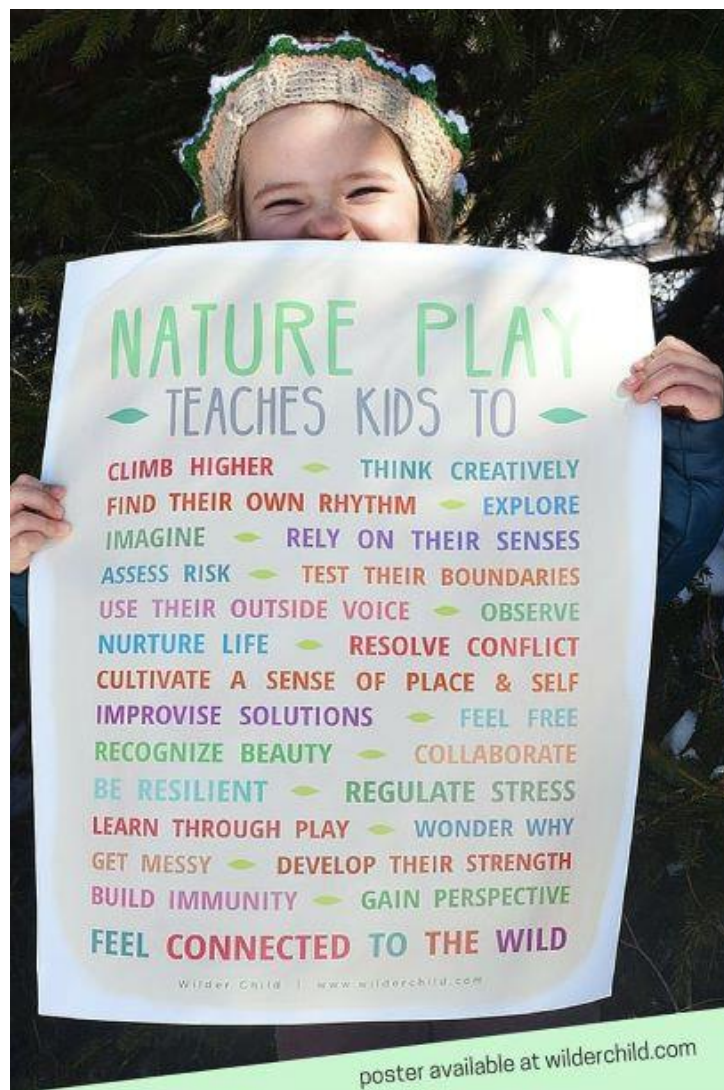


Figure 12: Benefits of nature play¹¹

¹⁰ Mildura Rural City Council Public Open space strategy

¹¹ <https://wilderchild.com>

PRIORITY 4 – WHAT WE WILL DO

1. Ensure all new playground equipment meets current Australian Standards
2. Develop a Risk Management Approach for nature play areas
3. Plant trees whenever possible at playgrounds to provide natural shade for parks and equipment.
4. Incorporate more natural play elements into existing playground

Priority 5: Connection to the Community

Council will consult with communities regarding the implementation of playground developments to ensure the needs and interests of the residents are considered. The level of engagement required will be assessed on a case by case scenario. There are a number of methods to achieve this but the preferred approach will be a survey on the council website, site visits to existing council playgrounds and consultation with the community. If the children and the community have input into the design and planning of the play space they are more likely to feel a connection to it. This will hopefully result in increased patronage of the playground which will assist in safety and less opportunity for vandalism and graffiti.

Council will also promote the playgrounds to the community by placing details online. The website will list the available equipment and extended facilities for open play or picnics at the different sites. All the playground sites will be shown on a map of each township in the municipality with their corresponding classification level. This map could also be printed in hard copy and distributed through tourist outlets and local information centres.

Once council has made the investment in outdoor fitness equipment it is important to promote the asset to the community to facilitate their engagement. Posting on the council web site, and highlighting the fitness parks as a separate category to the playgrounds, as well as printing on any local brochures at tourist information booths would be a minimum. Other municipalities have hired fitness instructors for up to a month after opening new facilities to teach interested groups in the different techniques and exercises offered by each unit. This strategy has proved popular as it generates enthusiasm and maximises the benefits for the participants as well as contributing to injury prevention from misuse. Separate sessions can be run in the morning and afternoon to suit different users and these can be developed and ultimately become self-sustaining, thus encouraging further participation and social interaction

PRIORITY 5 – WHAT WE WILL DO

1. Consult with locals in proximity of newly proposed neighbourhood level playgrounds
2. Develop an interactive website to encourage community feedback and consultation
3. Ensure that all playground information is current and easily accessible.

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Current Playgrounds

It is essential that quality play spaces are equally distributed across the municipality to encourage healthy living some form of playground is easily accessed by walking.

Playground benchmarks vary but the generally accepted rate for the provision of Playgrounds within the Australian Local Government (metropolitan) is locating a Playground within a 500m radius of residents. The other industry measurement is a per head ratio that was developed through a study of metropolitan Councils in Victoria with approximately one playground per 1,300 head of population and one playground per 300 head of children aged 0-15 years.

In line with Mildura Rural City Councils current Public Open Space Strategy it is entirely possible to provide a level of service to meet the following:

- Regional Park catchment area of 5km
- Neighbourhood Park catchment area of 1km
- Local Park catchment area of 400m
- Civic Park catchment area of 400m
- Township Sporting Reserves 5km
- Local Sporting Reserves 1km

There are currently 57 playgrounds in the municipality (Appendix 1). Council will pursue additional playground opportunities where there is a lack of reasonable access to playground sites.

The following diagrams show existing playground locations and the recommended catchment area in the various built up areas and townships

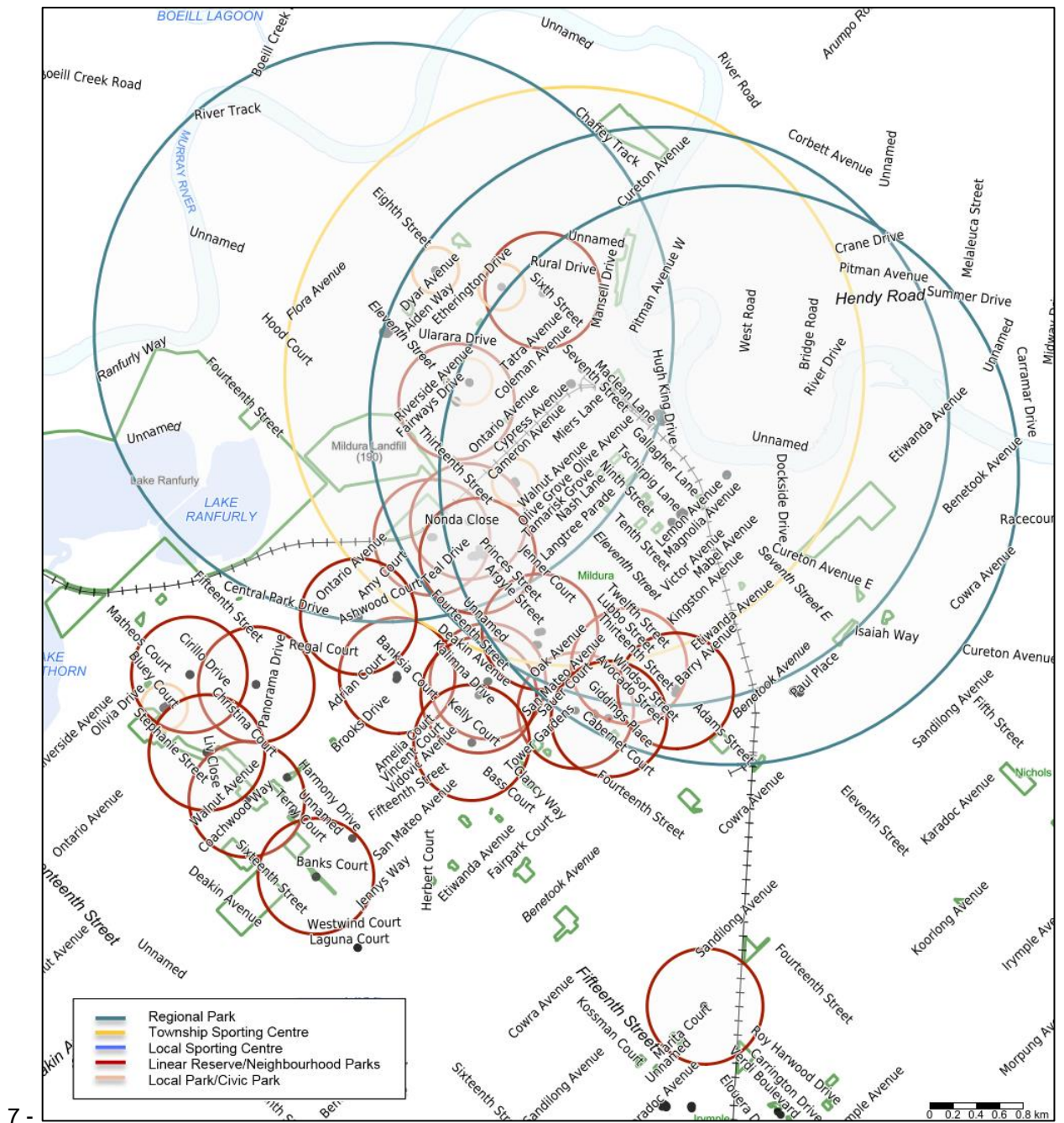


Figure 13: Playground locations – Mildura

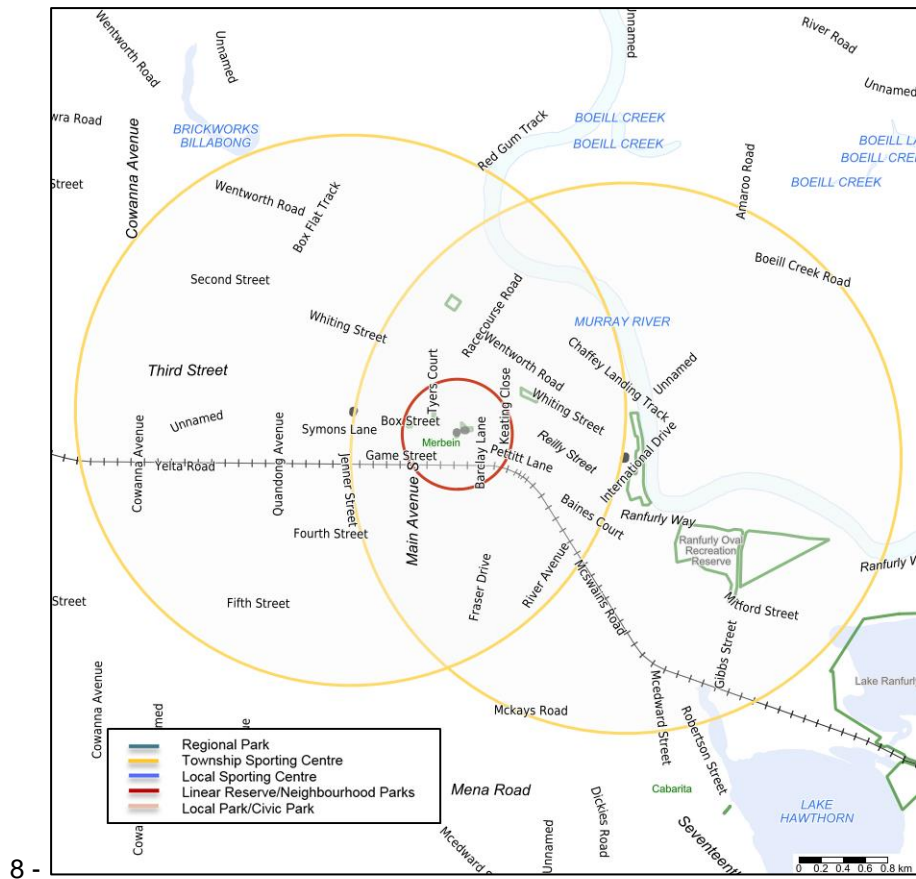


Figure 14: Playground locations - Merbein



Figure 15: Chaffey Park playground

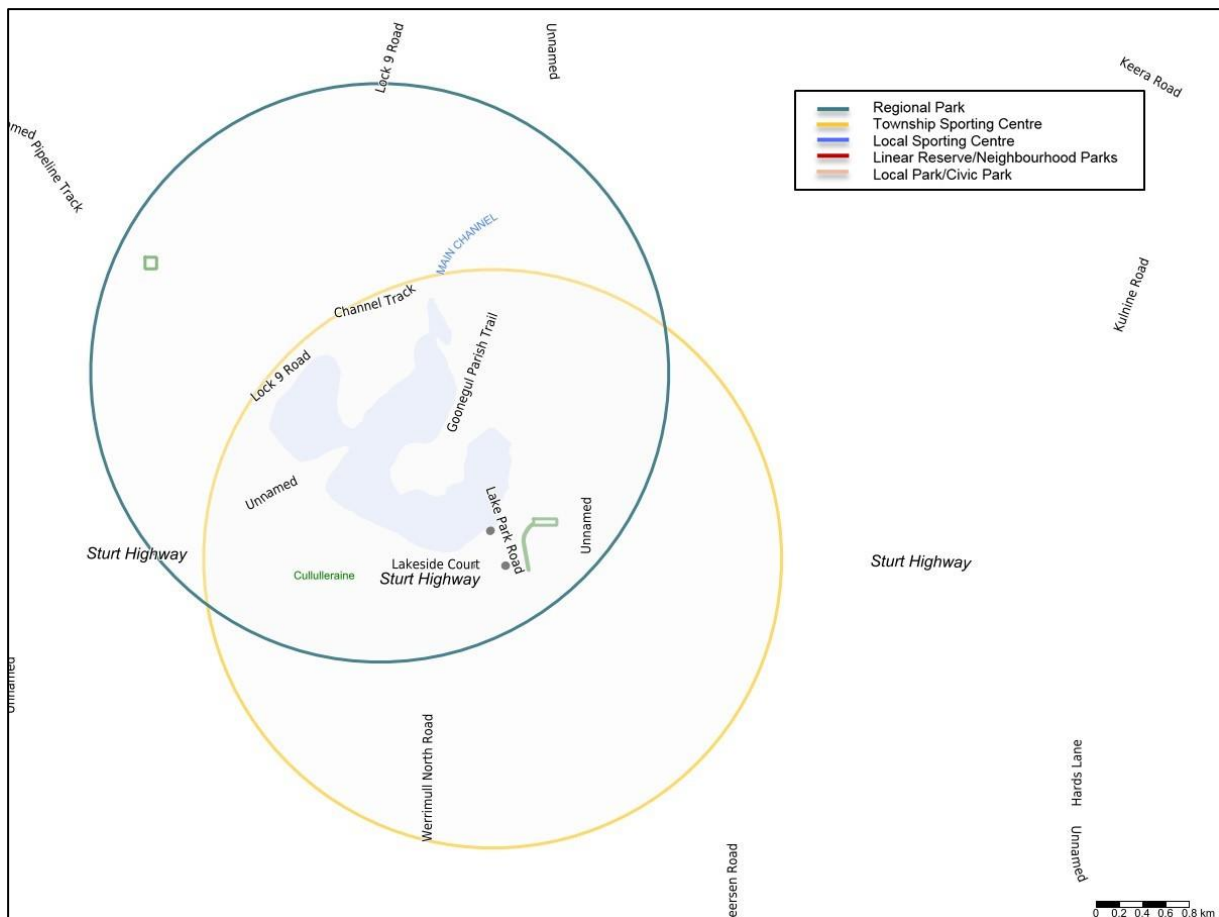
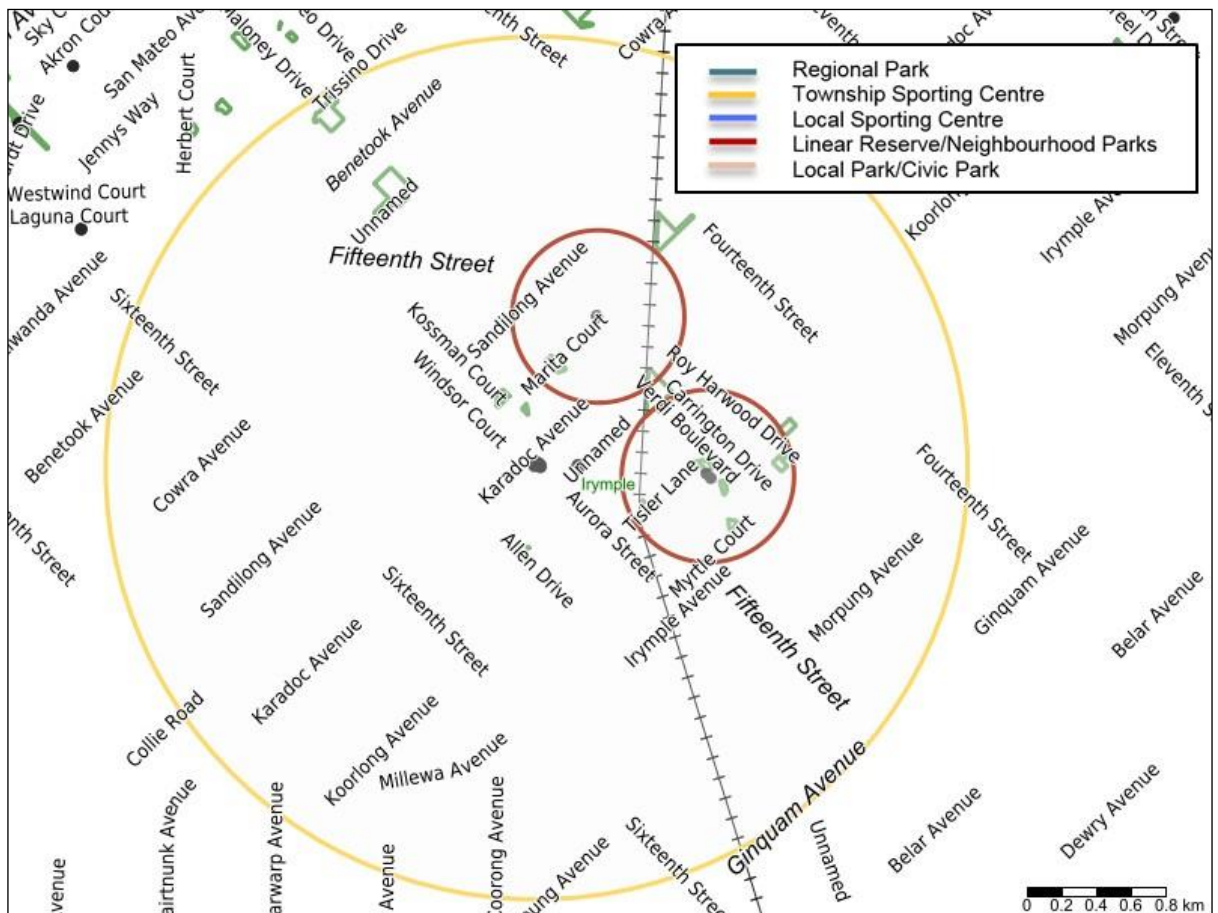


Figure 16: Playground locations – Lake Cullulleraine



Figure 17: Lake Cullulleraine foreshore



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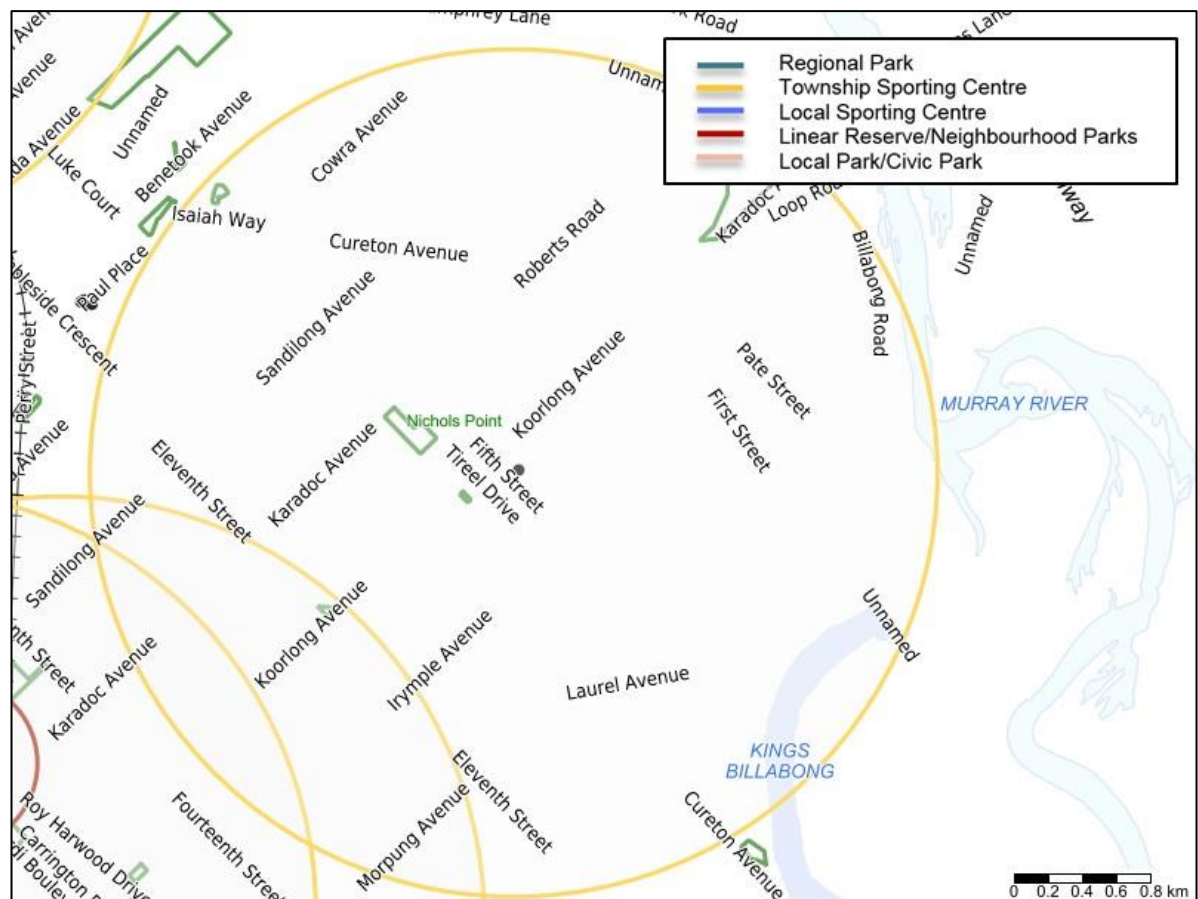


Figure 20: Playground locations – Nichols Point

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Figure 21: Nichols Point Recreation Reserve playground

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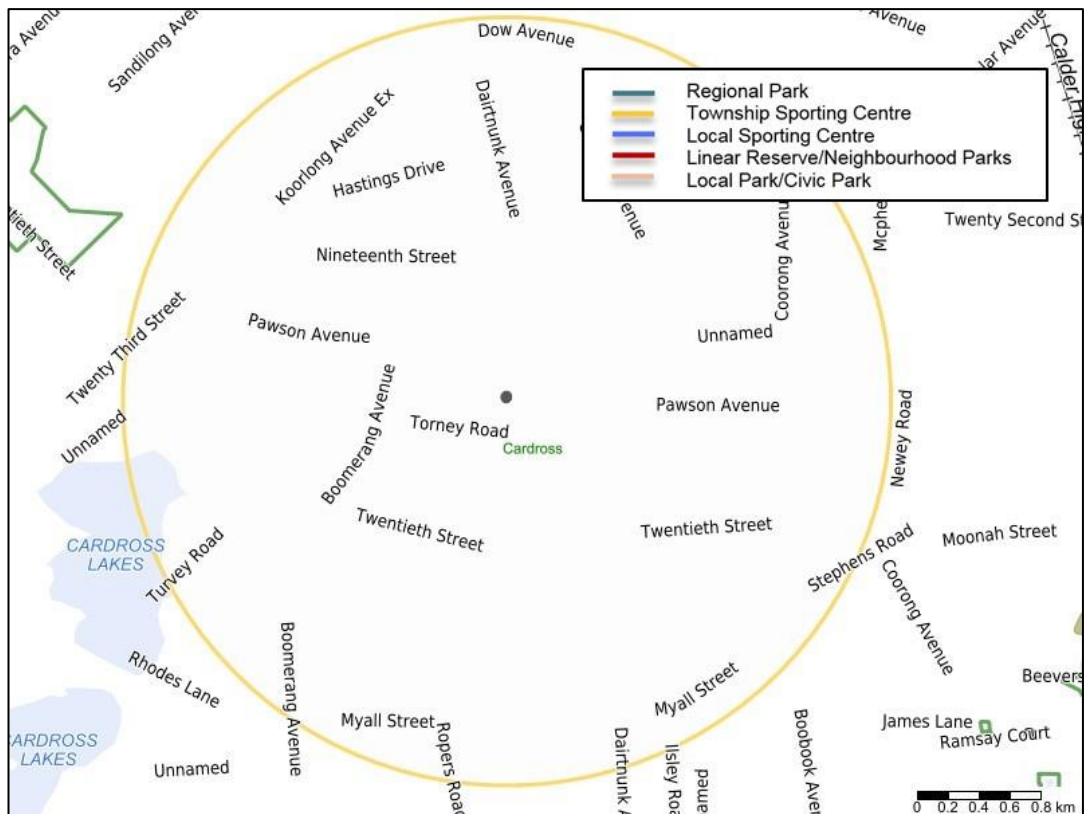
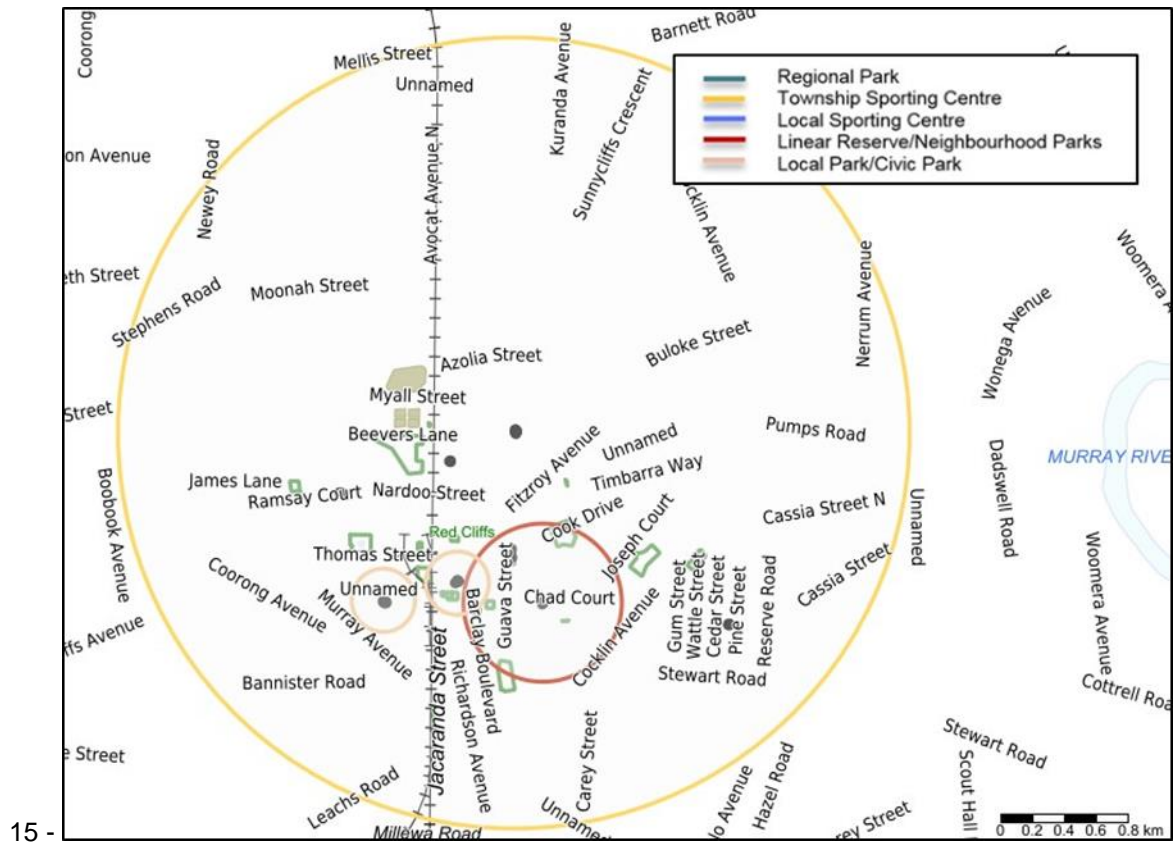


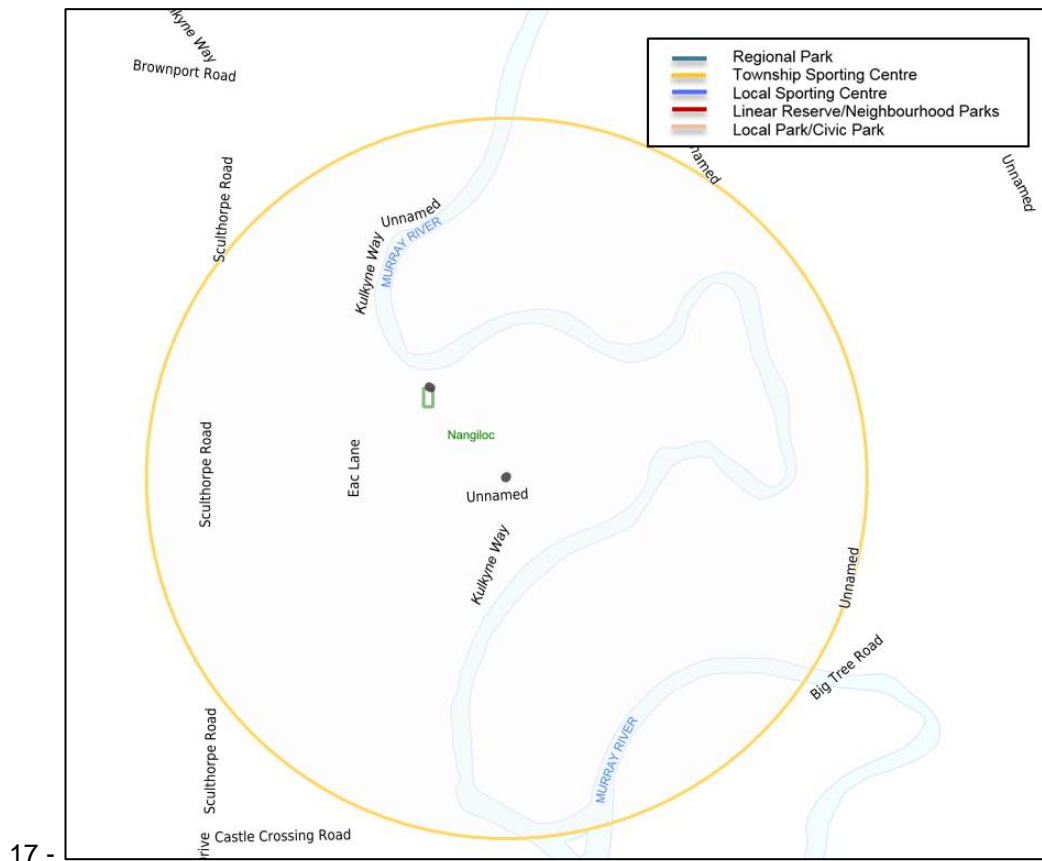
Figure 22: Playground locations - Cardross

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Figure 23: Cardross Recreation Reserve playground





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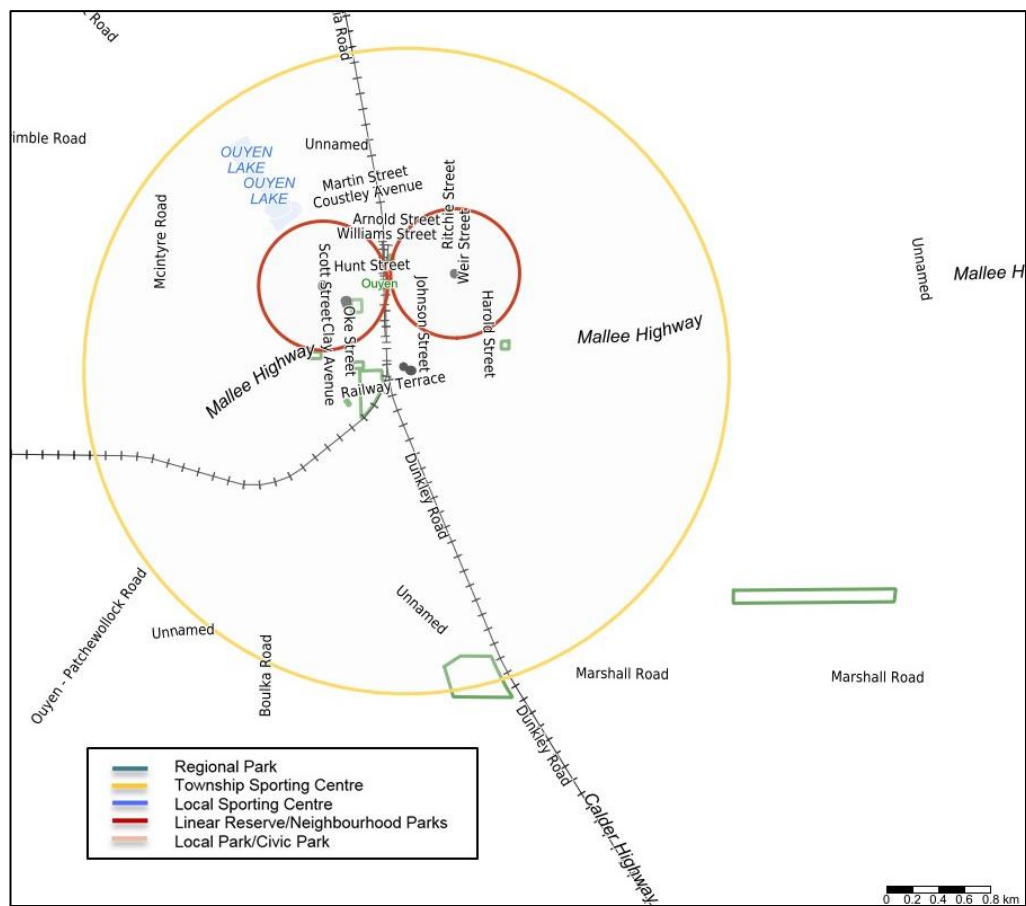


Figure 28: Playground locations - Ouyen

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Figure 29: Ferguson Park playground

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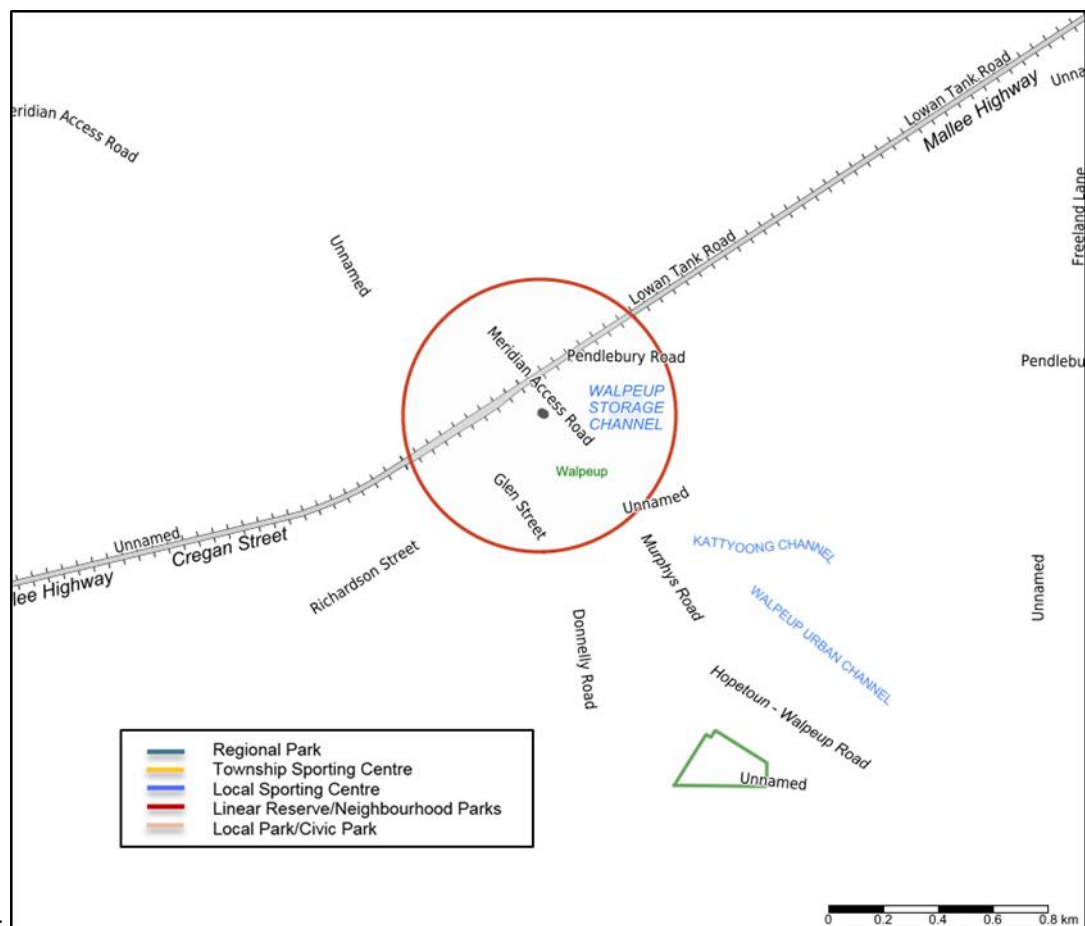


Figure 30: Playground locations - Walpeup

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Figure 31: Walpeup Wayside Stop playground

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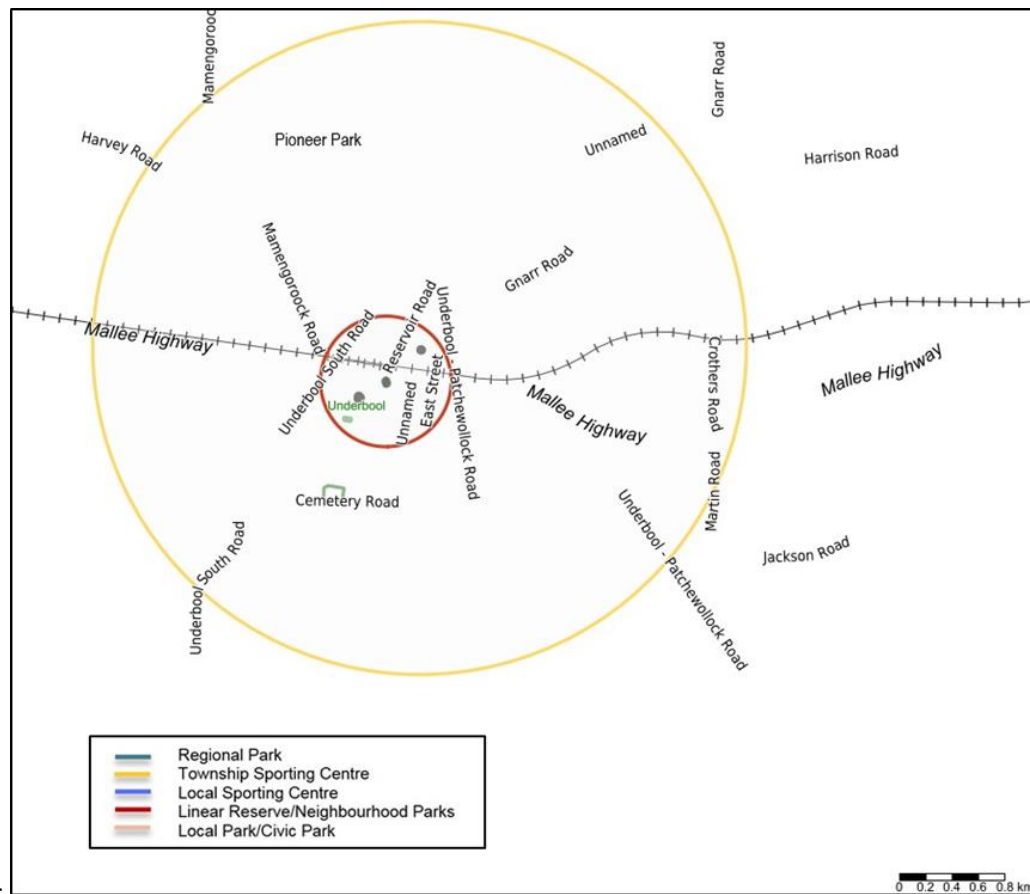


Figure 32: Playground locations - Underbool

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Figure 33: Outen Park playground

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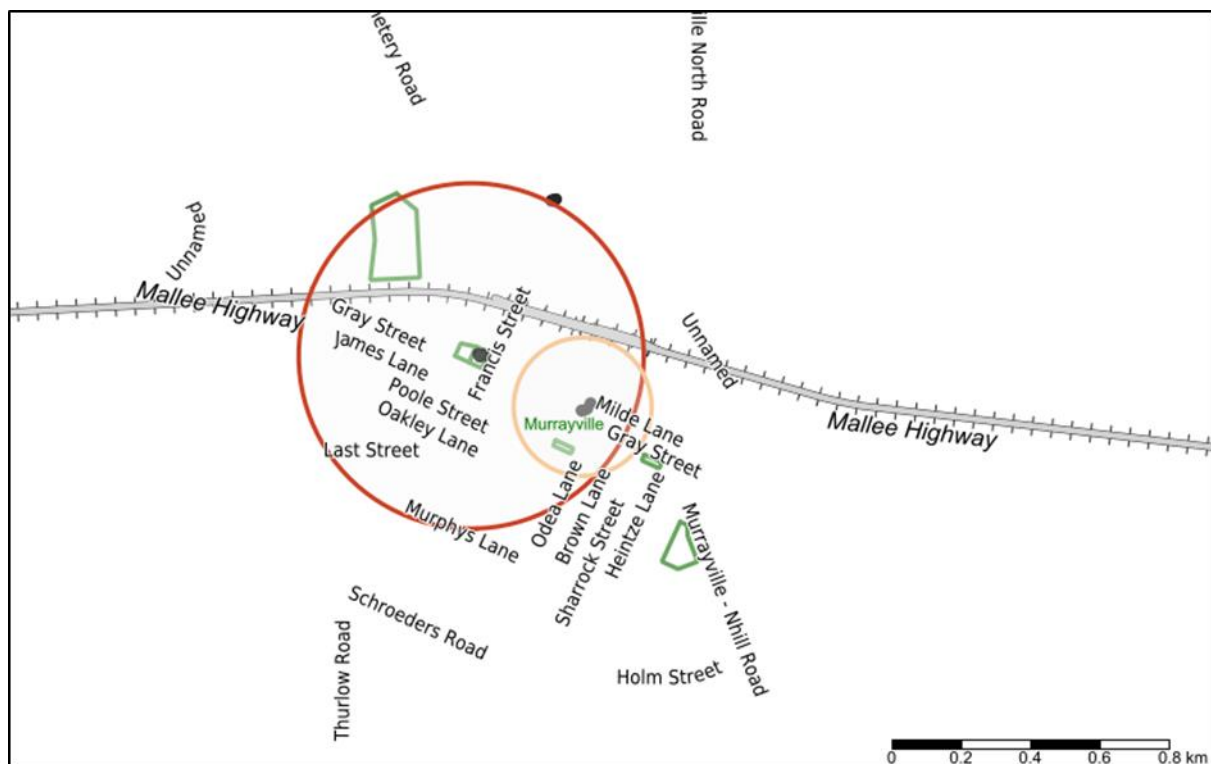


Figure 34: Playground locations - Murrayville

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Figure 35: Pioneer Park playground

References

MRCC Council Plan	https://www.mildura.vic.gov.au
MRCC website	https://www.mildura.vic.gov.au
Kompan	https://www.kompan.com.au/inclusive-play
UNICEF	https://www.unicef.org.au
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City of Casey	https://www.casey.vic.gov.au
Booroondara	https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au =
Latrobe City	https://www.latrobe.vic.gov.au
Monash	https://www.monash.vic.gov.au
Play Australia	PLAYAUS-Strategic-Plan-2020.pdf (playaustralia.org.au)
<u>Wilderchild</u>	www.wilderchild.com

Appendix 1: Playground locations and classifications

Town	Park	Classification
Mildura	Andamifi Park (Ribarits Court)	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Bingarra Park	Local
Mildura	Birrallee Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Buxton Sobee Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Dennis Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Flamingo Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Greenpines Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Hornsey Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Jaycee Park	Regional
Mildura	Kiata Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Linton Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Kalimna Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Mansell Reserve	Township Reserve
Mildura	Meadow Grove Park	Neighborhood
Mildura	Ornamental Park/ Waterplay	Regional
Mildura	Park for Play	Regional
Mildura	S.C Mills Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Semmens Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Sharland Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Touhy Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Walnut Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Washington Park	Local
Mildura	Windsor Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Woodley Park	Local
Mildura	Brodie Close Reserve	Local
Mildura	The Grange	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Sixteenth and Etiwanda Reserve – Diablo Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura	Rita Drive Reserve	Local
Mildura	Dominic Court Reserve	Local
Mildura South	Hollywood Boulevard Linear Reserve	Linear Reserve
Mildura South	Olivia Drive Reserve – Ontario Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura South	Sherring Way Reserve – Ontario Park	Neighbourhood
Mildura South	Telfar Wetlands	Wetlands Urban
Mildura South	Dunning Wetlands	Wetlands Urban
L/Cull	Lake Cullulleraine Foreshore	Regional
L/Cull	Johansen Memorial Recreation Reserve	Township Sporting Reserve
Merbein	Chaffey Park	Township Sporting Reserve
Merbein	Kenny Park	Township Sporting Reserve
Merbein	O'Bryan Park	Neighbourhood
Cardross	Cardross Recreation Reserve	Township Sporting Reserve
Nichols Point	Nichols Point Recreation Reserve	Township Sporting Reserve
Irymple	Francesca Park	Neighborhood
Irymple	Henshilwood Memorial Recreation Reserve	Township Sporting Reserve

Irymple	Irymple Lions Park	Neighborhood
Red Cliffs	Quandong Park east	Township Sporting Reserve
Red Cliffs	Quandong Park west	Township Sporting Reserve
Red Cliffs	Simon Court Park	Neighborhood
Red Cliffs	Woodbine Park	Local
Red Cliffs	Ovens Park	Red Cliffs
Red Cliffs	Barclay Square	Civic Park
Nangiloc	Nangiloc Reserve	Township Sporting Reserve
Ouyen	Blackburn Park	Township Sporting Reserve
Ouyen	Ferguson Park	Neighborhood
Ouyen	Jardine Park	Neighborhood
Walpeup	Walpeup Park	Neighborhood
Underbool	Underbool Recreation Reserve	Township Sporting Reserve
Underbool	Outen Park	Neighborhood
Murrayville	Murrayville Wayside Park	Linear Reserve
Murrayville	Murrayville Pioneer Park	Civic Park

Action Plan

Short term: 1 – 3 years

Medium term: 2 – 5 years

Long Term: 5+ years

Priority 1: Health and Wellbeing	
Action	Timframe
Complete a safety audit of all municipal playgrounds	Short term
Prioritise and re-develop existing playgrounds identified as non-compliant	Short term
Research opportunities for future for fitness hub sites	Medium term
Explore opportunities for additional amenities at existing playgrounds	Ongoing

Priority 2: Access and Inclusion	
Action	Timframe
Audit existing playgrounds for pathways and equipment to suit all abilities and all ages	Short term
Conduct Gender Impact Assessments	Short term
Ensure that all new playground design caters for all ages and all abilities	Short term
Develop a risk management approach that considers the benefits against risks of challenging play experiences	Short to Medium term

Priority 3: Environment and sustainability	
Action	Timframe
Maintain a playground condition register	Short term
Explore funding opportunities through State and Federal grants	Ongoing
Endeavour to use nature and recycled elements in the construction of new playgrounds and equipment	Short term
Use more natural shade elements in playgrounds	Short term

Priority 4: Design Principles and Innovation	
Action	Timframe
Ensure all new playground equipment meets current Australian Standards	Short term
Develop a risk management approach for nature play areas	Short to Medium term
Plant trees whenever possible at playgrounds to provide natural shade for parks and equipment	Short term
Incorporate more natural play elements into existing playgrounds	Short to Medium term
Identify potential locations for fitness hubs	Medium term

Priority 5: Connection to the Community	
Action	Timframe
Consult with locals in proximity of newly proposed neighbourhood level playgrounds	Ongoing
Develop an interactive website to encourage community feedback and consultation	Medium term
Ensure that all playground information is current and easily accessible	Short term

