LAKE MACQUARIE CITY COUNCIL PARKS AND PLAY STRATEGY 2021

BACKGROUND REPORT

APRIL 2021

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In conjunction with 180SLS

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Contents

1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the background research undertaken to inform the Lake Macquarie Parks and Play Strategy. It is part of a suite of documents, which together comprise the overall Parks, Play and Public Amenities Strategy Project.

The documents that make up the overall Parks, Play and Public Amenities Strategy Project are shown below:

Parks and Play Strategy	Public Amenities Strategy
Combined Background Report (this document)	
Combined Community Engagement Report	
Analysis Report	Analysis Report and Demand and Priority Assessment Tools
Planning Framework and Assessment Tools	Strategic Summary
Parks and Playspaces Inventories	Public Amenities Inventory

1.1 Purpose of the Park & Play Strategy

The purpose of the Parks and Play Strategy is to:

"…create a Strategy that will plan for and enhance the park and play experience of Lake Macquarie residents and visitors."

The study will result in the development of a strategic framework for Lake Macquarie City Council that will:

- Establish a vision and guiding principles for Lake Macquarie's park, playground and public amenities network

- Measure the adequacy of parkland, playground and public amenities provision and identify future need

- Categorise parks, playgrounds and public amenities into a classification hierarchy

- Provide a clear framework, based on hierarchy classification, to guide levels of infrastructure development and service level provision for parks, playgrounds and amenities

- Provide an assessment tool that supports a strategic approach to land acquisition and informs decisions as to whether a site should be acquired for parkland purposes, and the prioritisation of any action

- Identify where community land is unable to provide parkland or broader open space functions and where playgrounds and public amenities are not required under the service level provision framework. This will include an assessment tool to identify opportunities for divestment and help to ensure that evaluations are conducted fairly, transparently and consistently

- Identify priorities for the development, management and use of parks, playgrounds and amenities which will support a range of experiences, can respond to constraints, opportunities and the changing needs of the community over time

- Identify strategic partnerships to leverage opportunities to support the planning, delivery, management and use of the park, playground and public amenity network.

1.2 Study Scope

The project scope incorporates:

- Council owned and managed land providing park and play opportunities

- Playgrounds, public amenities and associated facilities located within these spaces

- Council owned and managed land providing linkages

- Government and Privately owned and managed park and playground facilities accessible to the public.
- Consideration of NSW National Parks, State Conservation areas, Crown land and privately owned and/or managed facilities, and their role in the park and play facility provision network, both currently and in the future.

1.3 Study Approach

The study approach is as follows:

1.4 What is covered by this Strategy?

The project scope incorporates:

- Council owned and managed land providing park and play opportunities
- Playgrounds, public amenities and associated facilities located within these spaces
- Council owned and managed land providing linkages
- Government and Privately owned and managed park and playground facilities accessible to the public.
- Consideration of NSW National Parks, State Conservation areas, Crown land and privately owned and/or managed facilities, and their role in the park and play facility provision network, both currently and in the future.

1.5 Strategic Context and Alignment

The Lake Macquarie Parks and Play Strategy aligns with a range of government strategies, policies and guidelines as outlined below:

Table 1: Strategic context and alignment of the Lake Macquarie Sports Strategy.

Level	Document
NSW Government	NSW 2021: A Plan to Make NSW Number One Urban Green Infrastructure Policy "Greener Places" Greener Places Design Guides NSW Everyone Can Play Guidelines Premier's Priorities
Regional Plans	Hunter Regional Plan 2036 Lower Hunter Regional Strategy 2006-2031 Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036
Local Plans	Imagine Lake Mac Council's Community Strategic Plan Council's Local Strategic Planning Statement

Level	Document
	Revised Delivery Program 2017-2022 and Operational Plan 2020-2021
	Lake Macquarie Housing Strategy
	Lake Macquarie Youth Strategy, 2023
	Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017-2021
	Children and Family Strategy, 2015-2020
	Cycling Strategy 2012
	Environmental Sustainability and Action Plan 2020-2027\
	Night Time Economy Action Plan 2019-2024
	Public Toilet Strategy 2011
	Development Contribution Plans and associated Recreation and Land Plans
	Asset Management Plans
	Site specific master plans

A detailed review of literature is provided at Section 3.

2. Who is Lake Macquarie?

2.1 Regional Context

The City of Lake Macquarie is located in the Hunter Region of New South Wales. It is approximately 2 hours drive north of Sydney and around a 40-minute drive south of Newcastle. The City is made up of nine town centers circling the lake including Belmont, Cardiff, Charlestown, Cooranbong, Glendale, Morisset, Swansea, Toronto and Valentine. The largest of these population centers is Charlestown. The LGA is bordered by Newcastle to the North, Maitland to the North-West, Cessnock to the West and the Central Coast to the south.

Figure 1: Location of Lake Macquarie
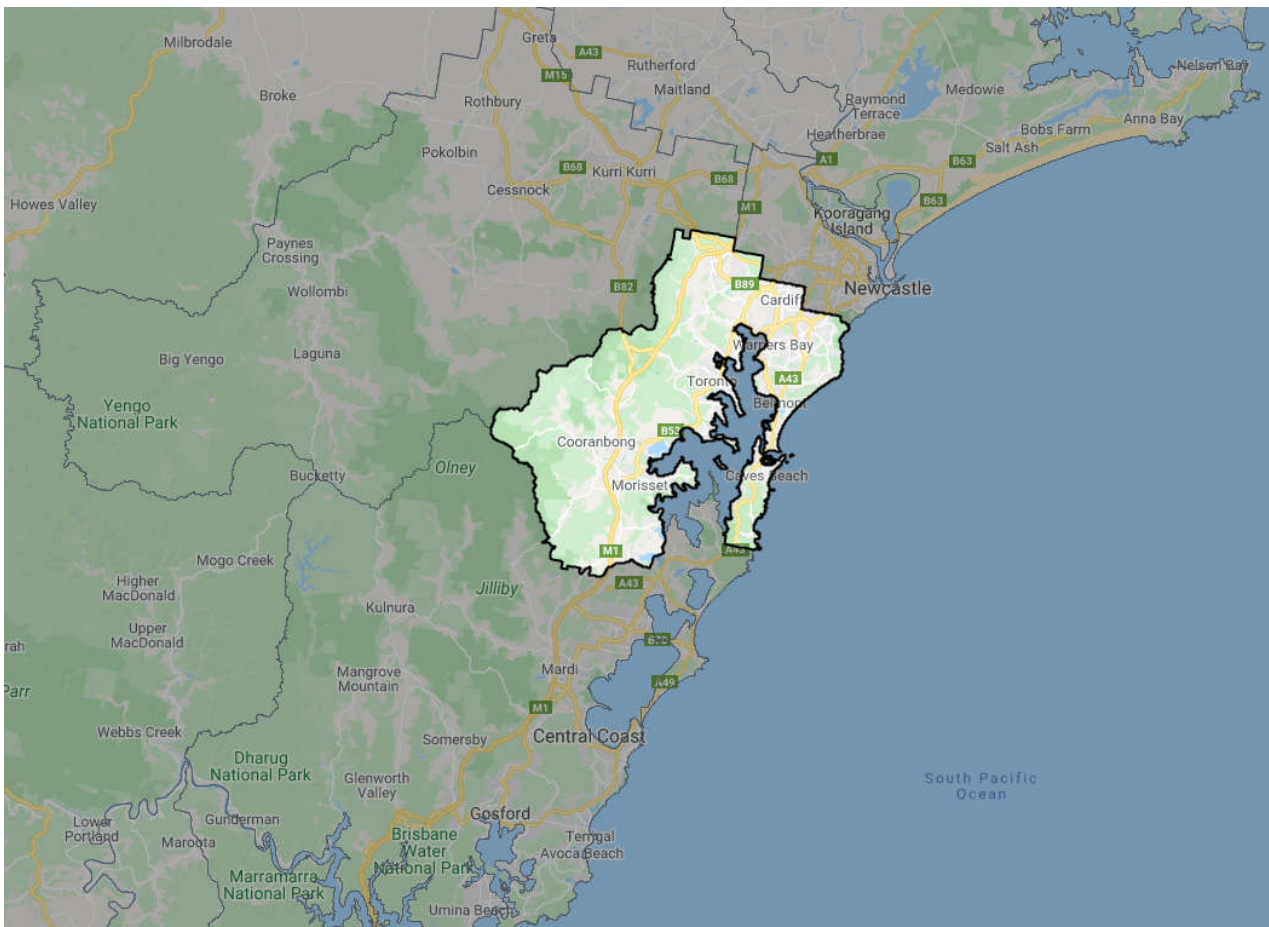
2.2 Our People

2.2.1 Population and Growth

As of 2019 there are an estimated 205,901 residents living within the Lake Macquarie Local Government Area[1]. This is an increase of 6.36% from 193,585 residents in 2009[2]. The following table shows the comparative population growth rates for the surrounding council areas since 2009.

Table 2: Population Growth Rates

Council Area	2009 Population	2019 Population	10 Yr Pop'n Change	10 Year Growth Rate
Lake Macquarie	193,585	205,901	12,316	6.36%
Central Coast	316,796	343,968	27,172	8.58%
Newcastle	151,895	165,571	13,676	9.00%
Cessnock	50,218	59,985	9,676	19.45%

Lake Macquarie has experienced lower population growth over the last decade in comparison to surrounding Local Government Areas.

Recent population estimates prepared by REMPLAN indicate that the 2021 population of Lake Macquarie is 208,615[3].

2.2.2 Age Breakdown

The median age of Lake Macquarie residents as at the 2016 Census was 42, which compares with 38 for NSW as a whole.

The table below summarises the Lake Macquarie age profile compared to NSW and shows that:

- The largest age group in Lake Macquarie is the 50-59 years cohort

- Lake Macquarie has significantly less 20 to 39 year olds than NSW

- The Lake Macquarie population is ageing, with significantly more people aged 60 to 79 than NSW

- While on par with NSW, children aged 0 to 9 make up 12.2% of the Lake Macquarie population and teenagers and adolescents (aged 10 to 19) account for 11.92% of the population.

Table 3: Lake Macquarie Age Profile (Source: REMPLAN)

Age	Lake Macquarie Population #	Lake Macquarie Population %	NSW %	Difference
0 to 4 years	11,874	6.0%	6.22%	-0.20%
5 to 9 years	12,306	6.2%	6.39%	-0.15%
10 to 19 years	24,171	12.2%	11.92%	0.33%
20 to 29 years	21,282	10.8%	13.59%	-2.81%
30 to 39 years	22,504	11.4%	13.90%	-2.50%
40 to 49 years	25,542	12.9%	13.31%	-0.37%
50 to 59 years	26,560	13.5%	12.77%	0.69%
60 to 69 years	25,069	12.7%	10.76%	1.94%
70 to 79 years	17,270	8.8%	6.82%	1.93%
80 to 89 years	8,981	4.6%	3.50%	1.05%
90 and over	1,794	0.9%	0.82%	0.08%

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[1] REMPLAN 2020. Retrieved October 2020.
https://app.remplan.com.au/lakemacquarie/community/population/age?state=w3NEuP!w3NEuzaAgh1XmEgsxzv4ztzcOF4EWTRF4FlFN9c7FbsoOAtaPA
[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016). Census QuickStats. Retrieved October, 2020.
https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA14650?opendocument
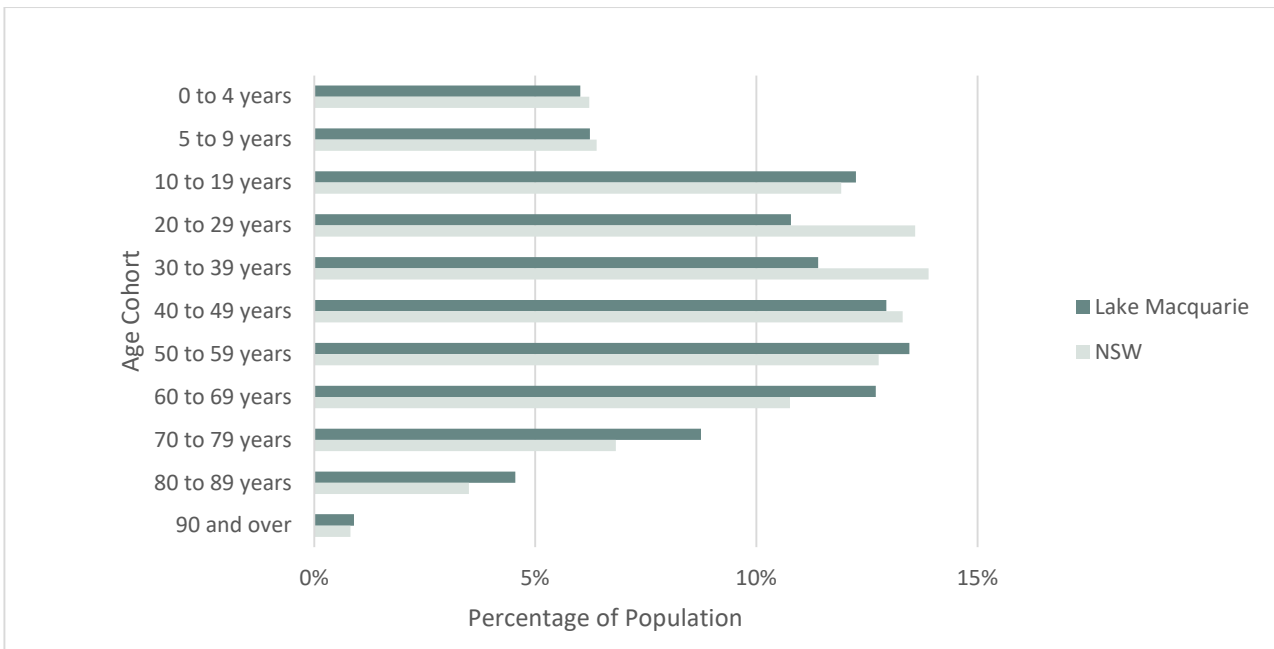[3] Population Estimates, REMPLAN, 2021

Figure 2: Age profile of Lake Macquarie compared to NSW (Source: REMPLAN)

2.2.3 The Next 15 Years

According to REMPLAN population projections[4], by 2036, the Lake Macquarie population is expected to increase to an estimated 231,198.

REMPLAN Predictions indicate that:

- Between 2021 and 2036 an increase of 22,583 people is expected

- The largest of growth is expected in age cohorts above 80 years, with the 90-94 years cohort expected to experience an increase of 1,697 persons between 2021 and 2036 (98.6% growth). This is followed by 3,031 persons (84.2%) for the 85-89 year cohort.

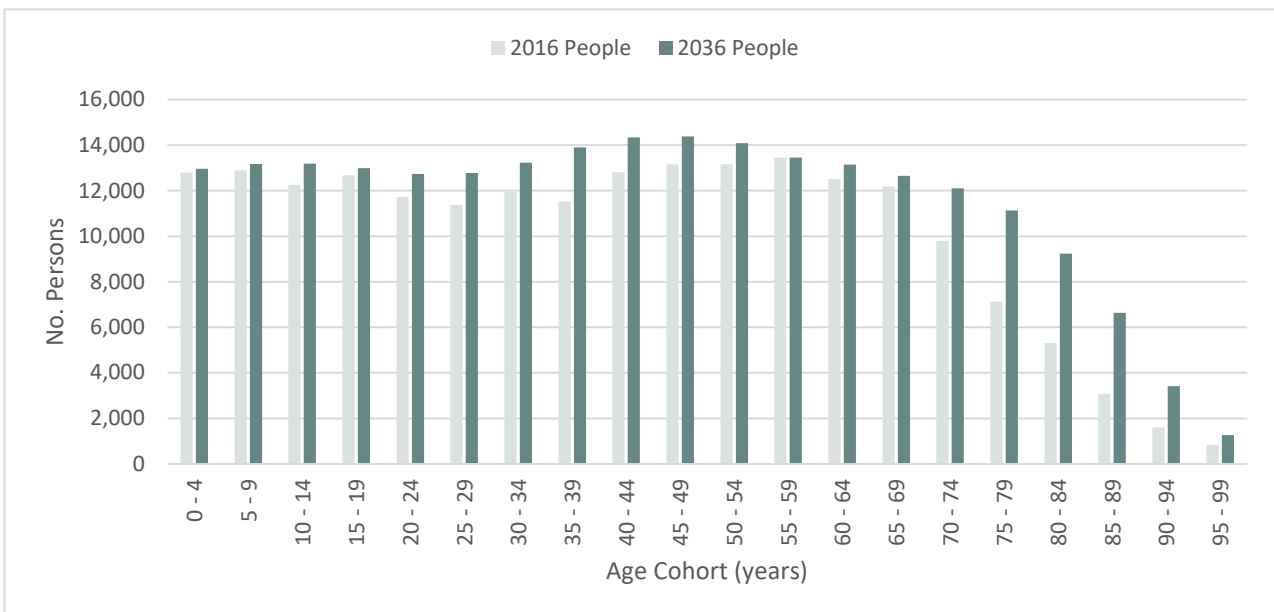- Projections overall reinforce the aging of the population.

Figure 3: Age projections for Lake Macquarie (2021 to 2036) (Source: REMPLAN)

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[4] REMPLAN 2021.

2.2.4   Cultural Diversity

Lake Macquarie has a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (4.1%) compared with NSW as a whole (2.9%) and is consistent with the Hunter region (4.7%)

As at the 2016 census, 9.4% of the Lake Macquarie population were born overseas, which is less than slightly less than the Hunter Region and (10.2%) and significantly less than NSW as a whole (27.71). The most common place of birth for Lake Macquarie residents born overseas is England (2.6%).

Only 4.1% of the Lake Macquarie population indicated they spoke a language other than English at home. This is a slightly lower than the Hunter Region (5.0%) and significantly lower than NSW as a whole (25.2%).

2.2.5   Disadvantage and Social Capital

The Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (SEIFA) index measures the relative level of socio-economic disadvantage based on a range of characteristics including income, educational attainment, and high unemployment. A higher score means a lower level of disadvantage. The 2016 SEIFA index for Lake Macquarie was 996, which indicates that the LGA is less disadvantaged than regional NSW Hunter Region at 983 and slightly more disadvantaged than NSW as a whole at 1,001. While Lake Macquarie as a whole is not significantly disadvantaged, there are some suburbs that recorded higher levels of disadvantage:

- Windale (660)
- Argenton (855)
- Gateshead (860)
- Booragul (877)
- Bolton Point (885)
- Teralba (916)
- Belmont South (902)
- Toronto (901)

- Marks Point (918)
- Swansea (913)
- Morisset (896)
- Fennell Bay (954)
- Glendale (958)
- Woodrising (955)
- Edgeworth (946)

Data on household income in Lake Macquarie shows that:

- The $2,000 to $2,499 per week household income bracket is the most comment, with 23,018 (11.84%)
- 7.5% of households earn a low income (< $650 per week) compared with 7.7% in the Hunter Region and 6.2% in NSW
- 19.9% of households earn a high income (> $2,500 per week) compared with 18.1% in the Hunter Region and 20.1% in NSW.

Individual income data shows that almost a quarter (24.3%) of people in Lake Macquarie earn between $300 and $650 per week compared to 23.4% for the Hunter Region and 19.7% for NSW as a whole.

2.2.6   Key Findings from Resident Profile

The population of Lake Macquarie is predicted to grow by 14,999 from 205,901 in 2019 to 220,900 in 2031. This increased in population is likely to result in continued and increased demand for a range of park and playground infrastructure and services.

The expected general aging of the population is in line with other regional New South Wales population centers. This is likely to see a shift towards recreational participation trends, with greater emphasis on social and low intensity activities, and potentially increasing the value of parks to this demographic.

Lake Macquarie's comparably higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people means there is likely to be a strong sense of cultural heritage, which will need to be considered in future parks planning.

The income and socio-economic data indicates that on the whole, the Lake Macquarie community has the capacity to pay for access to recreational programs and services, however there are pockets of low income and disadvantage that may not have the capacity to pay and will therefore need access to quality, free opportunities, of which parks and playgrounds play an important role.

2.3 Planning Catchments

The Lake Macquarie Local Government Area is divided into five planning catchment areas as shown below.

Figure 4: Map of planning catchment areas
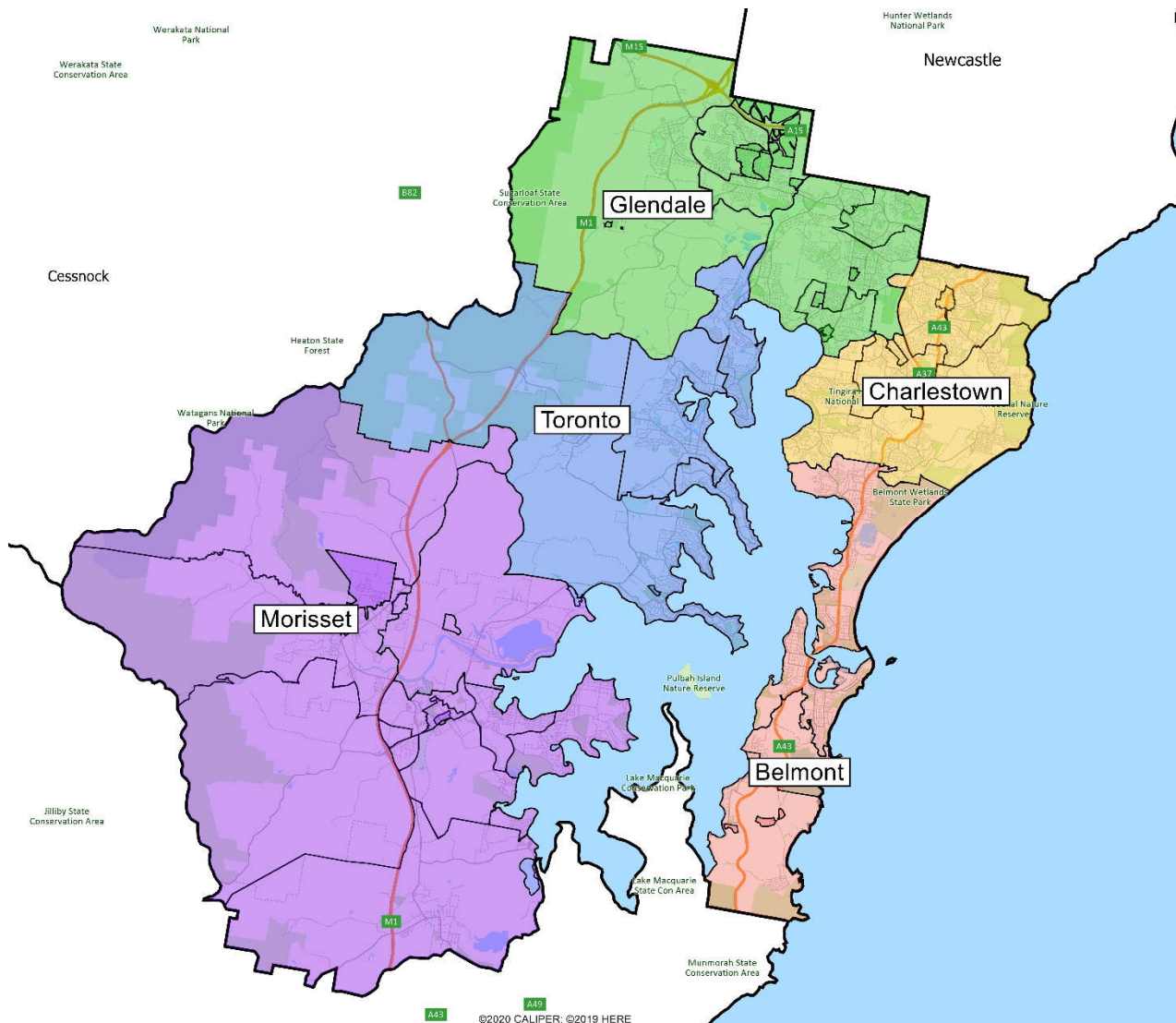
Table 4: Planning catchment summary

Catchment Area	2016 Population (ABS)	2036 Population (REMPLAN)	Population Change 2016 - 2036	% Change 2016-2036
Belmont	25,893	29,234	+3,341	12.9
Charlestown	61,530	62,939	+1,409	2.29
Glendale	55,506	68,807	+13,301	23.96
Morisset	23,672	35,086	+11,414	48.22
Toronto	30,796	35,132	+4,336	14.08
Total	**197,397**	**231,198**	**+33,801**	**17.12**

2.3.1 The Belmont Catchment
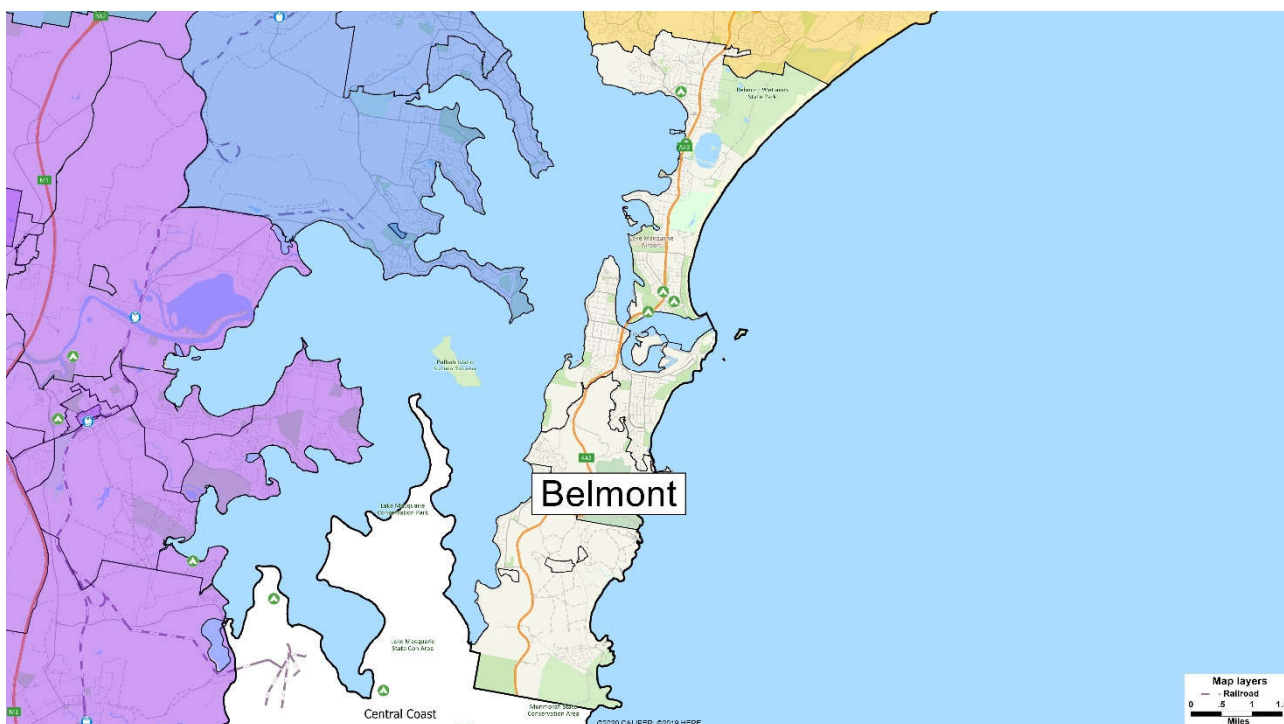
Belmont is the eastern most planning area in Lake Macquarie. It includes the suburbs of Belmont, Belmont South, Moonee, Nords Wharf, Catherine Hill Bay, Pinny Beach, Murrays Beach, Swansea, Caves Beach, Blacksmiths, Pelican, Marks point, Swansea Heads, Little Pelican and Cams Wharf.

The 2016 census estimates that Belmont has a population of 25,893 residents making it the second least populated planning catchment in Lake Macquarie. The table below shows the predicted change between 2016 (ABS) and 2036 (REMPLAN) for children (0-14 years), adults, and total population.

Table 5: Predicted population change (2016 to 2036)

Belmont	2016 Population	Population 2036	Population Change (2016-2036)	% Change (2016-2036)
0 to 14 years	4,076	4,443	+367	9.00
15+ years	21,817	24,791	+2,974	13.63
Total Population	25,893	29,234	+3,341	12.90

Population data indicates that:

- Belmont has a large proportion of the population aged 54 years and older. This age cohort is expected to grow at the fastest rate over the next 20 years, representing a gradual aging of the population.

- Based on the 2016 census there are an estimated 985 residents (3.8% of the Belmont population) who identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island descent.

- Cultural diversity is relatively low with 8.8% of the population being born overseas and 3.04% of the population speaking a language other than English at home.

- The average weekly wage within Belmont is $530 per week and this is the lowest average weekly wage of the 5 planning areas.

- The SEIFA index of relative advantage and disadvantage gives Belmont a score of 966. This is the lowest score and shows that there is a relatively high level of disadvantage within the planning area.

2.3.2 The Charlestown Catchment
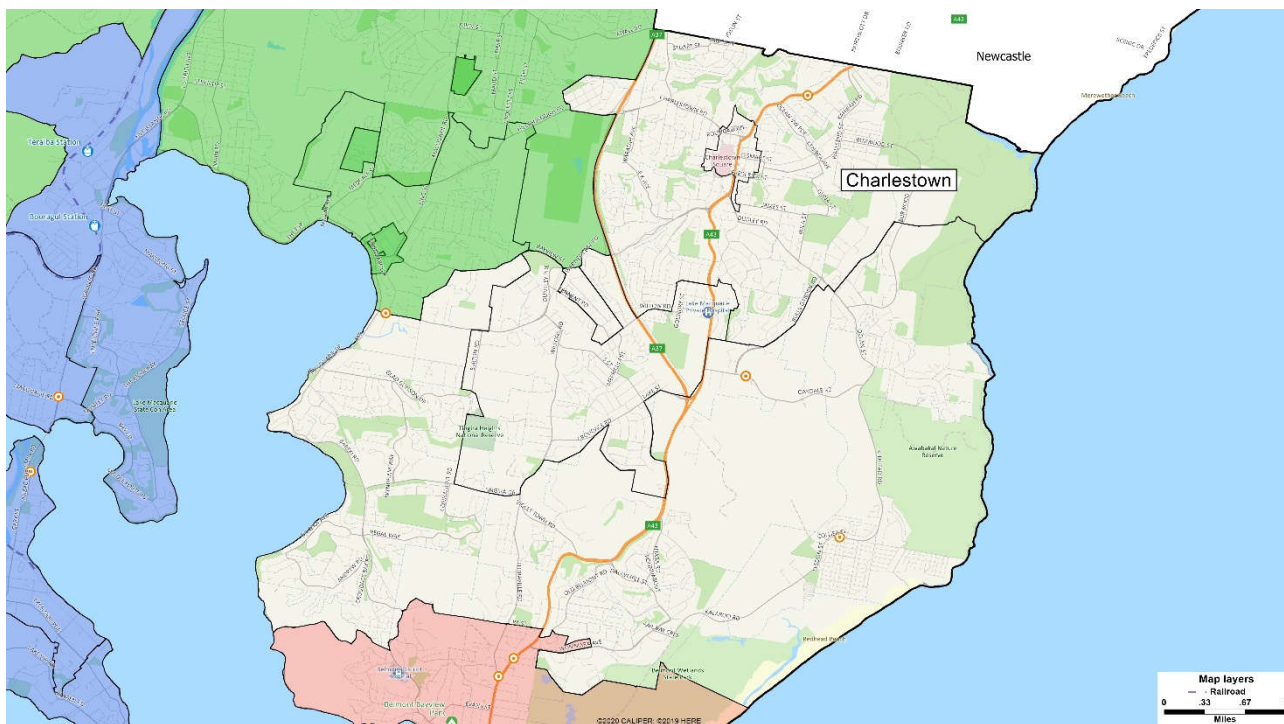
Charlestown is the north-eastern most planning area in Lake Macquarie. It includes the suburbs of Belmont North, Floraville, Valentine, Eleebana, Tingira Heights, Mount Hutton, Charlestown, Kotara South, Highfields, Whitebridge, Kahibah, Redhead, Jewells, Bennetts Green, Windale, Gateshead and Dudley.

The 2016 census estimates that Charlestown has a population of 61,530 residents, which is the most populated catchment in the LGA. The table below shows the predicted change between 2016 (ABS) and 2036 (REMPLAN) for children (0-14 years), adults, and total population.

Table 6: Predicted population change (2016 to 2036)

Charlestown	2016 Population	Population 2036	Population Change (2016-2036)	% Change (2016-2036)
0 to 14 years	12,022	10,573	-1,449	-12.05
15+ years	49,508	52,366	+2858	5.77
Total Population	61,530	62,939	+1,409	2.29

Population data indicates that:

- Charlestown has a large population of 0 to 14 year olds as well as a large population between the ages of 25 and 44. This suggests a large number of young families live within the catchment.

- There is a large proportion of the population aged 54 years and older. This age cohort is expected to grow at the fastest rate over the next 20 years, representing a gradual aging of the population.

- Charlestown has the second highest population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in the Lake Macquarie Council area (2,130 residents, or 3.46% of the Charlestown population)

- Cultural diversity is also high within the catchment with 9.83% of the population being born overseas and 4.90% of the population speaking a language other than English at home.

- The average weekly wage within Charlestown is $665 per week.

- The SEIFA index of relative advantage and disadvantage gives Glendale a score of 1010. This is the highest score and shows that there is a relatively low level of disadvantage within the planning area.

2.3.3   The Glendale Catchment
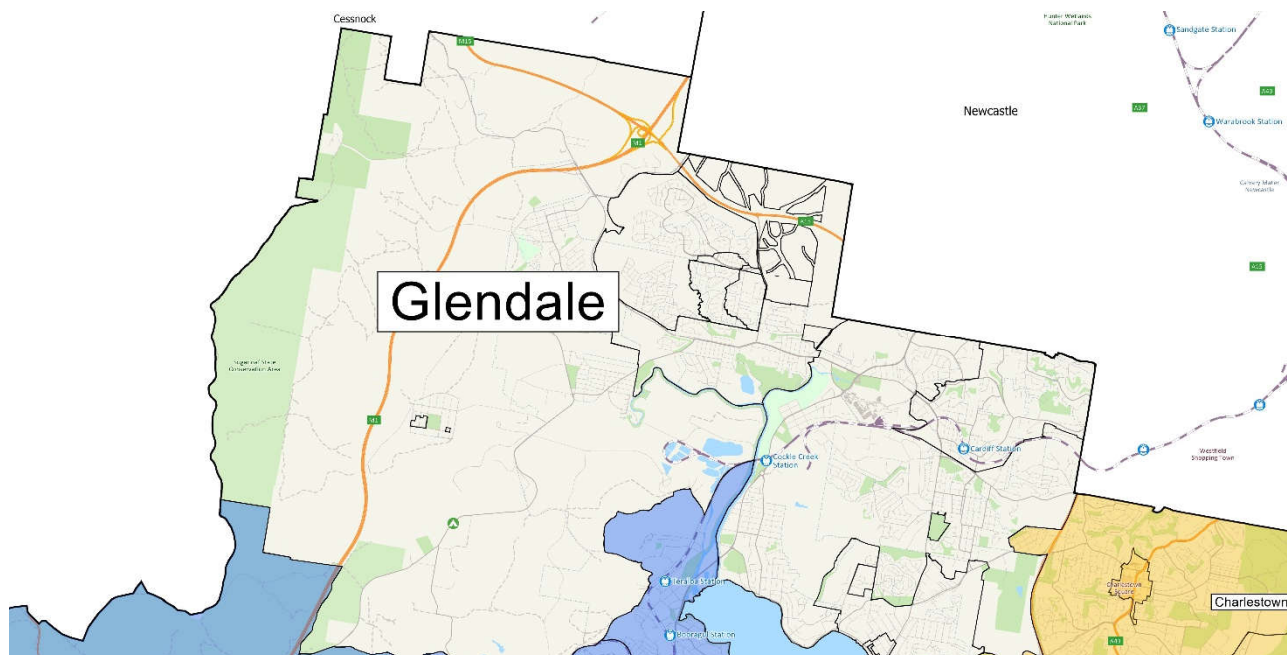
Glendale is the northern most planning area in Lake Macquarie. It includes the suburbs of Warners Bay, Wakefield, Killingworth, West Wallsend, Seahampton, Cameron Park, Edgeworth, Holmesville, Barnsley, Teralba, Speers Point, Hillsborough, Garden Suburb, Cardiff Heights, Glendale, Argenton, Boolaroo, Cardiff South, Lakelands, Macquarie Hills, Cardiff, New Lambton Heights and Elermore Vale.

The 2016 census estimates that Glendale has a population of 55,506 residents and is the second most populated planning catchment in Lake Macquarie. The table below shows the predicted change between 2016 (ABS) and 2036 (REMPLAN) for children (0-14 years), adults, and total population.

Table 7: Predicted population change (2016 to 2036)

Glendale	2016 Population	Population 2036	Population Change (2016-2036)	% Change (2016-2036)
0 to 14 years	11,130	12,133	+1,003	9.01
15+ years	44,376	56,674	+12,298	27.71
Total Population	55,506	68,807	+13,301	23.96

Population data indicates that:

- Glendale has a large population of 0 to 14 year olds as well as a large population between the ages of 25 and 44 suggesting that a large number of young families live within the catchment.

- There is a large proportion of the population aged 54 years and older. This age cohort is expected to grow at the fastest rate over the next 20 years, representing a gradual aging of the population.

- Glendale has the highest population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Lake Macquarie Council area (2,258 residents or 4.02% of the Glendale population).

- Cultural diversity is also high within the catchment with 9.65% of the population being born overseas and 5.29% of the population speaking a language other than English at home.

- The average weekly wage within Glendale is $808 per week and this is the highest average weekly wage of the 5 planning areas.

- The SEIFA index of relative advantage and disadvantage gives Glendale a score of 1001. This is the second highest score and shows that there is a relatively low level of disadvantage within the planning area.

2.3.4   The Morisset Catchment
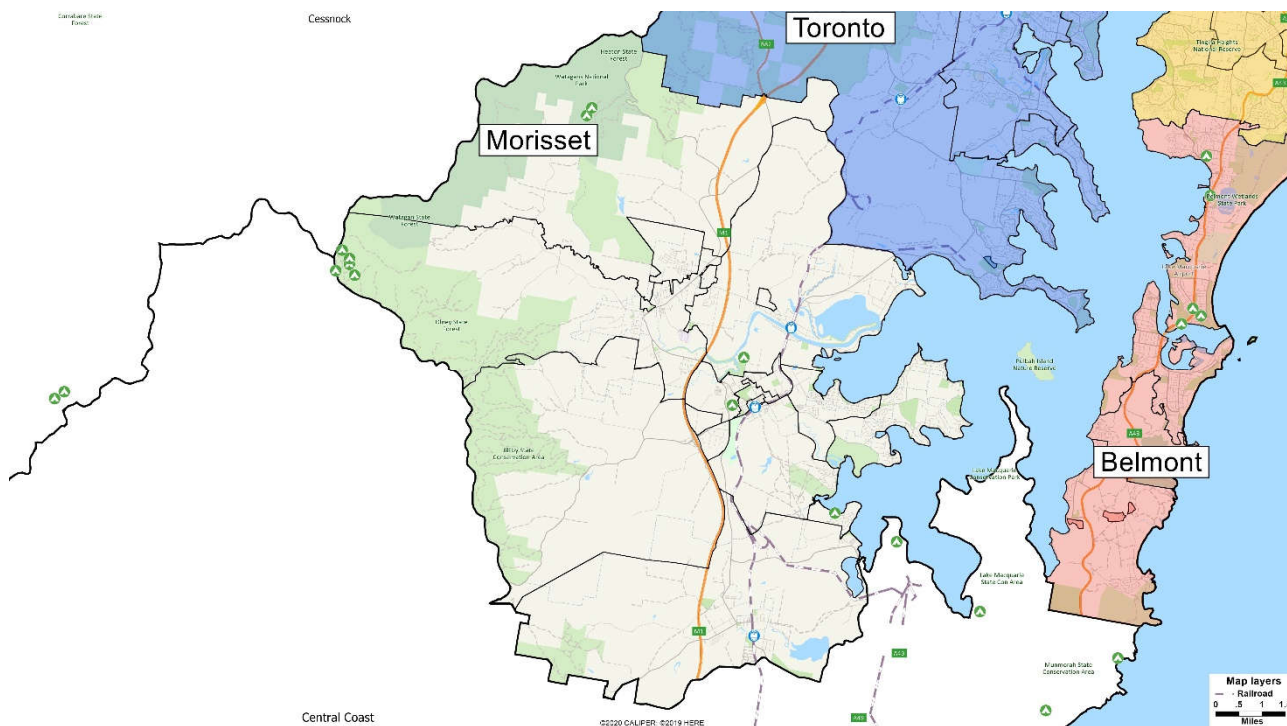
Morisset is the south-western most planning area in Lake Macquarie. It includes the suburbs of Cooranbong, Martinsville, Mandalong, Wyee, Wyee Point, Morisset, Dora Creek, Eraring, Bonnells Bay, Brightwaters, Sunshine, Mirrabooka, Silverwater, Morisset Park, Windermere Park, Yarrawonga Park, Balcolyn.

The 2016 census estimates that Morisset has a population of 23,672 residents. It is the least populated planning catchment in Lake Macquarie. The table below shows the predicted change between 2016 (ABS) and 2036 (REMPLAN) for children (0-14 years), adults, and total population.

Table 8: Predicted population change (2016 to 2036)

Morisset	2016 Population	Population 2036	Population Change (2016-2036)	% Change (2016-2036)
0 to 14 years	3,999	6,490	+2,491	62.29
15+ years	19,673	28,596	+8,923	45.36
Total Population	23,672	35,086	+11,414	48.22

Population data indicates that:

- Morisset has a high population of 25 to 44-year olds as well as a large population aged between 54 and 74 years old.

- The older age groups are expected to experience the highest population growth, indicating a gradual aging of the population.

- There are an estimated 904 residents (3.82% of the Morisset population) who identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island descent living within the Morisset planning area.

- Cultural diversity is the highest of all the catchments, with 13.21% of the population being born overseas and 4.49% of the population speaking a language other than English at home.

- The average weekly wage within Morisset is $560 per week.

- The SEIFA index of relative advantage and disadvantage gives Morisset a score of 982. This shows that there is a relatively high level of disadvantage within the planning area.

2.3.5 The Toronto Catchment
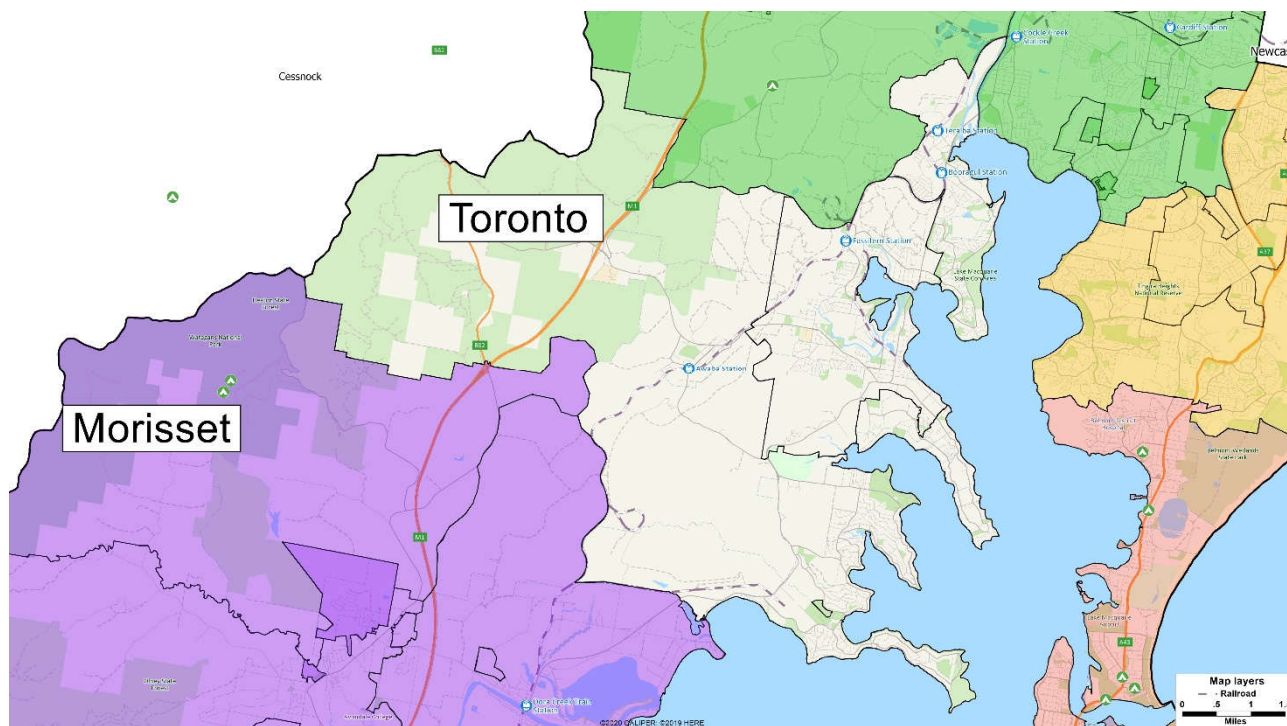
Toronto is the northern most planning area in Lake Macquarie. It includes the suburbs of Freemans Waterhole, Ryhope, Awaba, Blackalls Parl, Toronto, Fennell bay, Marmong point, Booragul, Bolton Point, Woodrising, Fassifern, Kilaben Bay, Coal Point, Carey Bay, Rathmines, Balmoral, Fishing Point, Arcadia Vale,Buttaba, Wangi Wangi and Myuna Bay. The 2016 census estimates that Toronto has a population of 30,796 residents.

The 2016 census estimates that Toronto has a population of 30,796 residents. The table below shows the predicted change between 2016 (ABS) and 2036 (REMPLAN) for children (0-14 years), adults, and total population.

Table 9: Predicted population change (2016 to 2036)

Toronto	2016 Population	Population 2036	Population Change (2016-2036)	% Change (2016-2036)
0 to 14 years	5,019	5,678	+659	13.13
15+ years	25,777	29,454	+3,677	14.26
Total Population	30,796	35,132	+4,336	14.08

Population data indicates that:

- Toronto has a high population of 25 to 54-year olds as well as a large population over the age of 54.

- The older age groups are expected to experience the highest population growth, indicating a gradual aging of the population.

- An estimated 1,583 residents (5.14% of the Toronto population) identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island descent.

- Cultural diversity is high within the catchment with 9.86% of the population being born overseas and 3.11% of the population speaking a language other than English at home.

- The average weekly wage within Toronto is $562 per week.

- The SEIFA index of relative advantage and disadvantage gives Glendale a score of 972. This is the second lowest score and shows that there is a relatively high level of disadvantage within the planning area.

3. Literature Review

A number of documents were reviewed to provide background information and context for the Parks and Play Strategy. These documents and their implications are summarised below.

Table 10: Lake Macquarie Strategic Planning Document Review

Document	Implications for the Parks and Play Strategy
Lake Macquarie City Council Planning/ Documents	
Imagine Lake Mac: Our Plan to 2050 and Beyond	Imagine Lake Mac: • is a high-level, long-term strategy that guides the growth and change of the City to 2050. • Identifies 7 aspirations expanding on the City Vision, with strategies to achieve the intended outcomes and identified change and growth areas Detailed actions and priorities are included in Council's Local Strategic Planning Statement (see below) Seven aspirations: 1. A city of vibrant centres 2. A city to call home 3. A city of prosperity 4. A city of close connections 5. A city of progress and play 6. A city with a vast natural environment 7. A city of resilience Importantly, for the Parks and Play Strategy, Imagine Lake Mac acknowledges the importance of parks to the City: *"The jewel in the crown for the City will be the abundance of high quality indoor and outdoor spaces to connect with others, enjoy nature, relax or get active. These spaces may be bushland reserves, the lake and foreshore, parks, a quiet garden area within a busy centre, or a purpose built area within a multi-use building."* Areas of change are highlighted for each catchment.
Our Future in Focus: Lake Macquarie City Community Strategic Plan 2017-2027	This plan outlines the following Vision for the City, and seven Community Values that will guide future planning and direct the City's response to change and growth. **Vision:** Lake Macquarie is a City with a lake at its heart encircled by distinctive towns and villages. We balance our cherished environments with our need for great spaces to live and visit, smart transport options and a thriving economy; which adapt and strive to be fair for all. **Community Values:** • Unique Landscape • Lifestyle and Wellbeing • Mobility and Accessibility • Diverse Economy • Connected Communities • Creativity • Shared Decision-Making The Plan aligns with the NSW State Plan and Hunter Regional Plan and has been prepared with regard to the social justice principles of access, equity, participation and rights, and addresses social, environmental, economic and governance matters.

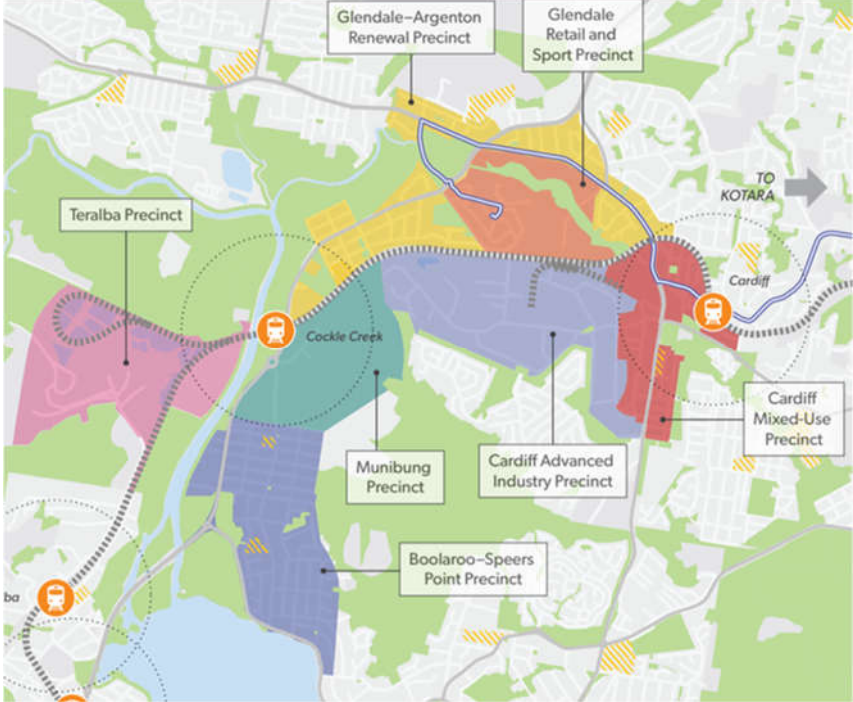| Document	Implications for the Parks and Play Strategy
	The Plan is arranged into Key Focus areas, with objectives, strategies, partners and performance measures. The following focus areas relate to planning for parks and play: Unique Landscape: • Optimise land use to meet the social, environmental and economic needs of the City. • Promote high quality development Lifestyle and Wellbeing: • Ensure sports and recreation facilities are available to meet community needs • Ensure future development supports the growth of our community • Ensure public spaces and community buildings meet the needs of the community • Host and support a diverse range of festivals and events Mobility and Accessibility: • Ensure community and transportation infrastructure are accessible for people with a wide range of abilities Connected Communities: • Enhance community spaces with urban and public art, place making and place activation. • Implement and review plans and strategies to support an inclusive community • Adapt our City to a changing climate • Empower our community to adopt sustainable behaviours • Encourage uptake of smart and sustainable infrastructure
Revised Delivery Program 2017-2022 and Operational Plan 2020-2021	This document outlines actions and strategies Council will undertake to achieve the objectives defined in the Lake Macquarie City Community Strategic Plan 2017-2027. The Delivery Program covers the term of the elected Council and the Operational Plan covers the financial year program (actions and funding). Relevant actions are within Objective 2.2 – *Our Public Spaces Help us Feel Healthy and Happy*: • Report to Council for public exhibition a draft City-wide Parks and Play Strategy • Design the playground, skate park and BMX facilities at Rathmines Park, in accordance with the master plan and heritage implementation strategy • Complete replacement of the timber play structure at the all abilities playground, Lake Macquarie Variety Playground, Speers Point • Complete playground replacement at Russell Reserve, Adamstown Heights • Complete playground replacement Baxter Park, Nords Wharf • Implement playground replacement at Ambleside Park, Lakelands • Implement playground replacement at Belmont foreshore • Implement playground replacement at Bahloo Reserve, Windale • Complete playground and park upgrades at Bernie Goodwin Memorial Park, Morisset • Implement the playground, amenities building, dog off-leash park, landscaping and path improvements at Thomas H. Halton Park, Eleebana in accordance with the adopted master plan
Lake Macquarie City Local Strategic Planning Statement (2019)	The aim of the planning statement is to influence public and private investment making Lake Macquarie City one of the most productive, adaptable, sustainable and liveable places in Australia. To achieve this, the Lake Macquarie Local City Strategic Planning Statement identifies: • The community's vision for future land use in the City • Seven Planning Priorities that articulate the special characteristics of the City • Strategies that deliver on those priorities, as well as a list of actions

Document	Implications for the Parks and Play Strategy
	• Key Change and Growth Areas that provide visual cues of where certain types of development will be focused It includes strategic actions that reinforce global, national and regional plans, including the Hunter Regional Plan and the Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan. Nine centres are indicated as being focus for change and growth: three strategic economic centres (Charlestown, Glendale and Morisset) and other economic centres at Belmont, Cardiff, Mount Hutton, Swansea, Toronto and Warners Bay. The areas in and around these centres will experience increased development and change. Planning Priority 5: *A City of Progress and Play* includes the following relevant principle: *Enhance community access to sporting, recreational, cultural and community services and facilities* The following Actions have connections to park and play planning: • Action 5.2 – Prepare a draft master plan and plan of management for Rathmines Park to make recommendations for heritage management, recreation, events and other opportunities. • Action 5.8 – Implement the actions in Lake Macquarie Urban and subject to adoption, Public Art Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2029 to help shape the City's identity and liveability. • Action 5.10 – Prepare a master plan for Catherine Hill Bay to determine the recreational needs of the community and how these will be delivered. • Action 5.11 – Prepare a Trails Strategy, incorporating walking and mountain bike trails in the City, to provide improved connection with the existing and planned footpath and cycling networks.
Lake Macquarie Housing Strategy	Council has invested considerable time in developing a housing strategy to address the lack of housing diversity and increasing population. As part of the strategy, Council set five priorities, each with a number of objectives. Those relevant are: • Priority 1: Facilitate efficient housing supply and infrastructure co-ordination noted that Council want to "investigate the potential of providing a greenbelt". • Priority 3: Facilitate infill opportunities for housing near jobs and services outlined that Council should "review contribution plans to ensure adequate funding is available to supply and service the increasing resident population in infill areas and ensure contributions charged are commensurate".
Lake Macquarie Youth Strategy 2020-2023	The Youth Strategy linked the strategic framework to the focus areas of the Community Plan, with the key areas for consideration in parks and play planning including: • Providing safe places that encourage participation and cultural learning experiences and address health needs. • Providing frequent, convenient, low cost and safe transport. • Ensuring the natural environment is better looked after.
Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017-2021	The Action Plan outlines the facility upgrades that need to be made to improve accessibility, including: • Lake Macquarie Variety Playground – an all-abilities playground featuring a liberty swing, sensory features, a quite zone and barbeque/picnic facilities. • Changing place facility, located at Speers Point Park. • Upgrade of amenities at Council Community Facilities.

Document	Implications for the Parks and Play Strategy
Children and Family Strategy 2015-2020	As part of the Strategy a series of priorities were outlined, including: • Families and children are aware of outdoor recreational opportunities in their area. This included a playground facility review being conducted and information made available on Council's website.
Cycling Strategy 2012-2021	The vision of the strategy was *by 2022 a much stronger and diverse cycling culture will be evident in Lake Macquarie.* To achieve this, five strategic goals were established, including three that should be considered in park and play planning: • A network of safe, comfortable bicycle routes connect Lake Macquarie residents with key destinations both within the municipality and adjoining municipalities. • Good end-of-trip facilities at key destinations make cycling an easy and attractive form of transport. • Providing children with a safe and familiar environment to develop the skills, knowledge and experience to make cycling and attractive form of transport throughout their lives. The strategy outlined over 170 specific proposals. Those of significance include: • Investigate the provision of a dedicated facility for training young people to cycle (e.g. Speers Point Park) • Investigate the potential for connecting this facility with the bicycle network and other green open space • Establish the bicycle network • Provisions for cycling infrastructure, including end-of-trip facilities should be a requirement, where considered appropriate, for all new development.
Environmental Sustainability and Action Plan 2020-2027	This strategy provides a framework for sustainable planning, decision-making and action to achieve improved environmental sustainability for Lake Macquarie. Among the strategic themes a set of objectives are established. Two are indirectly relevant to this strategy: • Increase active transport to 15% of total trips • Guiding land use planning to support development of a high-quality built environment.
Night-Time Economy Action Plan 2019-2024	This document sets objectives, priorities and actions to grow Lake Macquarie's night-time economy. Objectives that need to be considered as part of the Play Strategy include: • Review Council's Park Booking Policy/ Procedure to ensure consistency with the objectives of the night time economy action plan. • Host events, workshops, and live performances that enable experiencing the natural environment after dark. • Explore night-time food markets, night-time cinema and family friendly events in parks and public spaces as part of Council's Event Strategy. • Investigate a pilot place-making project to assist in activating the City's urban centres • Investigate ways to assist groups to activate public spaces of an evening • Review public infrastructure provided at Council parks and reserves to ensure sufficient infrastructure is in place for events.
Public Toilet Strategy 2011	This strategy provided a detailed assessment of the existing supply of public toilets in Lake Macquarie, separated into two categories. For category one toilets (those open 24/7) the following recommendations were made: • Retain facility (may include minor works and monitoring of use) - 55 facilities; • Replace facility - 14 facilities; • Modify and/or upgrade facility - 11 facilities; • Close and demolish facility - 9 facilities; • Full CPTED assessment required to determine further action - 9 facilities;

Document	Implications for the Parks and Play Strategy
	• Convert facility to Category Two Public Toilet Facility - 7 facilities; • Relocate facility - 2 facilities.
Development Contributions Plans	Each development contribution plan (DCP) was assessed to determine the following details for parks and open space: • Total number of new parks planned • Total number of parks upgraded • Total number of new play features • Total number of play upgraded • Other projects that may impact open space and recreation (includes community gardens, skateparks, BMX etc.) These details are summarised below:

Contribution Plan Name	New Parks	Upgraded Parks	New Play	Upgraded Play	Other	Total Costs
Glendale DCP	6	3	7	6	17	$26,406,944
Belmont DCP	3	1	4	0	9	$20,023,434
Charleston DCP	2	9		13	18	$32,463,439
Morisset DCP	5	1	6	1	6	$9,358,484
North Wallarah DCP (2004)	0	0	5	0	2	$1,259,757
Northlakes DCP (2012)	1			1		$2,887,290
Toronto DCP	1	3	1	3	13	$19,935,655
North Cooranbong	5		6		1	$15,843,367

Document	Implications for the Parks and Play Strategy
Recreation and Land Plans	Recreation and Land Plans support and inform the Development contributions Plans for the following catchments: • Glendale • Belmont • Charleston • Morisset • Toronto Specific information relevant to the Parks and Play Strategy will included in the individual catchment summaries where relevant as the study progresses.
Site Master Plans	Master Plans exist for: • Rathmines Park • Speers Point Park • Thomas H Halton Park • Ulinga Park Specific information relevant to the Parks and Play Strategy will included in the individual catchment summaries where relevant as the study progresses.
Regional Planning/ Documents	
Hunter Regional Plan 2036 (NSW Government, Dept of Planning & Environment, 2016)	The Regional Plan includes 27 directions within 4 Goals and narratives for the local governments. The four goals are: • 1. The Leading regional economy in Australia • 2. A biodiversity-rich natural environment • 3. Thriving communities • 4. Greater housing choice and jobs The plan

Document	Implications for the Parks and Play Strategy
	• identifies Greater Newcastle as a key element in the future productivity of the Hunter Region and comprises the closely connected urban areas of Cessnock, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Newcastle and Port Stephens local government areas • commits to developing and delivering a Metropolitan Plan for Greater Newcastle Specific Lake Macquarie references/ priorities in the Regional Plan: • Lake Macquarie (waterway) supports important water-based recreational activities including both powered and nonpowered boating activities • A network of walking, cycling and jogging opportunities provided by a number of scenic shared paths along the foreshores of Lake Macquarie, and includes the CycleSafe proposal, an initiative that aims to connect 90 kilometres of existing cycle paths with a 140-kilometre network of new construction to deliver a system of safe, easy-to-follow walking and cycling connections throughout Newcastle and Lake Macquarie. Direction 18: Enhance access to recreational facilities and connect open spaces is relevant to park and playground planning, specifically Directions 18.4 and 18.5 below: • 18.4: Assist councils to develop open space and recreation strategies that identify a range of accessible open space and recreation opportunities; integrate open space, active transport and recreation networks; and improve public foreshore access. • 18.5: Implement actions and invest in boating infrastructure priorities identified in regional boating plans to improve boating safety, boat storage and waterway access
Lower Hunter Regional Strategy 2006-2031 (NSW Government, Dept of Planning)	This Regional Strategy: • Applies to five LGAs of Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens, Maitland and Cessnock • Represents an agreed NSW government position on the future of the Lower Hunter and for the region's population over the 25-year period (2006-31) • Is one of a number of regional strategies prepared by the Department of Planning. • Identifies Lake Macquarie, Newcastle and Port Stephens as the faster growing areas (population) • Will be reviewed every five years The Regional Strategy does not contain any specific references park/ playground development, except within the broader narrative of providing community access to recreation and open spaces. The Strategy contains a centres hierarchy. Within Lake Macquarie, the following are identified as Major regional centres and town centres: **Major Regional Centres** • Charlestown • Glendale (emerging) • Morisset **Town Centre** • Belmont • Mt Hutton • Swansea • Toronto • Warners Bay
Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan, 2036 (NSW Department of Planning & Environment)	The Plan sets out strategies and actions to drive sustainable growth across Cessnock City, **Lake Macquarie City**, Maitland City, Newcastle City and Port Stephens communities, which together make up Greater Newcastle.

Document	Implications for the Parks and Play Strategy
	The Plan also helps to achieve the vision set in the Hunter Regional Plan 2036 – for the Hunter to be the leading regional economy in Australia with a vibrant new metropolitan city at its heart The plan is arranged around four outcomes and identifies a number of catalyst areas: • Outcome 1: Create a workforce skilled and ready for the new economy • Outcome 2: Enhance environment, amenity and resilience for quality of life • Outcome 3: Deliver housing close to jobs and services • Outcome 4: Improve connections to jobs, services and recreation Some strategies relate to the planning of parks and playgrounds in Lake Macquarie: *Strategy 11* – create more great public spaces where people come together. Lake Macquarie, its waterfront and the coastline will be protected from encroachment of development that impacts open space and diminishes the natural landscape setting. Specific actions related to parks and play include: • Create and activate public spaces in the strategic centres that are suitable for community events • Enhance community access to sporting, recreational, cultural and community services and facilities • Protect and enhance waterfront parkland areas *Strategy 12* – Enhance the Blue and Green grid and the urban tree canopy. This references developing and supporting metropolitan scale areas at Speers Point Park. Strategy 12.1 is particularly relevant: Greater Newcastle councils with support from the Department of Planning and Environment, will: • Improve access to open space, recreation areas and waterways so that 90% of houses are within a 10-minute walk of open space. • Enhance Greater Newcastle's Blue and Green Grid by implementing the Green Infrastructure Outcomes of the Greener Places policy to integrate water sensitive urban design principles in local plans • Make a cooler Greater Newcastle by greening urban areas, buildings, transport corridors and open spaces to enhance the urban forest • Enhance nature based tourism through protection and promotion of natural assets such as Lake Macquarie. Catalyst areas are defined as places of metropolitan significance that need a collaborative approach to the delivery of new jobs and homes. North West Lake Macquarie is one of 11 catalyst areas and identified as a strategic Gateway to Newcastle. The following outcomes are relevant to park and playground planning: • Boolaroo-Speers Point Precinct – protect and expand the recreational and environmental amenity of the Cockle Creek and Speers Point foreshores to support the regionally significant Speers Point Park • Glendale Retail and Sport Precinct – work to improve utilisation of surplus public lands • Explore opportunities for better pedestrian and cycle connectivity to Cockle Creek station and to the Glendale Retail and Sport Precinct.

Document	Implications for the Parks and Play Strategy
Greater Newcastle Transport Future Plan	This Plan guides future transport planning for the Greater Newcastle Area, building on the platform to increase liveability in Greater Newcastle through more sustainable travel behaviour. The plan is underpinned by ten customer outcomes from the Regional NSW Services and Infrastructure Plan.

Those most relevant to park and playground planning are:

Sustaining and enhancing the liveability of our places:
• The appropriate movement and place balanced is established enabling people and goods to move efficiently through the network whilst ensuring local access and vibrant places
• Supporting centres with appropriate transport services and infrastructure

Connecting people and places in growing regions:
• Changes in land use, population and demand, including seasonal changes, are serviced by the transport system |
| **State Government Planning/ Documents** | |
| Premier's Priorities | The Premier's key policy priorities for NSW are:
• A strong economy
• Highest quality education
• Well-connected communities with quality local environments
• Putting customer at the centre of everything we do
• Breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

Directly relevant to the Park and Play Strategy is the following target and measure:
• Better environment
    a) Greener public spaces – increase the proportion of homes in urban areas within 10 minutes' walk of quality green, open and public space by 10 per cent by 2023 |
| NSW 2021: A Plan to Make NSW Number One | This 10-year plan replaces the State Plan as the NSW Government's strategic business plan. It aims to rebuild the economy, provide quality services, renovate infrastructure, restore government accountability, and strengthen the NSW local environment and communities.
NSW 2021 is based around five strategies: |

Document	Implications for the Parks and Play Strategy
	• Rebuild the economy – restore economic growth and establish NSW as the 'first place in Australia to do business' • Return quality services – provide the best transport, health, education, policing, justice and family services, with a focus on the customer • Renovate infrastructure – build the infrastructure that makes a difference to both our economy and people's lives • Strengthen our local environment and communities – improve people's lives by protecting natural environments and building a strong sense of community • Restore accountability to government – talk honestly with the community, return planning powers to the community and give people a say on decision that affect them. Of relevance to the Park and Play Strategy are the following goals: • Build liveable centres • Protect our natural environment • Increase opportunities for people to look after their own neighbourhoods and environments • Enhance cultural, creative, sporting and recreation opportunities The delivery strategy involves working with local governments and communities to develop local and regional actions plans aligned to NSW 2021.
Urban Green Infrastructure Policy "Greener Places" (NSW	Aims to create a networked urban ecosystem of green space that encompasses parks and open spaces to help create a healthier, more liveable and resilient place to live. The policy advocates for **green infrastructure to be considered as essential infrastructure throughout the urban design process**, from strategy to construction and maintenance. The objectives of the draft policy are: • To protect, conserve and enhance NSW's network of green and open natural and cultural spaces • To secure a network of high quality, high performing and well-designed green space, establishing a crucial component of urban infrastructure to address the environmental challenges of the twenty-first century • To promote healthy living, encouraging physical activity, social cohesion, and enhancing wellbeing by providing liveable places for the NSW community • To create a more strategic approach to planning for Green Infrastructure, encouraging early and integrated investment through statutory planning • To deliver better tools for the delivery of Green Infrastructure across NSW.
Draft Greener Places Design Guide	One of three manuals/ tool kits that support the Greener Places policy. The Open Space for Recreation Guide proposes a new framework for planning. In summary it advocates: • A shift in focus from coarse measures such as hectares per 1000 to a performance approach combining a number of measures • An emphasis on the recreation opportunity outcomes required and defining the spaces needed to support these • A recognition that existing parks have a capacity and can only accommodate so much use before additional land is needed • Increased multiple use of open space and public spaces such as those within schools Details a range of performance criteria that guide successful planning and delivery. These include: • Accessibility and Connectivity • Distribution • Size and Shape • Quantity • Quality • Diversity

Document	Implications for the Parks and Play Strategy

Everyone Can Play: NSW Government Office for Open Space and Parklands, 2019	This document is a guide for inclusive playspaces - a toolkit for local authorities, communities, planners and designers of playspaces.
	Key Areas:
	• Can I get there? - Considers location, layout, signage, wayfinding and accessibility to ensure everyone can find their way to, in and around the playspace.
	• Can I play? - The play experience, including the equipment and surfacing, should allow everyone to experience a variety of challenging and engaging play opportunities in a way that suits them.
	• Can I stay? - Considers safety, facilities, landscape and the wider environment to ensure everyone can stay at the playspace for as long as they would like.
	• Identifies play as being more than just equipment
	• Access v Inclusivity identifies standards and compliance versus a place being welcoming and comfortable with barriers removed.
	• 1.3m young people in NSW live with a disability
	• NSW is multicultural with over 100,000 new migrants settling each year
	• The community is ageing
	• Play is vital for bringing communities together
	• The inclusive play process identifies:
	  – **Strategic Planning:** Plan for inclusive play across the community.
	  – **Scope:** Review existing playspaces, determine improvements and create a scope for a new playspace.
	  – **Design:** Use inclusive design principles to inform playspace design.
	  – **Deliver:** Build inclusive play opportunities.
	  – **Evaluate:** Conduct continuous reviews and measurement of success.
	  – **Champion:** Become an inclusive playspace champion.
	• Councils can use Everyone Can Play to:
	  – Inform design briefs.
	  – Address existing playspaces.
	  – Determine what improvements can be made to increase inclusivity.
	  – Influence budget setting for playspaces.
	  – Educate staff on the importance of inclusion in our open spaces.
	  – Form part of council's Play Delivery Program.
	Considerations for the Parks and Play Strategy:
	1. Ensure that accessibility and inclusivity is included in the strategic aspect of play
	2. Acknowledge the importance of inclusivity and access whilst understanding that this does not mean all playspaces should be fully accessible
	3. Play is more than equipment and the whole space should be considered when classifying and designing play
	4. This strategy will address three components of the inclusive play process to include:
	  a. Planning:
	    i. undertake an analysis of the distribution of existing playspaces and identify opportunities to maximise inclusion in existing playspaces.
	    ii. mapping will indicate the current distribution of inclusive play opportunities
	    iii. assess community needs
	  b. Scoping and
	  c. Championing inclusive play
	5. Designing, delivering, and evaluating, should be driven and guided by this play strategy
	6. It is therefore recommended that once the high-level strategy has been developed, Councils design team use the resource as a guide to designing inclusive play into the spectrum of opportunity across the municipality.

4. Park and Playspace Trends

4.1 Importance of Parks and Open Space

Parks and public open space support the health and wellbeing of our residents. Parks are places where our residents and visitors to the city can relax, be physically active and play. They provide free locations for people to gather and socialise, helping people to make connections with one another and have a sense of belonging in our growing community. They provide opportunities to escape the built environment, and improved amenity provides habitat for wildlife and improved air quality.

Our parks, sport and recreation facilities are critical for community health and wellbeing, helping to benefit our community:

Physically and mentally by promoting physical activity and active lifestyles, reducing illness and disease, improving mental health and creating a sense of wellbeing.

Socially by generating stronger and more connected communities with improved social interaction and inclusion through provision of active and vibrant community hubs, access to facilities and resources, opportunities for volunteering and involvement.

Environmentally by developing well-planned and attractive settings encouraging active transport and use of public parks and leisure services. The provision of parks and green environments also include temperature reduction and mitigation of the urban heat island effect; air quality improvement; management of storm water reducing the incidence of flooding and water-borne disease; ecosystem support and biodiversity enhancement.

Economically by assisting to reduce health care cost through reduction in disease and illness associated with lack of physical activity and social interaction. A park and public space network can also provide local employment and investment opportunities and contribute to maintaining a healthy workforce.

Evidence from around the world for building cities and regional areas around public open space, active recreation areas, green streets and walking and cycling infrastructure, has repeatedly demonstrated this approach will deliver improved health, social cohesion, vibrant local economies, productivity, and environmental benefits. [5]

Public open space, sport and recreation infrastructure could be defined as a critical investment in current and future populations. This "Urban Health Infrastructure" delivers multiple returns on investment.

The National Heart Foundation observes:

- *The health effects of physical activity are compelling. However, the potency of physical activity as a policy investment for Australia extends far beyond health. Active living plays a key role in broader economic and social goals for our nation:*
  walking, cycling and public transport are affordable and sustainable solutions to traffic congestion
- *these same behaviours contribute to cleaner air, reduced carbon emissions and sustainable environments*
- *active neighbourhoods and cities are more liveable, with higher levels of social capital and community cohesion and lower levels of crime*
- *in the context of an ageing community, physical activity enables older Australians to live more active lifestyles with reduced risk from disabling and costly chronic diseases*
- *fit and active workers are more productive, take fewer sick days and make a positive contribution to our economic wellbeing.*

(A blueprint for an active Australia, Heart Foundation, 2019 pg 8)

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[5] State of New South Wales (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment) 2020 Draft Greener Spaces Design Guide

4.2 Trends in open space and recreation

Consideration of emerging trends in open space and recreation is important when planning for the future of parks and playspaces. The most important considerations are:

- Changes in community preferences and participation patterns
- Changes in how parks, open spaces and recreation infrastructure is being planned and provided.

The following section provides a rapid overview of key trends relevant to parks and playgrounds.

4.2.1   Changes in active recreation

Sport and physical activity are increasingly important to our health and wellbeing – 2019 Healthstats NSW data indicates that 40.5% of adults in the Hunter New England Local Health District are not sufficiently active to achieve a health benefit and 59.5% are overweight or obese[6]. In 2019 the National Heart Foundation of Australia released its third edition of the *Blueprint for an Active Australia.* Some key evidence cited in this report includes:

- Heart disease remains the single leading cause of death in Australia

- Physical activity can significantly reduce heart disease risk and the burden of a range of other chronic diseases, as well as improve mental health

- *"Nearly 6 in 10 adults, 3 quarters of seniors and over 8 in 10 children and young people are not active enough for good heart health. This ranges Australia among the world's most inactive nations."*

Significant amounts of research has provided insight into the importance of planning for active and healthy communities. The availability of green spaces, including parks, playgrounds and streetscapes that are safe, accessible, walkable and inviting are a key component of an environment that supports physically active lifestyles.

We need to have urban environments that make it easy and attractive to exercise as well as provide a range of opportunities to enable activity. While it is important to promote the benefits of physical activity to children and adults, there is a need to ensure that our parks can support and encourage physical activity for all ages, abilities, genders, cultures and socio-economic groups.

NSW residents are changing how active they are and what they do for active recreation:
Over the last three years in NSW Ausplay participation data has highlighted:
1. Walking (recreational) continues to be, by far, the most popular activity (43.3% in 2020). This is consistent with previous trends.
2. Fitness/ Gym, Swimming, Athletics, Cycling, Football/ Soccer and Bushwalking have consistently rated as the top seven activities since 2015.
3. Only minor changes in participation are evident between 2017 and 2019:
4. Since 2015 participation has increased slightly in eight of the top 10 activities, with the largest increases being in Fitness/ Gym (↑4.8%) and Walking (↑2.8%).

4.2.2   Changes in how we value parks, pathways and open space:

We value our parks and open space more, we expect to have bikeways and walking tracks available in our neighbourhoods and we are increasingly getting out and using the path and park networks for exercise and activity. We have also increased our expectations for the quality of development in our parks.
- **Increased participation in walking**, combined with rising participation in cycling and running in parks and natural areas means that the demand for pathway networks within open space is probably the largest emerging infrastructure need.
- Research has shown the importance of a **supportive environment** to encouraging participation. This means parks and shaded pathways, natural landscape settings, a sense of safety and good access to public open space.

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[6]Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence. HealthStats NSW. Sydney: NSW Ministry of Health. Available at: www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au. Accessed 29/10/20.

- Many local governments are facing **increasing financial constraint to** the funding of infrastructure and future maintenance. Planning and finance controls such as contributions caps and borrowing restraints have meant that funding parks and recreation facilities is increasingly difficult. A key challenge is to deliver open space and recreation infrastructure in a timely manner as demand emerges.
- Community **expectations are increasing** as to the quality of parks and sporting areas and the level of access to these. In particular, there is increasing awareness of "high quality" destination parks with regional scale play and active recreation elements.
- The rise of **exercise and fitness as recreation** has meant that public parks have become the new venues for formal and informal group fitness and social exercise. This is increasing pressure on local parks as well increasing demand for shade and water as key elements.
- The **infiltration of technology throughout our lives** means we have unlimited access to knowledge, information and engagement and expect instantaneous communication. There is potential for increased digitisation of public spaces through virtual and augmented play experiences and use of "smart" features[7], such as smart lights which can double as a WiFi node, smart benches with solar powered USB charging docs and interactive kiosks that provide information on weather and local news.
- Increased value on the importance of our **environment and sustainability** will drive incorporation of sustainable design into parks and playspaces and creation of green spaces and corridors that mitigate urban heat island effects.
- National Recreation and Parks Association research shows dog parks are the fastest growing type of park in America. The increasing desire to **exercise with our pets** is also seen in Australia and is likely to increase demand for dog friendly parks, particularly in urban areas.

4.2.2.1   Lessons from the Lockdown - importance of public open space

The recent impact of measures to reduce the spread of the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted just how important public spaces, parks and pathways are to the community. Anecdotal evidence from many towns and cities has highlighted the rapid increase in use of public space and how important the opportunity to get outdoors and be active has become to all. It is likely this rapid shift in behaviour will emphasise inequity in provision and may result in more permanent increases in outdoor activity and exercise.

> *"However, the sheer volume of people exercising in the open air has also exposed the limitations of historic design of some public spaces, with too many people crowded onto narrow walkways or poorly laid out parklands. That's why our future precincts, parks and public spaces need to be designed to enable better social distancing, with wider footpaths, segregated cycleways and more linear parks, to meet the increased demand for these precious public spaces."*

Rob Stokes Minister for Planning 12/05/20 Guardian Australia

In October 2020 AusPlay released data on the early impact of Covid-19 on sport and physical activity participation by comparing data for the period of April to June 202 with April to June 2019. Key findings include:

- The need for more frequent participation appears to have been prompted by Covid-19. 63% of females and 65% of males participated in physical activities 3+ times per week between April to June 2019. This increased to 66% and 70% respectively for April to June 2020.

- Recreational and fitness activities were most popular during April to June 2020. The top three adult activities during this period were Walking (recreational)(86.3%); Exercise at home (81.6%) and Exercise biking (81.3%).

- Running (41.0%), Jogging (41.8%) and Yoga (38.6%) were the top three recreational and fitness activities adults participated in more in April to June 2020.

- Comparison of ABS emotional and wellbeing data shows an increase in emotions associated with anxiety and depression in April, before stabilising or reducing in June 2020.

- Data on motivation for participation showed physical and mental health and social reasons were more prevalent in April -June 2020 data.

Figure 5: Top motivations for participation in physical activities (Source: AusPlay: A focus on the early impact of COVID-19 on sport and physical activity participation, October 2020)
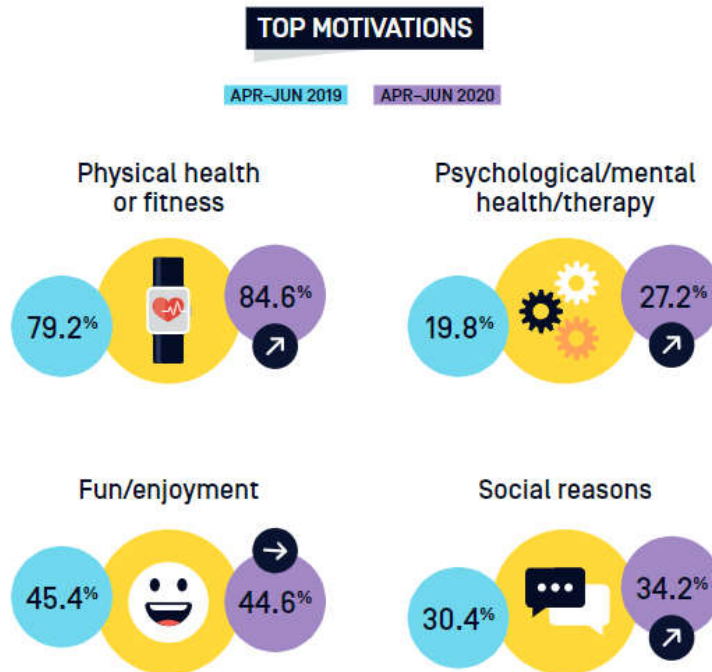
4.2.3 Changes in planning and providing open space

The way we plan and provide public open space is changing. Increased pressure on land supply, tighter budgets and lessons from past planning failures have seen shifts in state policy and in how we think about the open space network:

Increasing multiple use of open space

- There is increasing acceptance of multiple use of open space to achieve a number of outcomes. But there are challenges as some uses can greatly diminish the recreation value of a space if the design for shared use is inadequate. We have also realised that in some cases multiple use is not desirable and attempting too much can be more costly and less effective.
- With good design and sufficient space, multiple use open space can support recreation uses, pathways, protection of riparian environments and management of stormwater.
- There has also been increased awareness that sporting fields should encourage multiple use and especially, provide recreation opportunities for nearby residents-rather than being locked away for sport only.
- Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) is a key driver of multiple use with integration of stormwater treatment systems into the urban landscape (generally in public open space). This can see drainage swales, gross pollution traps, filtration wetlands, detention basins and similar elements be designed as elements within a larger area of public parkland.
- Multiple use can also ensure that open space areas designed primarily for water treatment, drainage and flood management can be enhanced with good multiple use design to provide additional recreation opportunity.
- Planning for multiple use, where appropriate can increase the diversity of outdoor recreation opportunities and reap increased value for the community from infrastructure investment.

New approaches to planning open space for sport and recreation.

The way we plan public open space is changing. **The Urban Green Infrastructure Policy "Greener Places" (NSW) was released by the state government in 2017 and the Draft Guidelines "Open Space for Recreation" were** released late in 2018 by the NSW Government Architect in 2018 for public review and discussion.

The *Greener Places*[8] document aims to create a networked urban ecosystem of green space that encompasses parks and open spaces to help create a healthier, more liveable and resilient place to live. The policy advocates for **green infrastructure to be considered as essential infrastructure throughout the urban design process,** from strategy to construction and maintenance.
The objectives of the draft policy are:

- To protect, conserve and enhance NSW's network of green and open natural and cultural spaces

- To secure a network of high quality, high performing and well-designed green space, establishing a crucial component of urban infrastructure to address the environmental challenges of the twenty-first century

- To promote healthy living, encouraging physical activity, social cohesion, and enhancing wellbeing by providing liveable places for the NSW community

- To create a more strategic approach to planning for Green Infrastructure, encouraging early and integrated investment through statutory planning

- To deliver better tools for the delivery of Green Infrastructure across NSW.

The **Draft Greener Places Design Guide** contains three manuals/ tool kits that support the Greener Places policy; one being the "**Open Space for Recreation Guide**" which proposes a new framework for planning.
This guide has informed the Parks and Play Strategy and provided significant guidance on the planning principles and performance criteria used for open space planning in particular.

In summary it advocates:
- A shift in focus from coarse measures such as hectares per 1000 to a performance approach combining a number of measures.
- An emphasis on the recreation opportunity outcomes required and defining the spaces needed to support these.
- A recognition that existing parks have a capacity and can only accommodate so much use before additional land is needed.
- Increased multiple use of open space and public spaces such as those within schools
- It details a range of performance criteria that guide successful planning and delivery. These criteria include:
  - Accessibility and Connectivity
  - Distribution
  - Size and Shape
  - Quantity
  - Quality
  - Diversity

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[8] Source: https://www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/policies/greener-places

4.3 Understanding Play

In order to develop a strategy for playspaces, we must first understand the benefits and role they have in the lives of children, their families and the broader community. Not only will this assist Council in understanding the role it could and should play, but the design and placement of assets will be guided through a range of opportunities rather than a 'one size fits all' approach.

4.3.1   The Benefits of Play

Research shows that play has many benefits for children, including:
increasing their self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-respect

- improving and maintain their physical and mental health

- giving them the opportunity to socialise with other children

- allowing them to increase their confidence through developing new skills

- promoting their imagination, independence, and creativity

- offering opportunities for all abilities and backgrounds to play together

- providing opportunities for developing social skills and learning

- building resilience through risk taking and challenge, problem solving, and dealing with new and novel situations

- providing opportunities to learn about the environment and wider community.

Evidence also supports wider benefits of play to include:

- parents feeling secure knowing their children are happy, safe and enjoying themselves

- families benefit from healthier, happier children

- play services are frequently seen as a focal point for communities

- offers opportunities for social interaction for the wider community and supports the development of a greater sense of community spirit and cohesion

- public outside spaces have an important role in the everyday lives of children and young people, especially as a place for meeting friends

- parks and other green spaces are popular with adults taking young children out to play and for older children to spend time together.

4.3.2   Play Theory

It is also widely acknowledged and researched that play has a significant impact on the social, physical and cognitive development of the child. Play theory in general identifies these three broad categories of play behaviour that apply across all ages but the way they are interpreted by each age group varies with some type of play assuming greater importance at particular stages of child development.

Effective play provision must consider the characteristics of play as well as the different types of play. Multiple types of play have been documented including:

- Physical Play (or Locomotor play) such as skipping, jumping, hoping, climbing

- Construction Play

- Object play

- Pretend play (including superhero play & war play)

- Sociodramatic play

- Rough & Tumble play

- Social play

Socio-dramatic play is considered by some researchers to be the most complex and combines elements of the other forms of play. Family roles, character roles and functional roles are most commonly featured in children's sociodramatic play (Hughes, 2010). Through imagination within socio-dramatic play, children create the characters, assign themselves roles, create the rules of the play, the dialogue and storyline, develop the plot, and are the scriptwriters and the director.

Social play is important when thinking about facilitating children's social interactions. Social play can be subdivided into five categories:
1. Onlooker play is a term used to describe a child or children watching others engaged in play
2. Solitary play refers to a child playing alone
3. Parallel play involves children playing alongside other children with similar objects but without interaction
4. Associative play refers to playing with others without shared goals or coordination
5. Cooperative play can be observed when children are playing within a group with co-ordination and cooperation amongst players (e.g. players organise themselves into roles with specific goals in mind).

Alternative classifications of children's play are associated with different contexts. For example 5 to 11-year-old play at school falls into the following types: Artistic play, Controlled imaginary/socio dramatic play, Exploratory play, Games play, Integrated play, Play with whole school environment, Replication play, Small world play, Role play and Virtual play (Briggs and Hansen, 2012).

4.3.3 Planning for Different Needs

Given the broad categories of play theory, playspaces need to include a number of components that encourage cognitive, social, and physical elements. However, not all playspaces will include all of these elements as the classification (to be discussed in the following section) will offer differing play experiences and target different users. That is, playspaces can and should be designed for a number of ages to include:

- **Birth - 1yr:** This is the called the 'sensorimotor period' where children spend most of their playtime exploring and manipulating objects, for example sucking a toy.

- **15 -21 months:** Elaboration with objects. The child starts to play with and explore objects in greater detail for example rolling a ball or pulling a pull toy

- **2 years:** Pretend play (2yrs) towards self. Pretend play begins when children use a toy to represent a real object, such as using a toy spoon or a toy comb as they would a real spoon or comb. Typically the recipient of the pretend action is themselves or a toy, most often a doll or teddy.

- **2 – 4 years:** Substitute pretend play. This where children develop symbolic play - children begin to use objects in their play to stand for something altogether different, such as using a carrot and a stick as an imaginary violin and bow

- **5 - 6 years:** Socio-dramatic play develops and children start to use their imagination and creativity to act out stories and scripts with others. It can involve the use of props, costumes, and scenery, but this isn't a requirement. It is possible for sociodramatic play to make use of nothing but children's imagination.

- **7 +:** Games with rules is a level of play that imposes rules that must be followed by the players. It requires self-regulation by the children who play.

- **Teenagers (ages 13 +):** Areas for 'play' for teenagers needs to be carefully managed and monitored and in some instance's youth recreation requires a separate study to determine the broader needs of this group. While it is acknowledged young people will use open space for a number of uses including skateboarding, bike riding, unstructured sport or just 'hanging out' with friends etc., the location areas needs to be carefully managed to avoid potential conflicts of use with younger children and their carers while ensuring a sense of ownership by the young people.

- **Adults:** Adults should not be excluded from using playgrounds, and equipment needs to be designed and developed for use by this group, i.e. the provision of swing seats and rockers designed for use by adults is a way of encouraging adults to use park facilities with their children. Naturally, provision for adults at the exclusion of children is not the intention, but design standards now consider loadings and structural requirements to withstand use by adults.

- **Inclusivity:** Playspace provision must ensure there are equal opportunities for play, ensuring that all children can play together, and have the same play opportunities regardless of ability.

Facilities and provision need to consider multiple aspects of design including:

- Accessibility: parking, paths, surfaces, independent access to equipment

- Children and families feel safe and welcome: cultural inclusive signage, inclusive signage, height and text of signage, boundary fencing etc

- Different age and abilities have challenges in the playspace: range of slopes, climbing, different heights,

- Stimulate all the senses (vision, hearing, touch, taste, smell) and encourage movement: mud, plants, talk tubes, sand, water, athesitics, textures etc

- Facilities : seating, shade, toilets, water, phone charging, wifi

- Social play – large swing seats to play together, wheelchair access, provision so that adults can join in the play etc

4.3.4   Play in the 21st Century

Despite the critical place of play in children's lives, the decline in unstructured child initiated play, outdoor play and play based learning in schools is gaining momentum within the research literature and starting to feature within the media. The 21st century has seen dramatic shifts in political, economic and social structures. The rapid introduction of technology and the rise of the internet in children's lives are like no other time in history. This rapid rate of change within society has led to a transformation of childhood (Webb-Williams, 2019) with technology/social media/gaming seen by many as negatively impacting children's development and consuming our young children's lives.

Moreover, there are concerns about children's hurried and stressed lives including pressure for high academic achievement, high stakes testing (NAPLAN) and increased participation in after school competitive sports and extracurricular activities. Current concerns for the health, development and wellbeing of children and young people include:

- Rising mental health issues

- Rising obesity levels

- Reduced independence

- Increased dependency on technology

Moreover, research in Australia, UK and USA suggests that:

- Play has tended to be associated with only young children however more recently the value of play with older children, and throughout the life course into adulthood and old age, is being acknowledged.

- Many parents are unsure of how to play with their children

- Growing concern over the lack of play in children's lives, particularly outdoor play and access to green space.

- Debates in the field about the quantity or type of play that children should engage in.

- Perceptions of risk ('bubble wrap society') limiting children's independence & development

- Play advocacy groups and 'grass roots' momentum to counter the decline of play

4.3.5 Playspace Trends

Play and understanding its importance has come a long way in recent years with many local authorities now developing strategies that not only assess playspaces as assets that need to be managed, but also their relevance in design and the changing needs of a child as they grow and develop. To this end, the **traditional playspace equipment by way of slide, swings, and rockers whilst still important, are considered as only one component of the play spectrum**. Other design elements are therefore being introduced to encourage an array of learning and development opportunities including the use of the natural environment (nature play), creative landscaping, and additional features that promote a sense of belonging and place to a park.

Playspaces are also considered not only as areas for children, but also the **whole family and therefore now include aspects for adults and carers** such as barbeques, shade and shelter and end of trip facilities such as water, bike racks, paths and trails, carparks and in some instances fencing to offer a sense of security when located near to main roads, traffic, waterways or when dogs may be present in open space areas.

Play standards have also come a long way with equipment now designed and developed to **include and consider adult use and weight bearing to enable social interaction and play with and between children.** Additionally, the introduction of fitness equipment is also becoming increasingly popular and offers a unique element to many parks and playspaces. They are often standalone areas separate from children's playspaces.

From a planning perspective, the notion of playspaces being developed in areas where young families are prevalent is now an outdated planning method as the needs of a child (and demographics generally) will change in relatively short periods of time (2-3 years) whereas a playspace as an asset may last in excess of twenty years.
Modern trends in planning for playspaces are therefore now based on an **even distribution of facilities to ensure access for all including grandparents, people with disabilities and carers and families**. It also considers the playspace hierarchy as discussed earlier and design and distribution based on local through to regional each offering their own unique experiences.

Liability and risk is always a key factor in the provision of any service or facility that is available to the public, and whilst councils' have an obligation and duty of care, aspects such as **the promotion of nature play has caused some concern in recent years** due to the absence of standards for 'nature'. However, more innovative and proactive councils are working with their respective insurers to ensure a range of opportunities can be provided and children and their parents protected from perceived risks whilst still enjoying and benefiting from the experience of play in a natural setting.

4.4 The Value of Public Amenities

Public amenities contribute to creating a supportive environment for active living and hence, are important features in a city's liveability. Provision of well located, safe, clean and accessible public toilets can improve the ability of people to actively enjoy a city's parks and playgrounds and encourage participation in activities that enhance the economic, social and recreational value of parks.

Review of several Public Toilet Strategies adopted by local governments throughout Australia has revealed some key principles and common themes relating to public amenity provision:

- Key factors in providing a valuable public amenity network include:

  - Equitable distribution of toilets throughout the city

- Facilities that we well designed and incorporate Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) and Ecologically Sustainable Design (ESD) principles.

- Ensuring facilities are accessible and cater for the needs of all ages, abilities and cultures

- Consistently well maintained and clean facilities through clearly defined service levels.

- There are varying models around opening hours of public amenities and the impacts of opening hours should be considered in line with supporting objectives to increase park usage.

- Ageing infrastructure and ensuring compliance with Australia Standards is a key challenge for local governments in providing public amenities.

- Access to public toilets can contribute to the use, walkability and appeal of parks and can play a role in:

  - encouraging residents to walk or use active transport

  - encouraging families to spend more time using parks and playgrounds

  - encouraging greater and longer participation by the general community and particularly people with limited mobility or specific mobility needs

- Communities often have concerns or perceived concerns surrounding the safety of public amenities, which is a challenge Councils need to address through design, maintenance and management. Perception of safety can be influenced by:

  - visibility

  - lighting

  - cleanliness (including odour)

  - general maintenance and upkeep

  - aesthetics.

- There are often challenges for councils who seek to revise the network of public amenities with community resistance to removal of existing facilities. It can be difficult to communicate the benefits of a revised network. The cost to the community of maintaining a stranded asset needs to be balanced against equitable access to amenities.

5. Council's Existing Hierarchy and Service Standards

5.1 Parks/ Open Space Hierarchy

Parks and open spaces are generally categorised according to:
- Primary function or purpose
- Hierarchy of supply, which reflects the catchment that a park is expected to service.

Lake Macquarie's current hierarchy for parks includes:

- Local

- Neighbourhood

- Major/ accessible

- City Park/ catchment park

Council's existing provision standards are outlined in catchment Recreation and Land Plans and are summarised below relevant to parks and playgrounds.

Table 11: Existing Parks Hierarchy (Source: Recreation and Land Plan, Belmont Contributions Catchment 2015 – 2030)

Description	Size	Catchment	Population Threshold
PARK			
Local Park	0.5 to 1 ha	400m – 800m	1,400
Neighbourhood Park	1 to 5 ha	1km	5,000
Major Park	5 to 10 ha	5km	Up to 50,000
Catchment Park	10+ ha	10km	50,000 +
PLAYGROUND			
Local Playground	2 to 8 yrs	400m – 800m	1,500
Neighbourhood Playground	20 to 12 yrs	2km	5,000
Major Playground	2 to 15 yrs	5km	Up to 50,000
Catchment Playground	2 to adult	10km	50,000 +

5.2 Parks Service Standards

Council's existing service standards are shown at Table 12 below.

Table 12: Existing Service Standards for Parks (Source: Recreation and Land Plan, Belmont Contributions Catchment 2015 – 2030)

Function	Local	Neighbourhood	Major	Catchment
USABLE PARK AREA	0.5 ha to 1 ha	1 to 5 ha	5 to 10 ha	10 + ha
DISTANCE FROM RESIDENTS	400 to 800 m	Usually 2 km	Usually 5 km	Usually 10 km
STANDARD	Every 1,400 persons	Every 5,000 persons	Up to 50,000 persons	50,000 + persons

Function	Local	Neighbourhood	Major	Catchment
AREA SERVICED	One per suburb	Two or three suburbs	Several per catchment	Catchment (10-15 suburbs)
USAGE	Minimal	Moderate	High	Very High
GROUP USE	Individuals, carer with children	Small – medium sized groups	Large groups, functions	City festivals, civic events, circus
USES/ ACTIVITIES	Park with some facilities often a playground	Playground, picnic/BBQ, multi-court, skate, BMX, fete/markets	Playground, picnic/BBQ, skate, BMX, informal cricket/soccer, kite flying, fete/markets, weddings	Playground, picnic/BBQ, skate, BMX, informal cricket/soccer, kite flying, fete/markets/circus/wedding
TRAVEL TO PARK	Mostly walk	Walk or cycle	Walk, cycle or drive	Walk, cycle or drive
DURATION	Short (10-15 mins)	Up to 30 mins	Up to 1 hour	Up to several hours
ACCESS	Maybe accessible	Some parts accessible	Mostly all accessible	Extremely good accessibility
PARK FACILITIES	Very limited	Some	Moderate	Large number
QUALITY	Basic	Moderate	Good quality	High Quality
Public Toilet	No	Yes	Several	Large number to cater for large events
Seating	One park bench	Several park bench seats	Numerous park bench seats	Park bench seats throughout the park
BBQ	No	One	Several	Numerous, some covered
Rubbish Bin	No	One	Several	Numerous
Picnic Table	No	One	Several	Numerous
Covered Picnic Table	No	One covered picnic table	Several and a covered group area	Numerous and covered group areas
Shade Structure	No	Not usually	Yes	Yes
Pathways	Pathway to play equipment	Shared pathway to play equipment & beyond	Shared pathway to play and through park, may incl. separated pathways	Numerous shared and separated pathways linking activity nodes
Parking	On street	On street	Off street, perimeter parking	Off street, parking bays
Signage	Park sign	Park sign	Park & directional sign	Park, directional & interpretive sign
Other features	Not generally	Minimal	Yes	Sculptural art, fountains/water features
Landscaping	one or two large trees	Several large trees	Numerous significant trees with minor landscaped areas	Many significant trees in expansive grassed park area with landscaping
PLAYGROUND	Maybe	Yes	Yes	Yes
Age range	2 to 8 years	2 to 12 years	2 to 15 years	2 years to adult
Equipment	Slide, rocker, climbing equip	Large range of equipment	Several different areas of age related equipment, themed playground	Large scale, purpose built, many different play areas or special features i.e. themed, water play, nature play, adventure play

Function	Local	Neighbourhood	Major	Catchment
Bubbler / tap	One bubbler	At least one bubbler	Several bubblers	Numerous bubblers
Seating	One bench seat at playground	Two bench seats at playground	Numerous bench seats at playground	Bench seats throughout the playground
Fencing	Not unless required	Not unless required	Probably	Yes
OTHER FAC. bicycle circuit, outdoor gym, skate park, BMX track	No	Possibly	Generally more than one	Several