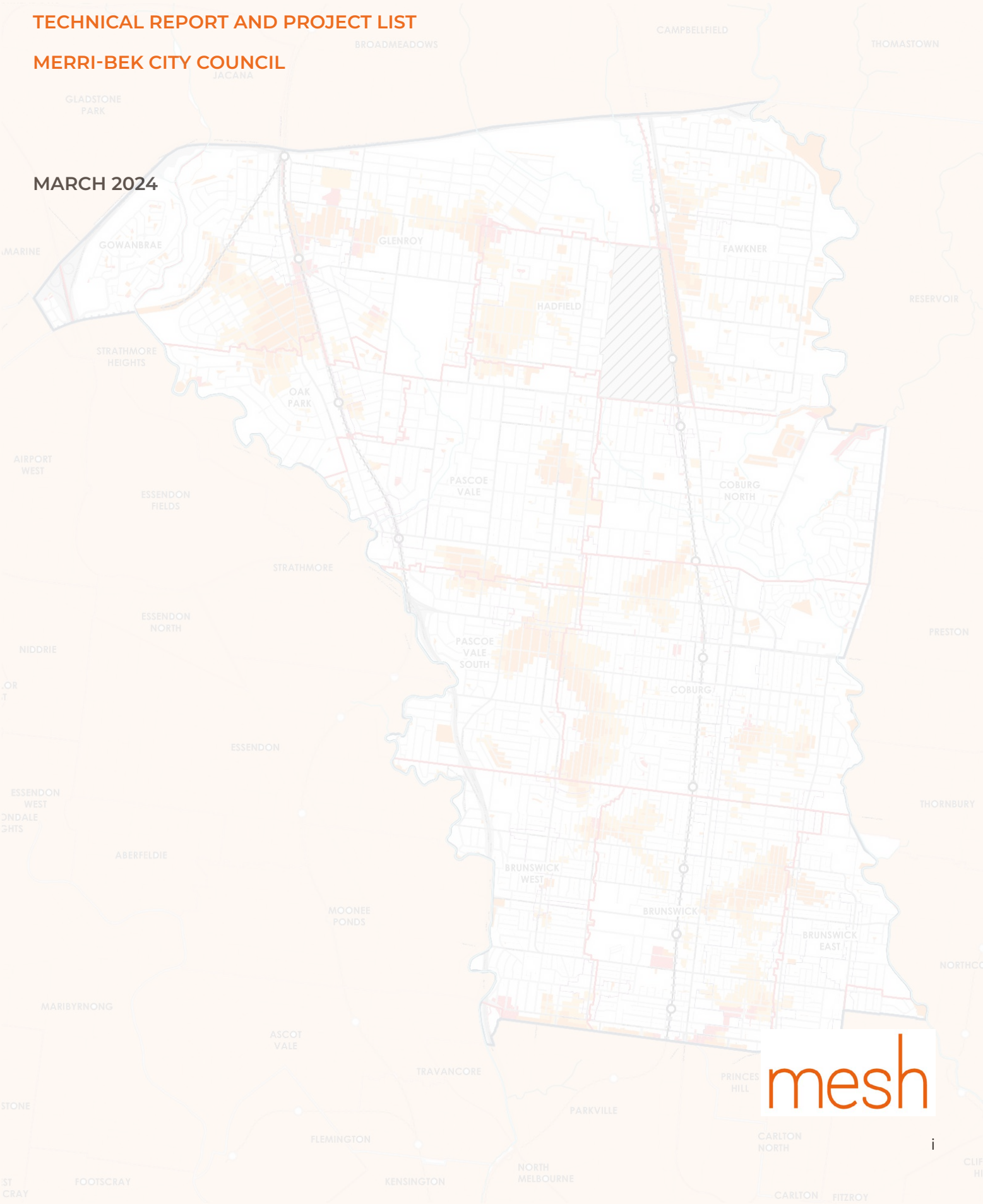
MERRI-BEK OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

TECHNICAL REPORT AND PROJECT LIST

MERRI-BEK CITY COUNCIL

MARCH 2024



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Technical Report and Project List

Merri-bek City Council

March 2024

Client	**Merri-bek City Council**
Project	**Merri-bek Open Space Strategy**
Version	Final (March 2024)
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Reviewed By	Will Priestley
Date	**March 2024**

Acknowledgement

Mesh acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we work, and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the traditional owners the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the land and waterways of the Kulin Nation. Council is committed to building a trusting, collaborative and supportive relationship with indigenous groups, and to respecting identified Aboriginal sacred sites and special places.

Council recognises that the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First People of the lands and waterways. City of Merri-bek is home to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from diverse family and community groups from across Australia, and therefore peoples of many moiety, kinship and language groups.

Council commits to addressing dispossession and dislocation of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from their traditional lands by establishing and maintaining into the future, respectful partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader community.

Council supports the right for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to enjoy their identity and culture, maintain and use their language, maintain their kinship ties and maintain their distinctive spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and waters.

2. ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document is the Open Space Strategy Technical Report and Project List for the Merri-bek City Council. This document provides important background and technical information that underpins and supports the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy. This document has been prepared by Mesh Planning on behalf of Merri-bek City Council.

CONTENTS

GLOSSARY 1

1. INTRODUCTION 5

1.1. WHAT IS OPEN SPACE TECHNICAL REPORT? 5

1.2. WHAT IS AN OPEN SPACE STRATEGY? 5

1.3. WHAT IS THE PROJECT SCOPE AND PURPOSE? 5

1.4. WHAT IS PUBLIC OPEN SPACE? 6

1.5. PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF MERRI-BEK 6

1.6. HOW DO YOU READ THIS DOCUMENT? 7

2. EXISTING OPEN SPACE NETWORK 9

2.1. HOW MERRI-BEK'S OPEN SPACE NETWORK WAS ESTABLISHED 9

2.2. ADJOINING OPEN SPACE 9

3. MERRI-BEK'S STRATEGIC CONTEXT 11

3.1. SUMMARY OF MERRI-BEK OPEN SPACE STRATEGY 2012-2022 11

3.2. KEY CHANGES AND EMERGING OPEN SPACE CHALLENGES SINCE MOSS 2012-2022 12

3.3. ACHIEVEMENTS OF MOSS 2012-2022 13

3.4. STRATEGIC POLICY CONTEXT 13

3.5. BENEFITS OF OPEN SPACE 23

4. COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY USE OF OPEN SPACE 26

4.1. OVERVIEW 26

4.2. SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION 26

4.3. COMMUNITY PREFERENCES AND USAGE OF OPEN SPACE FINDINGS 27

4.4. CONSULTATION CONCLUSIONS 29

5. FORECAST CHANGE AND OPEN SPACE NEEDS 30

5.1. FORECAST RESIDENTIAL GROWTH 30

5.2. FORECAST EMPLOYMENT GROWTH 36

5.3. SUMMARY 38

6. OPEN SPACE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK 39

6.1. OVERVIEW OF FRAMEWORK 39

6.2. CLASSIFICATION STRUCTURE 42

6.3. OPEN SPACE CHARACTERISTICS 52

6.4. OBJECTIVES 55

6.5. ASSESSMENT OF OPEN SPACE PROJECTS AGAINST OPEN SPACE OBJECTIVES 75

6.6. OPEN SPACE DESIGN GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS 78

6.7. GAPS ANALYSIS 88

7. GAPS ANALYSIS 90

7.1. ANALYSIS 1 - BASELINE SERVICE GAPS ANALYSIS 90

7.2. ANALYSIS 2 - CATCHMENT GAPS ANALYSIS 94

7.3. ANALYSIS 3 - SPECIFIC FUNCTION GAPS ANALYSIS 103

8. SUBURB ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENATION 111

8.1. BRUNSCWICK EAST 111

8.2. BRUNSWICK WEST 128

8.3. BRUNSWICK 144

8.4. COBURG 161

8.5. COBURG NORTH 178

8.6. OAK PARK 194

8.7. GLENROY 210

8.8. HADFIELD 227

8.9. FAWKNER 241

8.10. PASCOE VALE 257

8.11. PASCOE VALE SOUTH 273

8.12. GOWANBRAE 289

9. OPEN SPACE FRAMEWORK 304

9.1. INTRODUCTION 304

9.2. PRINCIPLES 304

9.3. SETTING A PUBLIC OPEN SPACE CONTRIBUTIONS PERCENTAGE 304

9.4. DELIVERING A PUBLIC OPEN SPACE PROJECT 304

9.5. PROJECTS LIST AND TIMING 304

10. IMPLEMENTATION 305

10.1. RESPONSIBILITIES 305

10.2. PRIORITISATION AND TIMING 305

10.3. MONITORING 306

11. REFERENCE LIST 307

FIGURES

Figure 1.Merri-bek principal existing and proposed open space in 1954 (Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme 1954 Report) 10

Figure 2.Aerial of Merri-bek Municipality in 1989 with the current open space locations overlaid 10

Figure 3.Open space definition 10

Figure 4.Open Space in Merri Bek 10

Figure 5.Merri-bek Open Space Strategy 11

Figure 6.Strategic Framework Plan: Open Space (Clause 02.04) 14

Figure 7. How people use open space in Merribek 28

Figure 8.Existing and Forecast Residential Population (2021-2041) 32

Figure 9.Merri-bek Housing Framework Plan (Clause 02.04) 35

Figure 10.: Existing and Forecast Worker Population (2021-2041) 37

Figure 11.Open Space Framework Diagram 39

Figure 12.Classification Structure 40

Figure 13.Open Space Definition 43

Figure 14.Municipal Hierarchy Catchment 46

Figure 15.Regional Park Catchment 47

Figure 16.District Park Catchment 47

Figure 17.Local Park Catchment 47

Figure 18.Neighbourhood Park Catchment 47

Figure 19.Pocket Park Catchment 48

Figure 20.Sumner Park 54

Figure 21.Gilpin Reserve 54

Figure 22.Victoria Street Mall 54

Figure 23.Merri Cree Linear Reserve 54

Figure 24.ATC Cook Reserve 54

Figure 25.Coburg Tennis Club 54

Figure 26.Municipal Office Forecourt 54

Figure 27.Bababi Djinanang Grasslands 54

Figure 28.CERES 54

Figure 29.Baseline Service Gap Analysis 56

Figure 30.Hierarchy Catchment Gap Analysis 59

Figure 31.Actual and Projected Tree Canopy Cover under the implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy (Merri-bek Urban Forest Strategy 2017, page 5) 62

Figure 32.Park with Play Space Function 67

Figure 33.Park with Formal Sport Function 67

Figure 34.Park with Dog Park Function 67

Figure 35.Creek Corridor Protection 71

Figure 36.Shared User Path Improvements 73

Figure 37.District Restricted Open Space 74

Figure 38.Baseline Service Catchment 91

Figure 39.Baseline Catchment Gaps Analysis 92

Figure 40.Adjoining Open Space 93

Figure 41.Hierarchy Catchment 95

Figure 42.Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 96

Figure 43.Combined Catchment Gaps Analysis 97

Figure 44.Play Space Catchment 104

Figure 45.Dog Park Catchment 106

Figure 46.Creek Corridor Catchment 108

Figure 47.Formal Sport Catchment 110

Figure 48.Brunswick East Existing Network 112

Figure 49.Brunswick East Baseline Service Gaps Analysis 115

Figure 50.Brunswick East Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 116

Figure 51.Brunswick East Function Gaps Analysis (Dog Park) 118

Figure 52. Brunswick East Function Gaps Analysis (Play Space) 119

Figure 53.Brunswick East Function Gaps Analysis (Creek Corridor) 120

Figure 54. Brunswick East Function Gaps Analysis (Formal Sports) 121

Figure 55.Brunswick East Open Space Key Recommendation 126

Figure 56.Brunswick West Existing Network 129

Figure 57.Brunswick West Baseline Service Gaps Analysis 132

Figure 58.Brunswick West Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 133

Figure 59.Brunswick West Function Gaps Analysis (Dog Park) 135

Figure 60. Brunswick West Function Gaps Analysis (Play Space) 136

Figure 61.Brunswick West Function Gaps Analysis (Creek Corridor) 137

Figure 62. Brunswick West Function Gaps Analysis (Formal Sports) 138

Figure 63.Brunscwick West Open Space Key Recommendation 142

Figure 64.Brunswick Existing Network 145

Figure 65.Brunswick Baseline Service Gaps Analysis 148

Figure 66.Brunswick Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 149

Figure 67.Brunswick Function Gaps Analysis (Dog Park) 150

Figure 68.Brunswick Function Gaps Analysis (Play Space 151

Figure 69. Brunswick Function Gaps Analysis (Formal Sports) 152

Figure 70.Brunswick Open Space Key Recommendation 158

Figure 71.Coburg Existing Network 162

Figure 72.Coburg Baseline Service Gaps Analysis 165

Figure 73.Coburg Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 166

Figure 74.Coburg Function Gaps Analysis (Play Space) 167

Figure 75.Coburg Function Gaps Analysis (Dog Park) 168

Figure 76.Coburg Function Gaps Analysis (Creek Corridor) 169

Figure 77.Coburg Function Gaps Analysis (Formal Sports) 170

Figure 78.Coburg Open Space Key Recommendation 175

Figure 79.Coburg North Existing Network 179

Figure 80.Coburg North Baseline Service Gaps Analysis 182

Figure 81.Coburg North Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 183

Figure 82.Coburg North Function Gaps Analysis(Play Space) 184

Figure 83.Coburg North Function Gaps Analysis (Dog Park) 185

Figure 84.Coburg North Function Gaps Analysis (Creek Corridor) 186

Figure 85.Coburg North Function Gaps Analysis (Formal Sports) 187

Figure 86.Coburg North Open Space Key Recommendation 192

Figure 87.Oak Park Existing Network 195

Figure 88.Oak Park Baseline Service Gaps Analysis 198

Figure 89.Oak Park Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 199

Figure 90.Oak Park Function Gaps Analysis (Play Space) 200

Figure 91. Oak Park Function Gaps Analysis (Dog Park) 201

Figure 92. Oak Park Function Gaps Analysis (Creek Corridor) 202

Figure 93.Oak Park Function Gaps Analysis (Formal Sports) 203

Figure 94.Oak Park Open Space Key Recommendations 208

Figure 95.Glenroy Existing Network 211

Figure 96.Glenroy Baseline Service Gaps Analysis 214

Figure 97.Glenroy Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 215

Figure 98.Glenroy Function Gaps Analysis (Play Space) 216

Figure 99.Glenroy Function Gaps Analysis (Dog Park) 217

Figure 100. Glenroy Function Gaps Analysis (Creek Corridor) 218

Figure 101.Glenroy Function Gaps Analysis (Formal Sports) 219

Figure 102.Glenroy Open Space Key Recommendations 224

Figure 103.Hadfield Existing Network 228

Figure 104.Hadfield Baseline Service Gaps Analysis 230

Figure 105.Hadfield Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 231

Figure 106.Hadfield Function Gaps Analysis (Play Space) 232

Figure 107. Hadfield Function Gaps Analysis (Dog Park) 233

Figure 108. Hadfield Function Gaps Analysis (Formal Sports) 234

Figure 109.Hadfield Open Space Key Recommendations 239

Figure 110. Fawkner Existing Network 242

Figure 111.Fawkner Baseline Service Gaps Analysis 245

Figure 112.Fawkner Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 246

Figure 113.Fawkner Function Gaps Analysis (Play Space) 247

Figure 114.Fawkner Function Gaps Analysis (Dog Park) 248

Figure 115.Fawkner Function Gaps Analysis (Creek Corridor) 249

Figure 116.Fawkner Function Gaps Analysis (Formal Sports) 250

Figure 117.Fawkner Open Space Key Recommendation 255

Figure 118.Pascoe Vale Existing Network 258

Figure 119.Pascoe Vale Baseline Service Gaps Analysis 261

Figure 120.Pascoe Vale Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 262

Figure 121.Pascoe Vale Function Gaps Analysis (Play Space) 263

Figure 122.Pascoe Vale Function Gaps Analysis (Dog Park) 264

Figure 123.Pascoe Vale Function Gaps Analysis (Creek Corridor) 265

Figure 124.Pascoe Vale Function Gaps Analysis (Formal Sports) 266

Figure 125.Pascoe Vale Open Space Key Recommendations 271

Figure 126.Pascoe Vale South Existing Network 274

Figure 127.Pascoe Vale South Baseline Service Gaps Analysis 277

Figure 128. Pascoe Vale South Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 278

Figure 129. Pascoe Vale South Function Gaps Analysis (Play Space) 279

Figure 130.Pascoe Vale South Function Gaps Analysis (Dog Park) 280

Figure 131.Pascoe Vale South Function Gaps Analysis (Creek Corridor) 281

Figure 132.Pascoe Vale South Function Gaps Analysis (Formal Sports) 282

Figure 133.Pascoe Vale South Open Space Key Recommendations 287

Figure 134.Gowanbrae Existing Network 290

Figure 135.Gowanbrae Baseline Service Gaps Analysis 292

Figure 136. Gowanbrae Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis 293

Figure 137.Gowanbrae Function Gaps Analysis (Play Space) 294

Figure 138.Gowanbrae Function Gaps Analysis (Dog Park) 295

Figure 139.Gowanbrae Function Gaps Analysis (Creek Corridor) 296

Figure 140.Gowanbrae Function Gaps Analysis (Formal Sports) 297

Figure 141.Gowanbrae Open Space Key Recommendations 302

TABLES

Table 1.Glossary 1

Table 2.Amount of contribution for public open space 17

Table 3.Open space Strategy Engagement phases 26

Table 4.Forecast Residential Population Change 2021-2041 by Suburb 31

Table 5.Forecast Private Dwelling Change 2021-2041 33

Table 6.Projected Dwelling Type by Suburb 2021 - 2041 34

Table 7.Forecast Employment Population Change 2021-2041 by Suburb 36

Table 8.Summary of Residential and worker population Change 38

Table 9. List of Open Space Definition 42

Table 10.List of Open Space Hierarchy 45

Table 11.List of Open Space Functions 50

Table 12.List of Open Space Elements 51

Table 13.List of Open Space Forms 52

Table 14.List Of Open Space Landscape Settings 53

Table 15.Open Space Hierarchy Summary 57

Table 16.Excerpt from Appendix 4 of Metropolitan Open space Network (VPA 2017) 58

Table 17.Park tree plantings per suburb required annually to meet the projections and strategy goal of the Urban Forest Strategy. 63

Table 18.Function Key Considerations 69

Table 19.Assessmet Matrix 76

Table 20.Objectives and Key Strategy Directions Alignment 77

Table 21.Open space Element Guidelines 80

Table 22.Function Design Guidelines and Standards 84

Table 23.Other Design Guidelines and Standards 87

GLOSSARY

TERM	DEFINITION
Active Open Space	Land set aside for the specific purpose of formal outdoor sports by the community
Activity Centre	An urban location that provides a mix of land uses and supports activities that includes commercial, retail, community facilities and civic uses within walkable distances of local residents and workers and accessible by public transport. Major Activity Centres (MAC) and Neighbourhood Activity Centres (NAC) are types of Activity Centre.
Amenity value	Amenity Value recognises a tree as a financial asset and derives a value based upon the City of Melbourne's Amenity Tree Valuation method. The valuation derives the real value of trees and recognises the amount of time and resources needed to get them to maturity in our harsh urban landscape. A value is calculated which emphasises the real value of trees and the loss of amenity for the community if the tree is removed.
Biodiversity	The variety of all life forms on earth. The different plants, animals micro-organisms and the ecosystems of which they are part. Biodiversity describes all living plants and animals and the areas that support them.
Canopy cover	Canopy cover is often used as a proxy for measuring the contribution of trees to urban greening. In this report, canopy cover measures the physical coverage (breadth, height and density of canopy) of street tree canopy over land.
Council Plan	Outlines Council directions, strategies and actions for a four year period
CPTED	Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a crime prevention strategy that focuses on reducing the incidence and fear of crime in planning and design of urban areas.
Cultural heritage	Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations, Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects. Places may have a range of values for difference individuals or groups. Source: Definition from The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural significance, 1999 edition.
Catchment	Refers to an identified area in proximity to an open space that is considered to be within a convenient walking distance to that open space for convenient utilisation, based upon a number of factors, including distance, travel time, scale, geographic boundaries and population within the catchment
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse refers to people from a range of countries and ethnic and cultural groups. It includes people of non–English speaking background as well as people born outside Australia but whose first language is English, and encompasses a wide range of experiences and needs
Commercial Zone (C1Z, C2Z)	As defined in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.
Designated off-leash area	A park, reserve or place where Council has made an order to change the space to an off-leash area for dogs. For more information go to Section 26(2) of the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

Table 1. Glossary

TERM	DEFINITION
Active Open Space	Land set aside for the specific purpose of formal outdoor sports by the community
Encumbered open space	Land that is constrained for development purposes. Includes easements for power/transmission lines, sewers, gas, waterways/drainage; retarding basins/wetlands; landfill; conservation and heritage areas. This land may be used for a range of activities (e.g. walking trails, sports fields). This is not provided as a credit against public open space requirements. However, regard is taken to the availability of encumbered land when determining the open space requirement.
Gap Analysis	Analysis that reveals opportunities to increase and improve the provision of open space by providing additional open space, or by improving the function of existing open spaces. Types of gaps analysis in this document include: **Baseline Gaps Analysis** – analyses what Merri-bek City Council seeks to achieve as the 'bare minimum' level of access to open space across the municipality. Areas within activity centres are considered to have a baseline level of service if they are within 300m of open space. Areas outside an activity centre are considered to have a baseline level of service if they are within 500m from an open space. **Hierarchy Gaps Analysis** – analyses differing catchment sizes dependent on the open space's identified hierarchy. Smaller parks are not intended to service a wide catchment and are designed for local needs. Larger parks which have the capacity to support more functions support larger catchments. Consequently, a range of catchment sizes has been applied from 200m applying to Pocket scale spaces up to 500m for District and Regional scale spaces. **Function Gaps Analysis** - analyses the distribution of specific uses across the existing open space network. It shows 500m catchments applied to a range of differing uses to gain an understanding of the areas within the municipality that are within safe, convenient and easy walking distance to these uses.
General Residential Zone (GRZ)	As defined in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.
Housing Density	The number of dwellings divided by the area of residential land they occupy, expressed as dwellings per hectare. **High Density** - Housing with a density of greater than 75 dwellings per hectare. This level of density is usually associated with apartments. **Medium Density** - Housing with a density of 25 to 75 dwellings per hectare. This level of density is usually associated with units, townhouses, and semi-detached dwellings. **Low Density** - Housing with a density of less than 25 dwellings per hectare. This level of density is usually associated with detached houses. Also referred to as Separate.
Industrial Zone (INZ1, INZ2)	As defined in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.
Landscape Character	A broad assessment of the predominant landscape setting of an open space area, differentiating bushland and creek spaces from treed parklands, lawns, or sporting surfaces.
Liveability	An assessment of what a place is like to live in, considering environmental quality, education and health provision, access to shops and services, crime and safety, recreational facilities and cultural activities.
LOE	Language other than English.

TERM	DEFINITION
Active Open Space	Land set aside for the specific purpose of formal outdoor sports by the community
Lot	A part (consisting of one or more pieces) of any land (except a road, a reserve, or common property) shown on a plan, which can be disposed of separately and includes a unit or accessory unit on a registered plan of strata subdivision and a lot or accessory lot on a registered cluster plan.
MAC	Major Activity Centre
Municipality	The official boundary of suburbs and lands administered by Merri-bek City Council as the Responsible Authority.
MSS	Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) sets out the council's strategic planning objectives and underpins the land-use and development provisions of the Moreland Planning Scheme.
NAC	Neighbourhood Activity Centre. Provides a mix of uses to serve the daily and weekly shopping and service needs of the local community. Accommodates an increase in density and scale of built form appropriate to their role in the Activity Centre Hierarchy but at a lesser intensity and scale to the larger centres of Coburg, Brunswick and Glenroy.
Native vegetation	Plants that are indigenous to Australia, including trees, shrubs, herbs, and grasses.
Nature Play	A type of play space focusing on playing in nature. These are designed predominantly using natural features, such as trees, shrubs, grass, rocks, etc, to facilitate play.
Nature strip	Nature strips are the area of public land between the paved footpath (or the private property boundary where there is no footpath) and the road kerb and gutter. Nature strips provide safe public walkways and contribute significantly to the character of our neighbourhoods and streetscapes.
NRM	Natural Resource Management (NRM) is the integrated management of the natural resources that make up Australia's natural landscapes, such as land, water, soil, plants and animals.
Neighbourhood Residential Zone (NRZ)	As defined in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.
Park Tree	A tree planted or located within Council's open space network of parks and reserves.
Passive Open Space	Open space that is set aside for parks, gardens, linear corridors, conservation bushlands, nature reserves, public squares and community gardens that are made available for passive recreation, play and unstructured physical activity including walking, cycling, hiking, revitalisation, contemplation and enjoying nature.
Principal Public Transport Network	A high-quality public transport network that connects Principal and Major Town Centres, and comprises the existing radial fixed-rail network, extensions to this radial network and new cross-town bus routes.
Public Land	Refers to the following land-use classes: Public Park, Education, Health and Community, Transport, Cemetery, Crematorium, Local Government, Conservation Zone, and other public use or service area.
Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ)	As defined in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.
Public Use Zone (PUZ)	As defined in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.
Passive irrigation	Describes the integration of water cycle management into urban planning and design, such as at grade tree cut outs or raingardens.

TERM	DEFINITION
Active Open Space	Land set aside for the specific purpose of formal outdoor sports by the community
Remnant Vegetation	A plant or plants of any taxa and their progeny as part of the floristics of the recognised endemic ecological community remaining in a given location after alteration of the site or fragmentation by activities on that land or on adjacent land.
Resilience	Refers to the capacity of an environment to deal with major changes, such as human or natural disturbance, and continue to develop.
Residential Growth Zone (RGZ)	As defined in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.
Respondent	Those who completed in the survey.
Transport Zone (TRZ)	As defined in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.
Urban Heat Island Effect	When urban areas are warmer than surrounding rural areas due to heat retention in hard surfaces such as buildings and roads. This build-up of heat is re-radiated at night time, increasing air temperatures which can have serious human health consequences particularly during heatwaves. The most cost effective and efficient mitigation tool is increasing tree canopy cover.
WSUD	Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) is the integration of the water cycle into urban planning and design by recognising all water streams in the urban environment as a potential resource e.g. rainwater, stormwater, grey water and blackwater. WSUD is often used to describe the infrastructure built to capture and reuse stormwater.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. WHAT IS OPEN SPACE TECHNICAL REPORT?

The role of the Open Space Technical Report is to inform and guide the development of the broader Open Space Strategy.

The Technical Report does this through doing the following:

+ Providing important background information and analysis on the quantity, quality and distribution of the existing open space network,
+ Outlining future anticipated population growth and distribution to frame anticipated future open space needs,
+ Outlining anticipated settlement patterns to understand and consider the implications of higher density development on open space provision
+ Establishing a clear methodology to categorise open spaces and set of open space objectives to guide the assessment of future open space projects
+ Undertake a gaps analysis to identify areas of open space need
+ Identify a recommended open space projects list that will be incorporated into the Open Space Strategy.

1.2. WHAT IS AN OPEN SPACE STRATEGY?

An Open Space Strategy provides the overarching framework and strategic direction for open space planning within an area over a specified period of time. For Merri-bek City Council, the Open Space Strategy provides guidance on all open space assets within the municipality. It outlines the key goals and objectives that the municipality seeks to achieve through its ongoing delivery and upkeep of open spaces, generally seeking to ensure that all residents and workers have convenient access to a diverse range of high quality open space opportunities.

An Open Space Strategy is an essential policy document for a municipality, allowing it to make coordinated and effective decisions on the management and improvement of the open space network. The Strategy informs important decisions around how funding for open space projects is directed, what that funding is spent on, where open space projects are located and how individual open space projects contribute to the larger objectives of the Strategy.

The Technical Report is an important reference document to the Strategy, providing the analysis and methodology through which the existing and future open space needs for the municipality have been assessed and identified. The Technical Report informs the priorities and goals of the Open Space Strategy and provides the detail on how open space projects have been assessed against their capacity to fulfil the Strategy.

The Strategy ensures that not only are individual open spaces operating as intended and delivering valuable open space to residents and workers within Merri-bek, but that they also align with the bigger picture of delivering a well connected functioning open space network contributing to the broader network of open spaces throughout the municipality, providing a diversity of open space experiences and opportunities

1.3. WHAT IS THE PROJECT SCOPE AND PURPOSE?

Merri-bek City Council (Council) is delivering a new Open Space Strategy (the Strategy) for the municipality to guide the future vision of the municipality's open space network for the next 20 years. The previous Strategy reached the end of its 2012-2022 timeframe and there is a need to renew and revisit Council's open space ambitions and goals for the future, ensuring they align with community expectations and deliver equitable and appropriate open space provision across the municipality.

Since the creation of the last Open Space Strategy, Merri-bek has also seen unprecedented change and intensification of population and built form. This has placed increased pressure on the performance of the existing open space network and the need for additional and new types of open space to be provided in the municipality to meet the increasing and diversifying needs of residents and workers.

The new Strategy will be the overarching, long-term strategic document governing open space in Merri-bek. It will set the vision and direction to guide future provision, planning, design, and management of open space in Merri-bek. The Technical Report forms the underpinning analysis and assessment of existing and future open space needs that supports the Strategy. The purpose of this Technical Report is to:

+ Develop a robust process to identify, assess and prioritise realisable improvements to the open space network to meet future community requirements.
+ Review of the use and suitability of existing open space reserves and other public land opportunities to upgrade or better utilise the existing open space network.

- Undertake an open space gaps analysis to identify existing and future gaps in open space provision
- Provide recommendations for the future design and provision of open space in the suburbs and areas within Merri-bek,
- Recommendation of criteria to guide the future design of open spaces to ensure quality outcomes.
- Identify a Projects List of public open space infrastructure and land acquisition projects to subsequently inform an updated Public Open Space Contribution Rate (to be undertaken by others)
- Provide a set of prioritised actions for open space within the municipal context.
- Provide a strategic basis for an open space contributions framework that delivers additional high quality open space for the forecast future population.

1.4. WHAT IS PUBLIC OPEN SPACE?

On a simple level, public open space can be described as public land utilised for the purpose of public enjoyment, and protection of unique, environmental, social and cultural values for existing and future generation to enjoy. Typically, this takes the form of parks, plazas, nature reserves, sporting fields and a whole myriad of open space typologies that encourage one or more outdoor recreational activities to take place.

Public open space encompasses spaces that were set aside specifically for these activities as well as open spaces that may have other critical functions (such as the role of existing waterways in the urban stormwater system) but have nonetheless become and been developed as important public recreational spaces.

Public open space also includes spaces with varying levels of accessibility. Public open space includes public parks which are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It also includes sporting fields or sporting clubs that restrict access to a public open space during certain times or through the requirements of membership.

This Technical Report establishes several definitions to better describe these varying permutations of public open space. These are public open space to denote unrestricted public open space and restricted open space to denote public open space that is restricted in function or in accessibility in some way. See 'Definitions' under Section 7.2 for further information.

1.5. PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF MERRI-BEK

The following is a brief summary of the key open space challenges and opportunities that Merri-bek is expected to need to address over the coming 20 years. These include:

Unprecedented population growth to date

The previous Open Space Strategy did not anticipate the pace of population growth in Merri-bek over the time period. As a consequence, investment in open space is not keeping up with the growth of new users, resulting in increased pressure on existing open space.

Substantial ongoing population growth into the future

Merri-bek is anticipated to continue to experience strong growth in residents and workers. The Open Space Strategy will need to ensure that the municipality is supporting new residents and workers with an open space network that provides convenient and easy access to open space at a quantum of scale appropriate to the urban density.

Changing settlement patterns and increased urban densities

Merri-bek is changing and that change is not uniform. In some areas, higher density development and apartment living is rapidly shifting the housing stock in suburbs. Future open space projects need to ensure that open spaces are provided where people are anticipated to live.

Changing patterns of community use

With a change in ways of living, comes a change in the way the community seeks to utilise open space. We are seeing increased demand for dog parks in some areas, multifunctional and diverse open space experiences, an increase in pocket or smaller scale spaces in higher density urban environments among other shifts.

Ongoing climate emergency and need for open space resiliency

The role of Merri-bek's open spaces in contributing to livability and resiliency in a climate impacted world is becoming increasingly crucial. With a clear ambition to expand the municipality's canopy cover through the Urban Forest Strategy, open spaces will have a critical role to play.

Maintaining and strengthening the health and ecology of Merri-bek's creek corridors

Our creek corridors such as Merri Creek and Moonee

Ponds Creek are unique and invaluable landscape assets that Merri-bek is privileged to enjoy. The ecological health of important ecological systems such as the Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek will continue to be protected as urban densification places increasing pressures on urban stormwater management and creek health. These creek corridors are supported by other tributary waterways including Edgars, Westbreen and Merlynston Creek.

Improving access to major open space assets in Merri-bek's existing network

As increasing population places additional pressure on existing open spaces, improving accessibility to the existing network, particularly to major open spaces such as the Brunswick Parklands and the Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek precincts will be critical. Through improved accessibility to these spaces, whether by upgrades to existing path networks or completing 'missing links', the existing network will be better leveraged to service a wider catchment of users, easing pressure on overserviced open spaces elsewhere in the municipality.

Ongoing commitment to eliminating open space gaps across the municipality

While Merri-bek is blessed with a unique and significant open space network the distribution of this network is not uniform. Areas exist in the municipality where access to open space is poor. The Parks Close to Home programme has helped identify these locations and prioritise new open spaces to ensure as many residents and workers within Merri-bek have access to some form of open space. Gaps still exist and will need to be addressed as Merri-bek grows.

Costs of providing new open spaces in and close to activity centres

As Merri-bek grows, the areas experiencing the greatest growth are often the areas where land values are highest due to demand. As population grows, these areas are also the areas where the existing open space network comes under the greatest pressure and where open spaces need to be adapted/upgraded to support a rapidly shifting user needs and settlement pattern. The demand for growth in these areas also fuels costs associated with securing land in these locations. It is likely that new parks in these locations will be smaller as land value costs make large scale acquisition difficult. Ensuring quality open space outcomes are delivered in these locations becomes a high priority to ensure that these spaces 'punch above their weight' in providing rich, diverse open space amenity in their higher density context.

Adequately funding a Projects List that will deliver an open space network that is 'fit for purpose'

The Open Space Strategy and Technical Report will outline a Project List of recommended projects to support the open space vision for the future of Merri-bek. This will need to be supported by a funding framework that identifies appropriate contributions from all stakeholders. This will necessitate review of the existing open space contribution rate to ensure the funding contribution from private development is proportional and appropriate. This analysis will be undertaken by others.

1.6. HOW DO YOU READ THIS DOCUMENT?

Section 1 – Introduction relates to this Section outlining the purpose, goals and structure of this document and the Open Space Strategy.

Section 2 – Existing Open Space Network, provides an overview of the existing open space network, its character and key assets. It positions this within the broader story of the growth of Merri-bek, identifying how the armature of the existing open space network came into being and what has led up to its current composition, to give a full picture of where the open space network has come from and where it is headed in the context of future growth set out in Section 5.

Section 3 – Merri-bek's Strategic Context reviews the past Open Space Strategy and assesses key challenges that have arisen since its development that can inform the development of the current Open Space Strategy. It includes review of the relevant planning policy and suite of strategic policy documents that have guided Merri-bek to date and will influence the development of the Strategy. This Section also provides an literature review of the current understanding of open space benefits, best practice approaches and learnings from other open space strategies.

Section 4 – Community Consultation and Community Use of Open Space provides a high level summary of the key outcomes of community engagement on the development Open Space Strategy, this includes shifts in open space needs, community preferences and a summary of the extent of open space consultation undertaken.

Section 5 – Forecast Change and Open Space Needs outlines the expected changes in resident and worker population within Merri-bek over the time period of the Strategy. It provides a breakdown of anticipated changes by suburb and includes high level understanding of how this will impact settlement pattern and type.

Section 6 – Open Space Strategy Framework outlines the methodology that the Technical Report uses to classify, assess existing open spaces and then identify future open

space projects. It introduces the Open Space Objectives, which form the key assessment criteria for the evaluation of projects to be included in the Projects List as well as the three levels of gaps analysis that are used to spatially analyse the existing open space network.

Section 7 – Gaps Analysis introduces gaps analysis mapping at the municipality scale to provide a broad overview of the scale, distribution and functions of the existing open space network. This Section provides high level observations against differing levels of accessibility from a baseline service access to an open space of any size, to a catchment based analysis defined by the scale of each open space, and gaps analysis relating to accessibility to specific functions (such as play spaces or dog parks).

Section 8 – Suburb Analysis and Recommendations – Provides a more detailed analysis of each suburb including gaps analysis, forecast population growth and settlement pattern. A list of recommended open space projects is then provided for each suburb which is subsequently included in the overall Projects List.

2. EXISTING OPEN SPACE NETWORK

This section briefly outlines how the Merri-bek open space network has evolved over time.

2.1. HOW MERRI-BEK'S OPEN SPACE NETWORK WAS ESTABLISHED

The City of Merri-bek comprises relatively flat land bounded by the Moonee Ponds and Merri Creeks. Prior to arrival of Europeans in the late 1830s this land was traversed and modified by the Traditional Owners known as the Wurundjeri-willam, a clan of the Woi-wurrung people.

Allotments for small farms were first sold in 1839 and 1840 and whilst some owners resided on the land many were speculators who subdivided their lots and sold off smaller blocks for more intensive farming and residential use. Many people lived around the early quarrying and brickmaking industries and the southern part of the municipality grew denser with both industry and residential housing.

In the early 1900's, various resident associations began to campaign for open space as the areas of Brunswick and Coburg were deficient in parkland. As a result, in the early twentieth century several significant land purchases were made to establish several significant open spaces which remain today. These include the reserve along Merri-Creek near Coburg Lake, large open space along Bell Street which became the site for Coburg High School, Brunswick Park and Oval on Victoria Street, and Warr Park on de Carle Street.

In addition to these purchases several quarry holes were converted to open space, these include Fleming, Methven and Temple Parks and Gilpin Park in Albert Street occupies a large former clay pit. Figure 1 illustrates the open space network as of 1954, the lighter green area shows the existing open space and the darker green area identifies the proposed expansion of the open space network which is concentrated along the Moonee Ponds and Merri Creeks and the creation of Gilpin Park.

Following the preparation of the Metropolitan Melbourne Planning Scheme 1954 Report, the Merri-bek open space network has been expanded along the Moonee Ponds and Merri Creeks and in the northern suburbs as these have developed which is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 is an aerial photo of the municipality of Merri-bek in 1989, the current 2023 open space shapes have been overlayed onto this plan to illustrate how the open space network has been expanded in the last three decades. A comparison between Figure 2 and Figure 3 which shows the current present day open space network illustrates that since 1989 the open space along the northern reaches of the Moonee Ponds Creek has been expanded as Gowanbrae and Glenroy has been developed for urban purposes, additional open spaces have been provided associated with the construction of the metropolitan ring road, and smaller localised parks have been provided within the southern suburbs as sites have been redeveloped.

2.2. ADJOINING OPEN SPACE

It is important to recognise that an inner city municipality does not sit in isolation. Merri-bek is bordered by the City of Darebin, City of Melbourne, Moonee Valley City Council and Hume City Council and due to topographical features it shares open space assets such as Moonee Ponds and Merri Creeks which form the boundary between Merri-bek, Moonee Valley and Darebin and often include a range of open spaces within the creek corridor along their length.

Some of these open spaces are small linear corridors while others, such as Merri Park offer regional sized landscapes immediately adjacent to Merri-bek on the far side of the creek.

Royal Park and Princes Park are one of Melbourne's most significant formal parklands and are located on the municipality's southern boundary providing an unparalleled open space resource to residents in Brunswick.

While these spaces undeniably provide open space amenity they do sit outside the municipality and outside the jurisdiction of Merri-bek City Council. Consequently, there is no control over their maintenance, design and long term retention for public recreation. Consequently, municipal and gaps analysis have had regard to adjoining open spaces in other municipalities while acknowledging these constraints.

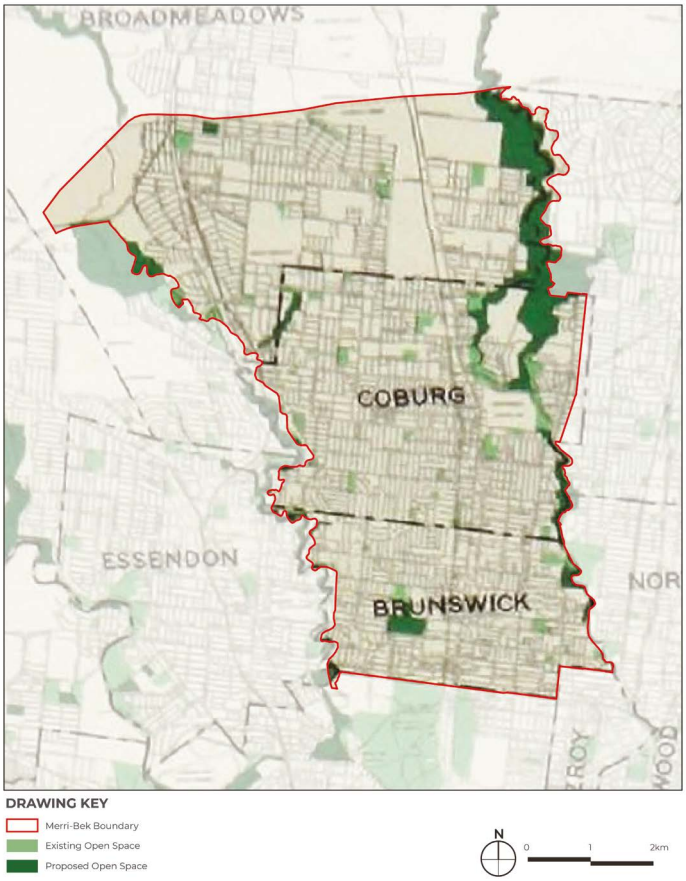


Figure 1. Merri-bek principal existing and proposed open space in 1954 (Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme 1954 Report)

Figure 2. Aerial of Merri-bek Municipality in 1989 with the current open space locations overlaid

Figure 3. Open space definition

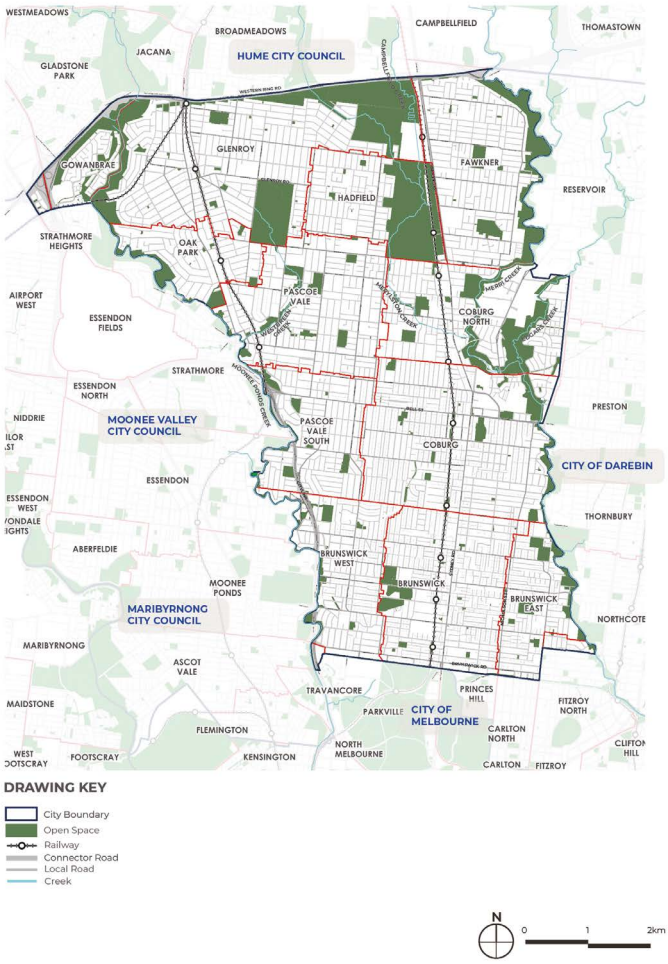


Figure 4. Open Space in Merri Bek

3. MERRI-BEK'S STRATEGIC CONTEXT

3.1. SUMMARY OF MERRI-BEK OPEN SPACE STRATEGY 2012-2022

The Merri-bek Open Space Strategy 2012-2022 (MOSS 2012-2022) is the most recent open space strategy prepared for the municipality. The document replaced the former Open Space Strategy prepared in August 2004 (MOSS 2004), with consideration of the first Open Space Strategy prepared in 1996.

The MOSS 2004 set broad goals and vision for open space in Merri-bek by 2023, it also identified projects for the 5 years following. The Strategy noted that by 2023 steady progress would be planned in park improvements and redevelopment as well as establishment of new open spaces. At the time MOSS 2004 was prepared it was predicted that there would be a net increase of approximately 6200 people between 2001 and 2011 and that population growth would slow between 2011 and 2030.

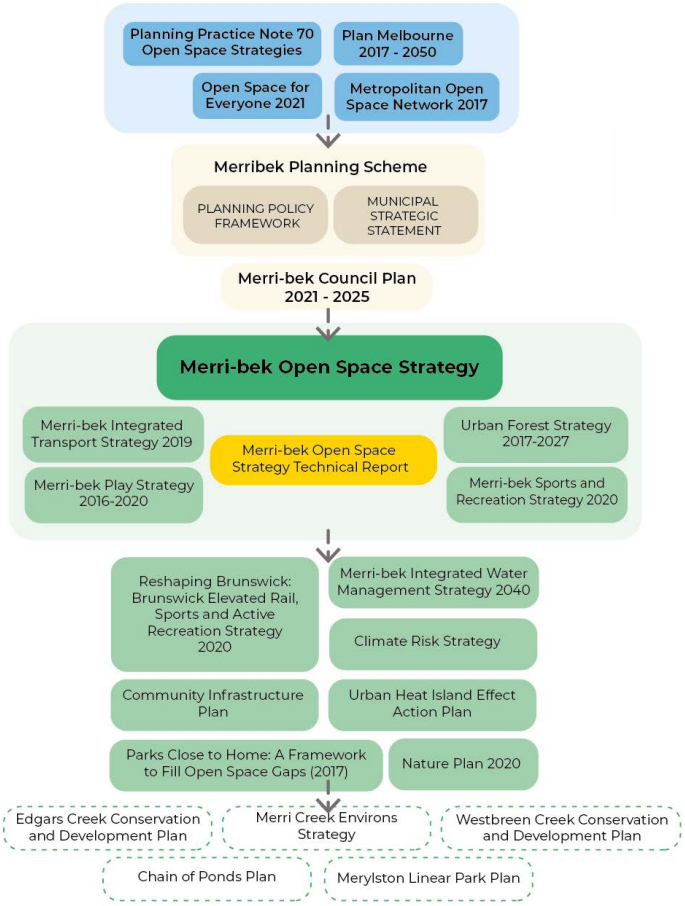


Figure 5. Merri-bek Open Space Strategy

MOSS 2012-2022 sought to address a number of issues that emerged since MOSS 2004 including:

+ Higher rate of population growth and urban densities than anticipated in Melbourne 2030
+ Increasing adverse health issues within the general populous linked to lack of exercise.
+ Increasing demand for space for team sports combined with maintaining sports grounds.
+ Loss of other government land including access to school sports grounds.
+ Loss of open space from private building/ garden encroachment, particularly along creek corridors.
+ Likely impacts of climate change and the urban heat island effect,
+ Shared use agreements with schools not being honoured.
+ Various types of private land need to be considered in the way that they complement public space.
+ Requests received to commemorate people or events by naming features in public spaces.

The goals of MOSS 2012-2022 echoed those set by MOSS 2004 but more specifically aimed to address those emerging issues identified, as follows:

+ Goal 1 Providing parks close to home
+ Goal 2 Having a mix of open space types and experiences
+ Goal 3 Making places for nature
+ Goal 4 A greener more liveable Moreland
+ Goal 5 Making the most of open space through effective management
+ Goal 6 Enhancing participation and use of open space
+ Goal 7 Development of a network of shared trails

At the time of its implementation there was an estimated 839ha of open space in Merri-bek including restricted and private owned open spaces. 6.2ha of open space per thousand residents was identified in Merri-bek, 4.2ha of that being publicly accessible open space (not including restricted access land such as the Northern Golf Course and the Fawkner Memorial Park).

3.2. KEY CHANGES AND EMERGING OPEN SPACE CHALLENGES SINCE MOSS 2012-2022

A review of the current Merri-bek Open Space Strategy 2012-2022 has highlighted key differences in the forecasted open space trends anticipated in Merri-bek and what Council has in reality experienced. Council has also experienced associated hurdles in the implementation of the methodologies that were outlined to achieve the goals, principles and actions set out in the document. These changes are described in turn below:

Increased population growth

MOSS 2012-2022 identified that Merri-bek had a population in excess of 147,000 people in 2011, spread relatively evenly throughout the municipality. This number was predicted to increase by almost 20%, equating to nearly 30,000 additional residents in the subsequent 20 years. As of 2021, only 10 years later, Merri-bek's ABS Estimated Resident Population was approximately 173,541 people. In short, the population growth anticipated by MOSS 2012-2022 rapidly increased in the lifetime of the strategy.

Densification

Urban densification is another key change in Merri-bek alongside the increased population growth. In accommodating more people in Merri-bek, the typology of housing has shifted from conventional detached 3-bedroom homes to townhouse and apartment typologies, typically accommodating fewer people with less access to large amounts of privately owned open space. Generally, the privately owned open space offering in townhouses and apartments are confined to courtyards, small yards, shared communal open space or balconies.

Between 2016 and 2021 the percentage of detached dwellings in Merri-bek has decreased from 54.8% to 51.1%, whereas the percentage of high-density dwellings in Merri-bek have increased from 9.2% to 12.8%. While the distribution of density varies across the municipality, on balance there has been a broad increase in density. Accordingly, the utilisation of public open space has likewise shifted with increases in density twofold; first as a result of more people being located near a public open space at any one time, and second being that more people are relying on public open space to service their open space needs, as opposed to private owned open space.

Open space scale

MOSS 2012-2022 identified three classifications of open space local, district and regional, where the local and district categories captured the majority of open spaces in Merri-bek. The challenge of MOSS 2012-2022 in only categorising three open space scales was the resulting variance of open space types within each category of scale. For example, a park of 100sqm and a park of 1000sqm both within the local category would serve very different catchments of people based on the open space size alone.

Recent open space strategies and state open space frameworks such as Open Space for Everyone (DTP) and the Metropolitan Open Space Network (VPA) apply a more comprehensive approach to open space scale categorisation whereby dividing open space size into between 5 or 6 categories to better capture scale and resulting open space utilisation through walkable catchment associated with a particular scale.

Diversity of open space

The expectation of open space has shifted. The definition of open space is recognised now as being more than just open green space, such as parks and ovals, and has expanded to include spaces that are publicly managed and publicly accessible, such as plaza, pedestrian links, forecourts to civic buildings, plazas and so on.

Further, a combination of changing community demographics and shifting community expectations on local government is driving the need for more innovative public open spaces. Nature play areas, seniors exercise equipment, enclosed dog parks, WSUD are all examples of emerging public realm spaces that work to address a gap in community infrastructure needs. In essence, the design and delivery of new types of spaces is and emerging and growing expectation of the community to serve more specific community needs and support the broader community network.

Multi-functional open spaces

The ability to acquire new public spaces has become more challenging due to the demand of land for residential development and the costs associated. As a response, there is an inferred requirement of open space to be better utilised, and more central to the design and development of existing and future open spaces. Open spaces that are flexible and multi-functional are seen as more successful in serving the long-term needs of the community. Multi-functional open space therefore is serving many functions at once, such as being an area for formal sports clubs, as well as an area for dog walking, passive recreation, amenity, and nature conservation.

Accordingly, the function of open space should not be recognised as just a single primary function as identified within MOSS 2012-2022 but as having multiple functions.

This works to identify the real provision of open space function to service community needs and address the expectation of these multiple functions individually and as an integrated open space in future design and development.

Changing nature of open space

The community demand of open space is constantly changing, as is the open space industry. The expectation from open space is increasingly dynamic. The difficulty in addressing this constantly evolving expectation is the ability to capture and appropriately respond to the relevant needs of the community at any one point in time, and over the course of an open space strategy.

Identifying the gaps in the current open space network and establishing priorities for future open space outcomes works to better ensure the needs of the community are met for the timeframe of the strategy. This process is central to open space planning broadly but also more particularly on a municipal level when understanding and responding to the needs of the Merri-bek community and context.

3.3. STRATEGIC POLICY CONTEXT

3.3.1. MERRI-BEK PLANNING SCHEME

The Merri-bek Open Space Strategy is directed by the Merri-bek Planning Scheme (the Planning Scheme). The Victorian Planning Policy Framework (PPF) contains the State and Regional policies as well as Local planning policies for Merri-bek. The Planning Scheme includes policy objectives for the provisions of open space which will guide the development of Merri-bek's open space network, specifically at Clause 19.02, Clause 53.01, and the Municipal Planning Strategy.

Further, the Planning Scheme provides overarching objectives for open space provision, design and development within the PPF as described under the following sub-headings.

MERRI-BEK PURPOSE AND VISION

Clause 02.02 Vision

Merri-bek City Council's vision prioritises the development of sustainable neighbourhoods that provide social, cultural, physical and economic well-being for communities. Council's goal for the planning of sustainable neighbourhoods is that they will generally include a mix of the following key elements, proportionate to the suburb scale: Shops and services; community facilities such as schools, neighbourhood houses, recreation, libraries; housing choices; employment choices; public transport options; and a network of different types of open spaces for leisure and recreation.

Clause 02.03-8 Open Space

There are specific areas in Merri-bek that have been assessed as deficient in the provision of open space as identified at Clause 02.04 Strategic Framework Plan: Open Space (Figure 6).

Council seeks to improve its open space and recreational opportunities by:

- Support the provision of a diverse open space network for amenity, recreational and ecological reasons.
- Prioritise new open space in areas where there is a deficiency in the open space provision as identified on Strategic Framework Plan: Open Space.
- Expand and enhancing the open space corridor along the Moonee Ponds, Merri and Edgars Creek waterways.

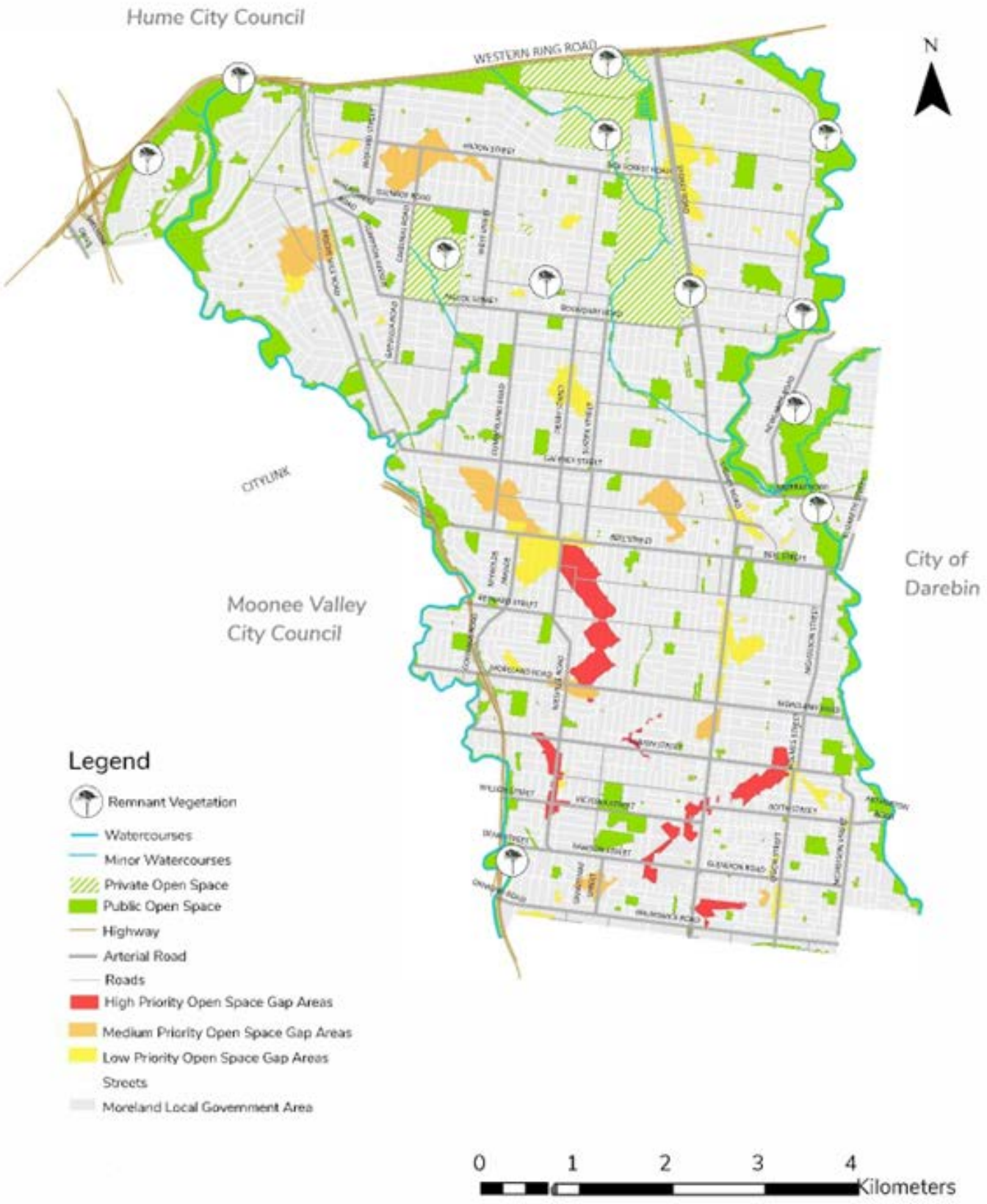


Figure 6. Strategic Framework Plan: Open Space (Clause 02.04)

VICTORIAN PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (PPF)

The Planning Scheme includes State, Regional and Local policy directives relevant to open space, which encourage strategic planning for open spaces in existing and future areas. The policy provisions relevant to Merri-bek's open space network include:

Clause 11.01-1S Settlement

The objective of this Clause is to facilitate the sustainable growth and development of Victoria and deliver choice and opportunity for all Victorians through a network of settlements. This is supported through the delivery of high-quality integrated settlements that have a strong identity and sense of place, are prosperous and sustainable through the protection of natural features to enhance their contribution to settlements and landscapes.

Clause 11.02-1S Supply of urban land

Ensuring a sufficient supply of land is available for residential, commercial, retail, industrial, recreational, institutional and other community uses is the principal objective of this clause.

Clause 11.02-2S Structure Planning

The objective of this clause is to facilitate the fair, orderly, economic and sustainable use and development of urban areas. It works to ensure effective planning and management of the land use and development of an area through the preparation of relevant plans that considers of sustainable and liveable urban areas, protection and enhancement of areas of natural and cultural significance, walkable neighbourhoods, active and sustainable transport modes, efficient use and provision of infrastructure and services, and integrated water management and urban greening.

Clause 12.01-1S Protection of Biodiversity

The protection and enhancement of Victoria's biodiversity is the key objective of this clause. Strategies include considering the impacts of land use and development that may affect the biodiversity value of national parks and conservation reserves or significant sites. The establishment and protection of linkages between biodiversity areas, including green space networks and vegetation corridors is a key strategy.

Clause 12.01-1L Biodiversity in Merri-bek

The objective of this clause is to increase tree canopy coverage and the ecological values of the city by increasing the planting and retention of native vegetation and habitat corridors as well as encourage a diversity of vegetation to promote climate pest and disease resilience. Key areas of protection and enhancement are as identified on Strategic Framework Plan: Open Space.

Clause 12.01-2S Native vegetation management

The objective of this clause is to ensure that there is no net loss to biodiversity as a result of the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation.

Clause 12.03-1S River and riparian corridors, waterways, lakes, wetlands and billabongs

Protecting and enhancing the waterway systems including river and riparian corridors, waterways, lakes and wetlands and billabongs is the objective of this clause. Strategies to support this objective include:

+ protecting the environmental, cultural, landscape values of all waterway systems as significant economic, environmental and cultural assets
+ sensitively design and site development to maintain and enhance the waterway system and the surrounding landscape setting, environmental assets, and ecological and hydrological systems.
+ enhance a sense of place and landscape identity
+ retain and enhance the recreation and amenity values along waterway systems
+ design and site development to maintain and enhance the natural environment of waterway systems

Policy guidelines state to consider as relevant:

+ Locating earthworks, including dams, a minimum of 30 metres from waterway systems.
+ Locating development a minimum of 30 metres from the banks of waterway systems.
+ The views of floodplain and waterway managers.
+ Any regional catchment strategy and related plans approved under the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994.

Clause 12.03-1R Waterways of the West

Maintaining and enhancing the natural landscape, biodiversity, cultural and social values, and the Traditional Owner living cultural heritage values of the waterways of Melbourne's west, including Moonee Ponds Creek (Moonee Moonee), and associated tributaries and wetlands is the objective of this clause. Strategies to support this clause include promoting a sense of place and landscape identity by ensuring green linkages and public access to rivers and green spaces are protected

and prioritised along the river corridors including Moonee Ponds Creek Trail.

Clause 13.01-1S Natural hazards and climate change

The objective of this clause is to minimise the impacts of natural hazards and adapt to the impacts of climate change through risk-based planning.

Clause 13.03-1S Floodplain management

The objective of this clause is to assist the protection of life, property and community infrastructure from flood hazard, including riverine and overland flows, the natural flood carrying capacity of rivers, streams and floodways, as well as the protection of floodplain areas of environmental significance.

Clause 12.05 Significant Environments and Landscapes

This clause aims to protect environmentally sensitive areas, as well as landscapes and open spaces that contribute to character, identity and sustainable environments. This clause recognises Merri Creek as an environmentally sensitive area and significant recreation value, requiring protection from development that would diminish this value.

The objectives of this Clause are supported by a set of strategies that aim to ensure development does not detract from the natural qualities and significant landscape areas. In particular, this clause seeks to improve landscape qualities, open space linkages and environmental performance in significant landscapes and open spaces, including green wedges, conservation areas and non-urban areas.

Clause 15.01-1S Urban Design

This clause aims to create urban environments that are safe, healthy, functional and enjoyable, and contribute to a sense of place and cultural identity. Strategies relevant to public open space include the strategy to ensure development and landscaping supports public realm amenity and safe access to walking and cycling environments and public transport.

Clause 15.01-1R Urban Design – Metropolitan Melbourne

This clause aims to create a distinctive and liveable city with quality design and amenity, through the provision of a network of boulevards, as well as spaces and facilities that support the development of Melbourne's cultural precincts and creative industries.

Clause 15.01-1L Urban Design in Merri-bek

Public open space access is a key component of this clause. Strategies include ensuring development contributes to a fine grain urban structure reflecting an appropriate balance of open space to built-form, and ensuing large sites have appropriate connections with and to the surrounding street and pedestrian network. Strategies also aim to limit overshadowing of public open space, maximise safety through passive surveillance and lighting, and incorporate climate resilient design. Further it ensures landscape design improves aesthetic quality and amenity for occupants and the public realm by:

+ Integrating development with the surrounding environment.
+ Providing for summer shading of buildings and privately owned open spaces and allows for access to winter sun.
+ Contributing to reduction of the urban heat island effect.
+ Incorporating integrated water management and water sensitive urban design.

Clause 15.01-3S Subdivision design

Ensures the design of subdivisions achieves attractive, safe, accessible, diverse and sustainable neighbourhoods. Strategies to support this objective include:

+ creating compact neighbourhoods that have walkable distances between activities,
+ creating urban places with a strong sense of place that are functional, safe and attractive,
+ creating landscaped streets and a network of open spaces to meet a variety of needs with links to regional parks where possible.
+ protecting and enhancing habitat for native flora and fauna, and providing opportunities for people to experience nature in urban areas.

Clause 19.02-6S Open Space

The objective of this clause is "to establish, manage and improve a diverse and integrated network of public open space that meets the needs of the community." Key strategies to deliver this objective include ensuring that the open space network is linked using shared paths and connect major parks and activity areas, and places of natural and cultural interest.

Clause 19.02-6R Open Space – Metropolitan Melbourne

This clause aims to strengthen the metropolitan open space network through the development of a network of accessible and high-quality local open spaces made

available through the planning of urban redevelopment projects. The creation of continuous open space links and trails along the Merri Creek Parklands (extending to Craigieburn) is a key strategy of this clause.

Clause 19.02-6L Open Space in Merri-bek

This clause seeks to design development to preserve or enhance public access to open space, and create a continuous public open space corridor along the Moonee Ponds, Merri and Edgars Creeks. For large sites located in priority opens space areas as identified by Open Space Strategic Framework Plan at Clause 02.04, the site design should include provision of new public open space.

Policy Guidelines:

That the public open space corridor along the creeks be a minimum of 50 metres on each side of the creek. A minimum of 30 metres from the edge of the embankment on each side should be a vegetated buffer.

Clause 53.01 Public Open Space Contribution and Subdivision

Clause 53.01 establishes Council's ability to set public open space contributions that is levied at the time of subdivision of land for residential, industrial or commercial purposes.

The schedule to Clause 53.01 sets the amount of contribution for public open space based on type or location of the proposed subdivision.

Type or location of subdivision	Amount of contribution for public open space
1. Brunswick East / North Fitzroy	5.7%
2. Brunswick	6.3%
3. Brunswick West	2.5%
4. Coburg	6.8%
5. Pascoe Vale South	3.4%
6. Coburg North	4.3%
7. Pascoe Vale	3.7%
8. Oak Park	3.1%
9. Fawkner	5.7%
10. Hadfield	4.3%
11. Glenroy	6.5%
12. Gowanbrae / Tullamarine	4.7%

Table 2. Amount of contribution for public open space

56.05 Urban Landscape

With reference to Clause 56 Residential Subdivision, the objective of Clause 56.06 is to "provide a network of quality, well-distributed, multi-functional and cost-effective public open space that includes local parks, active open space, linear parks and trails, and links to regional open space." This clause sets out the standards of public open space provision relevant to residential subdivision.

RELEVANT VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES AND DIRECTIONS

Across state policy and strategy there is a common theme to strengthen the integrated metropolitan open space network.

Plan Melbourne 2017-2050

The Victorian government has established a long-term vision and implementation plan to guide Melbourne's growth and development over the next 35 years. Plan Melbourne provides the overarching strategic document that will influence future planning and development in Merri-bek. It contains nine principles to guide policies and actions as follows:

Principle 1: A distinctive Melbourne

Principle 2: A globally connected and competitive city

Principle 3: A city of centres linked to regional Victoria

Principle 4: Environmental resilience and sustainability

Principle 5: Living locally — 20-minute neighbourhoods

Principle 6: Social and economic participation

Principle 7: Strong and healthy communities

Principle 8: Infrastructure investment that supports balanced city growth

Principle 9: Leadership and partnership

Plan Melbourne contains 7 outcomes that set the ambitions of the plan, and 32 directions that outline how the outcomes will be achieved. Many of the outcomes and directions contained in Plan Melbourne are relevant to Merri-bek's open space network. To assist with the achievement of these principles, Merri-bek's open spaces can contribute to the following directions:

Direction 2.1 Manage the supply of new housing in the right locations to meet population growth and create a sustainable city.

There is an opportunity to coordinate the delivery of housing with public open space provision to ensure that future and existing residential areas are designed to support access to open space and alignment with the 20-minute neighbourhood aims.

Direction 4.1 Create more great public places across Melbourne.

Open spaces help comprise Melbourne's public spaces, and the creation of open space can incorporate place-making practice, and the enhancement of the natural environment including water's edge parklands.

Direction 5.1 Create a city of 20-minute neighbourhoods

Open space is a key component of the 20-minute neighbourhood, helping to create vibrant neighbourhood activity centres with access to green spaces with close proximity to home.

Direction 5.2 Create neighbourhoods that support safe communities and healthy lifestyles

Open space has many benefits to community health and wellbeing. It is essential to supporting healthy lifestyles, and facilities walking and cycling as part of everyday life.

Direction 5.3 Deliver social infrastructure to support strong communities

Open space provides a place for community gathering to support social cohesion and place belonging.

Direction 5.4 Deliver local parks and green neighbourhoods in collaboration with communities

A network of high quality and accessible open spaces provides local opportunities for community involvement and recreation.

Direction 6.4 Make Melbourne cooler and greener

Open spaces provide an opportunity for greening and urban forest initiatives to reduce surface temperatures.

Planning Practice Note 70– Open Space Strategies (2015)

This practice note provides guidance to councils on preparing an Open Space Strategy, including the reasons for preparing the strategy, and the inputs and outputs to consider as part of this process.

Based on the guidelines and classifications set out in this practice note, the process undertaken as part of the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy refresh aligns with the recommended strategic approach.

Metropolitan Open Space Network 2017

The Metropolitan Open Space Network provides a clear definition of open space alongside a hierarchy and categorisation system and identifies six principles to guide the assessment of open space provision and guide the prioritisation of potential interventions as follows:

+ Equal distribution
+ Access and connectivity
+ Quality
+ Quantity
+ Diversity
+ Sustainability

The document defines open space as public open space, restricted open space and privately owned open space. It categorises the existing open spaces in Metropolitan Melbourne including Merri-bek and outlines distribution of public open space definitions and types, public open

space per person and percentage population within 400m walkable distance of public open space. This document provides a framework from which the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy will be reviewed and revised.

Metropolitan Open Space Strategy: Open Space for Everyone (DTP, 2021)

Open Space for Everyone 2021 puts in place the strategic framework to guide the planning, acquisition, design, management, use and maintenance of the Melbourne metropolitan open space network. This document, similar to Metropolitan Open Space Network categorises open space, by 'accessible', 'restricted' and 'encumbered or restricted'.

Open Space for Everyone is informed by a review of the global, state, city and local policies, strategies and literature. The document sets out Actions underway by state and local governments to optimise and grow Melbourne's open space network. Those actions that relate to Merri-bek include:

+ **Waterways of the West Action Plan** - A plan to protect the waterways of the Maribyrnong (Mirrangbamurn), Moonee Ponds (Moonee Moonee) and Werribee (Wirribi Yaluk) catchments and their parklands. It will include a community-developed vision, promote the waterways' amenity and significance and ensure the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung and Wadawarrung Traditional Owners are included in management and planning. This is applicable to Merri-bek as the Moonee Ponds River and some of its catchments lie within the municipality boundaries.
+ **Living Melbourne**: our metropolitan urban forest – Work collaboratively with public land managers to protect, restore and improve the connectivity of a Melbourne-wide urban forest for a cooler, greener city and healthy communities.
+ **Use of school grounds** – Investigate opportunities to work with local governments, schools and communities to increase access and encourage co-investment to improve facilities, allowing greater community use without jeopardising primary use and with consideration of amenity and local surrounds.
+ **Shared use of cemeteries** - Review opportunities and challenges to make cemeteries and memorial parks more-accessible, user-friendly community spaces. Where possible, improve interface and connectivity with open space beyond their boundaries. Open Space for Everyone references the vision, goals, principles and actions of the Harkness Cemetery design project which provides a useful guide for Merri-bek's cemeteries. Merri-bek has two large encumbered / restricted open spaces in the municipality: the Northern Memorial Park and the Fawkner Memorial Park, both owned and managed by the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust.

Chain of Ponds – Moonee Ponds Creek

The Chain of Ponds Collaboration (the Collaboration) is a comprehensive investigation into what the Moonee Ponds Creek is today and what it may become in the future. It is a holistic plan that explores the relationship amongst the many variables and forces that affect the creek. The project is a collaboration between 14 organisations across the Moonee Ponds Creek catchment, including Merri-bek City Council, the City of Moonee Valley and Melbourne Water [1].

The Collaboration recognises Moonee Ponds creek as an urban waterway that is one of five major north-south flowing tributaries of the Yarra River. The channel was designed to prevent people from accessing the creek through the use of a steep embankment. There are a variety of different types of public open spaces along the Moonee Ponds Creek including passive recreation, active recreation and linear connection spaces.

The key plan for the Collaboration, titled the Overall Plan (page 245), discusses the opportunity of the Moonee Ponds Creek as a linear park that reinstates the 'chain of ponds' that forms the creek. The document contemplates exploring the possibility of continuing the shared user pathway along the Merri-bek side of the creek to encourage more people to access this portion of the creek, which currently has a wild and untamed feel, thereby providing better passive surveillance and safety.

Some relevant Merri-bek actions within the Chain of Ponds include to:

+ Investigate strategic land acquisition opportunities to improve access, connectivity to support a minimum connected 100m wide open space corridor along the creek to support regular maintenance, emergency and pedestrian access.
+ Develop implementation plans for pedestrian loops and circuit routes using ford crossing, bridges, ramps and stairs at strategic intervals and practical along the creek
+ Remove fencing along the creek corridor as part design improvements to increase accessibility and connectivity, for example, at Hilda and Gordon Streets Essendon and Hopetoun Avenue, Brunswick West.
+ Promote the range of uses for the creek to encourage more participation, and in turn, protection and surveillance

[1] *The 14 organisations that have collaborated on the Chain of Ponds include Merri-bek City Council, the City of Moonee Valley and Merri- bek City Council, as well as Melbourne Water, the City of Melbourne, Hume City Council, Parks Victoria, Yarra Valley Water, Greater Western Water, Kensington Association, the Victorian Planning Authority, Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek, Living Colour Studio, Conservations Volunteers Australia and the Moonee Valley Bicycle Users Group*

+ Explore creative ways to celebrate, enhance and utilise the unique infrastructure along the creek, such as with public art and potential recreational pursuits (rock climbing walls, skate boarding).

Merri Creek and Environs Strategy

The Merri Creek and Environs Strategy (MCES) is a document intended to give direction to managers of the waterway corridors of the Merri catchment. The document sets out strategic intent, and also captures some important, site-specific actions, which underpin its strategic direction.

This 2009-2014 version of the strategy includes numerous changes resulting from the incorporation of many goals, objectives, targets and actions from the Port Phillip and Western Port Regional Catchment Strategy 2004-2009. Melbourne Water broadly supports the intent of the MCES. The overarching goals of the Merri Catchment include:

+ Water goal – Sustainable water use and healthy waterways, wetlands, estuaries, coasts and bays
+ Land goal – Healthy land used appropriately and productively.
+ Biodiversity goal – Healthy and enduring ecosystems with a diversity of habitats and native species
+ People goal – The community valuing, understanding and celebrating the region's catchment assets and working to achieve sustainability.

RELEVANT COUNCIL STRATEGIES

Merri-bek Council Plan 2021-25

The Council Plan sets out the five strategic objectives and corresponding strategies and initiatives that Council is aiming to deliver over the course of 4 years to achieve the community's vision for the future. The Council Plan includes the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. The protection, improvement and promotion of public health and wellbeing across the municipality is an overarching priority throughout the plan. The strategic objectives are relevant to Merri-bek's open space network as follows:

Theme 1: An environmentally proactive Merri-bek aims to respond to the climate emergency and regeneration the natural environment. A key strategy to deliver this objective is the use of open space to protect and enhance biodiversity and tree canopy, create spaces for nature to thrive and provide equitable access to recreational opportunities (passive and active). The delivery of open spaces should respond to local needs and other priorities for parks, playgrounds, dog parks, sporting facilities, community gardens, eating, toilets etc.

Theme 2: Moving and living safely in Merri-bek includes the objective to improve active transport options in the municipality so that getting around is safer, more accessible, and enjoyable. Strategies include constructing high-quality bike and pedestrian infrastructure to create links in high demand areas. Existing and future public open space network will have an important role to play in delivering this objective.

Theme 3: A healthy and caring Merri-bek aims to improve the quality and accessibility of community services to support healthier lifestyles, with particular emphasis on developing community resilience to climate change. Key strategies include investing in assets that mitigate the impacts of climate extremes such as heat waves, provide for a diverse range of recreation opportunities, and enhance social cohesion. Ensuring that Merri-bek's public open spaces are developed to deliver on these strategies is a key opportunity for the OSS.

Theme 4: Vibrant spaces and places in Merri-bek aims to provide public and commercial spaces that connect the community. Strategies include designing open space to promote equitable access recreation (passive and active) and improve biodiversity, waterway health and tree canopy.

Theme 5: An empowered and collaborative Merri-bek includes the strategy to progress efforts to secure more developer funding towards Council's response to population growth, which includes the priority to prepare and implement a revised Open Space Levy.

Merri-bek Community Infrastructure Plan 2022-2032

The Merri-bek Community Infrastructure Plan guides the planning and delivery of community infrastructure, including performance measures, future investment, and external funding. The Community Infrastructure Vision aims to achieve a network of quality community infrastructure that supports health, social wellbeing and economic outcomes, and is welcoming, vibrant and loved. Desired outcomes are described under the headings of Integrated, Accessible, Pace Based, Future Proofed and High Quality (page 11).

Park Close to Home: A Framework to Fill Open Space Gaps (2017)

This Framework Plan guides the expenditure of open space fund to create open space in the areas that have the least access to open space, to remove or reduce gaps in open space provision before land prices and population increase further. The Framework Plan identifies open space gap areas as those that do not have quality open space within 500m of residential areas or 300m of

activity centres. It considers high and medium priority gap areas as those that have the highest population and density, highest population growth and lowest amount of open space in the surrounding suburb. The Framework Plan sets out 7 steps to guide gap area closure and identifies the high and medium priority gap areas. Key opportunities include the proactive purchasing of land to create new open space, shared use agreements, conversion of other council owned land, and improving the accessibility of existing open space.

Merri-bek Climate Risk Strategy

The Merri-bek City Council Climate Risk Strategy 2022-2030 establishes a framework for Council's approach to managing climate-related risks as well as ways to reduce these risks via adaptation and resilience strategies. The Strategy highlights the importance of natural environments and open spaces for urban amenity under climate change, noting they provide ecosystem services such as shade, water retention and cool transit corridors. Goal 2 Built and natural environments sets the aim to improve the resiliency of Council's infrastructure, open spaces and natural environments to climate impacts. Objectives under Goal 2 are: to design open spaces to contribute to local cooling and flood risk mitigation to reduce community exposure to climate impacts, especially heat, and to improve climate-related community health and wellbeing outcomes; and to design and manage open spaces and natural environments so that they are more resilient to hotter, drier conditions and higher flood risk conditions, while fostering biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Merri-bek Integrated Water Management Strategy 2040

This Strategy identifies the actions required to achieve integrated water management (IWM) outcomes across the municipality. It aims to establish Merri-bek as a water sensitive city, with greener streets and high quality spaces. The strategic outcomes factor in open space as a demonstrated measure of water sensitive city design. Outcome 2 Resilient and liveable landscapes outlines how open spaces are important from IMW perspective. Objective 7 Improved liveability and amenity includes the need for high quality open space for recreation, relaxation and connecting with nature. Objective 8 Community health and wellbeing includes the need for high quality open space for encouraging community participation and interaction.

Merri-bek Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan 2016/2017-2025/2026

This plan sets the actions that will be undertaken to help reduce the impacts of urban heat island effect and prepare for future temperature increase. The strategic plan includes the integration of UHIE responses into existing operations and policies, increasing green infrastructure and heat reducing materials, and raising community awareness. Integrated water management approaches are highlighted as a key opportunity for open spaces in this document.

Merri-bek Cooling the Upfield Corridor - Action Plan

This Action Plan aims to reduce exposure to the social, economic, and environmental impacts of Urban Heat Island Effect within the Upfield Corridor. It identifies priorities for integrating water management and landscaping into this area to reduce surface temperatures and improve the amenity of the public realm. Theme 3: Utilising Council owned land includes the objective to establish landscaping in public open spaces and embed best practice to reduce UHIE impacts into every project.

Merri-bek Urban Forest Strategy 2017-2027

The Merri-bek Urban Forest Strategy 2017-2027 sets out to position the urban forest as a core element of the urban environment, seeking the protection, and enhancement of greenery in public and private areas. Actions include increasing tree canopy throughout the municipality, developing a tree management program to manage tree health within parks, and using integrated water management methods in open spaces. With regard to open space, the strategy seeks to prioritise the creation of open space in areas with high temperatures, particularly where there are vulnerable populations. It also seeks to integrate small pocket parks in dense areas, and to irrigate grass and trees during extreme heat periods.

Merri-bek Nature Plan

The Merri-bek Nature Plan aims to protect and enhance biodiversity in Merri-bek and acknowledges the importance of local connection to nature for the health and wellbeing of community. The Plan identifies priority actions to be undertaken as part of Council's open space and natural resource management over a 10 year period and specifies the projects for establishment and delivery within a 4 year period.

Merri-bek Play Strategy 2016-2020

The Merri-bek Play Strategy guides the strategic development of play spaces in Council-owned and managed public open space, such as parks, reserves, sports fields and public gathering spaces in shopping areas. The provision of a diverse range of accessible, presentable, challenging and maintained play spaces is the overarching goal. It provides a guide for future urban planning and design decisions to ensure the

needs of children and young people are considered. It provides guidance for the management of existing play spaces, and identifies design, development and funding allocation priorities for future play space developments. Nature based play, natural shade in parks and safe, attractive play environments is a priority.

As the timeframe of this document has lapsed the actions of the Play Strategy will be incorporated into the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy.

Merri-bek Sports and Recreation Strategy 2020

The Moreland Sport and Active Recreation Strategy is aimed at fulfilling the key priorities and commitments outlined in the Moreland Council Plan 2017-21 and Moreland Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-21 that relate to sport and active recreation including:

+ Growing participation in sport and active recreation, particularly by women, juniors, the elderly and other priority groups.
+ Ensuring access for all residents to a diverse range of recreation opportunities.
+ Building strong and productive relationships between Council, schools, sporting clubs, associations, peak bodies, government agencies and other key sport and active recreation providers.

The Strategy provides Council with a document to guide the planning, provision, promotion and advocacy of sport and active recreation in Moreland for the next 10 years and beyond.

Action 1 of the Strategy states to "*Undertake a high level, strategic and integrated analysis of Moreland's open spaces and recreation facilities (involving all relevant sections of Council) that will inform and prioritise Council's capital investments in recreation, open space and community infrastructure and assist in the development of Council's community infrastructure plan*". The Merri-bek Open Space Strategy is directly aimed at addressing this action.

Reshaping Brunswick: Brunswick Elevated Rail, Sports and Active Recreation Strategy 2020

Reshaping Brunswick addresses the need for heat mitigation interventions in the area surrounding rail line, which has been identified by Merri-bek's Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan as a hotspot. Such heat extremes can be mitigated by urban green spaces as a cooling mechanism. The Brunswick Level Crossing Removal Project presents an opportunity to create a cool, green, shaded, and biodiverse space where people are provided with space for cooling and socialising. This includes the use of strategies that engage integrated water management practice. The Strategy highlights the project area as a key consideration for the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy Refresh.

Brunswick Activity Centre Place Action Plan 2017

This document sets out the budgeted work program for the Brunswick Activity Centre over the next 5 years. The works described in this plan are incremental steps towards the achievement of Council's vision for Central Brunswick. Open Space is identified as a key component of the activity centre development, with efforts directed at the planning, design, delivery and maintenance parks and open space and street trees.

Principle 4: A rich network of streets, places and spaces aims to establish a public realm in Brunswick consisting of social gathering spaces.

The key opportunities for Public Spaces identified include increasing the provision of public spaces and parks and improving links. Public spaces are aimed to be multi-functional, providing informal social activity, community events, and short-term activation. Public safety around railway stations and industrial sites is a key priority, as well as mitigating the Urban Heat Island Effect through greening of the Activity Centre.

Merri-bek City Edgars Creek Conservation and Development Plan and Merri-bek City Westbreen Creek Conservation and Development Plan

This Development Plan seeks to balance the role of the Edgars and Westbreen creeks as primary waterway habitat and biodiversity corridor with the need to maintain drainage and key service easement functionality and meet the increasing needs of the local community for access and open space. Objectives include protecting vegetation links, and active transport links through corridor, ensuring new public open space is consistent with bushland character of this corridor, and includes future development recommendations.

3.4. BENEFITS OF OPEN SPACE

There has been a growing body of research undertaken into the link between open space, specifically green open space, and health and wellbeing. This connection has become more important with increases in urban densities alongside the reduction in overall green space within both public and private land.

Below are some of the more recent documents that summarise the key findings from the recent and ongoing research in both Australia and Internationally.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Assessing the value of urban green and blue spaces for health and well-being

World Health Organisation European Centre for Environment and Health, 2023

There is strong evidence supporting potential for urban green and blue spaces to generate positive public health and wellbeing outcomes. In this report, urban green space refers to the natural features within urban environments such as parks, gardens, green walls and street trees, while urban blue spaces refer to water bodies such as rivers, ponds and fountains.

The report sets out the following key messages a guideline for decision-making when valuing green and blue spaces.

- Use the available tools to quantitatively and qualitatively value the health benefits of urban green and blue spaces, and use this information to improve policy-making.
- Design green and blue spaces that enable physical activity and improve mental health and well-being to give the greatest benefit for health.
- Critically appraise the quantitative and qualitative evidence on nature benefits so that policy-makers can understand the quality of the evidence on the health value of green and blue spaces.
- Involve a range of stakeholders who place different values on urban green and blue spaces in developing appropriate strategies.
- Ensure that all policies that impact green and blue spaces (from climate adaptation to urban development policies) consider the health and well-being implications for urban populations, as well as the environmental and social impacts.
- Promote knowledge-sharing and training on valuation of the health and well-being benefits of green and blue spaces, including on economic valuation and qualitative methods.

The report concludes that there are multifunctional benefits derived from blue and green spaces including environmental, health and wellbeing, social, cultural and spiritual. Understanding the value of these spaces is highlighted as important for policy-makers and practitioners to ensure that efficient resource allocation and land usage supports the protection of these spaces.

In particular, the report outlines the physical, psychological health, social, cultural and spiritual benefits as:

+ Reduction of exposure to environmental stressors that cause harm to health (such as air pollutants, heat, noise)
+ Reduction or prevention of resultant disease burden, cancers, diabetes and cardiovascular disease
+ Restoring capacities such as stress recovery, cognitive restoration and flexibility
+ Development of a sense of community, social cohesion and contact
+ Development of social capital for different groups
+ Development of pro-social behaviours in children and adolescents
+ The use of space to contemplate or meditate, inspire creativity
+ The use of space to experience sacredness, and spiritual significance linked to cultural identity

Open Space Strategy Implications

Urban planning and design of open space should take account the value of nature – for environmental, social and health benefits, and in economic terms. These values are emphasised in the Design Guidelines and Standards at Section 7.6.

Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030: More Active People for a Healthier World

World Health Organization, 2019

This action plan provides a framework of policy actions aimed to increase regular physical activity for all people according to ability and stage of life.

The plan outlines the mission to ensure that all people have access to safe and equitable environments and to diverse opportunities to be physically active in their daily lives. The actions involve multi-sectoral interventions across government and key stakeholders in health, sports, transport, urban design, civil society, and academia.

There are four key objectives and 20 evidence-based policy actions within the plan. Objective 2: Create Active

Environments has implications for open space provision, promoting the need for supportive places that allow equitable and safe access to spaces to engage in physical activity.

Five policy actions support this Objective 2 as follows:

+ Strengthen the integration of transport planning policies at all levels of government to support neighbourhood connectivity. This includes walking, cycling, and other forms of mobility involving the use of wheels, and the use of public transport.
+ Improve walking and cycling network infrastructure through service improvements in relation to safety, equity, completeness, and quality.
+ Implement policy actions that improve road safety for everyone, as well as public transport users, prioritising actions that mitigate risk to the most vulnerable road users.
+ Strengthen access to good-quality public and green open spaces, green networks, recreational spaces and sports amenities ensuring design is safe, universal, equitable and age-inclusive.
+ Strengthen policy and guidelines to promote public amenities and community gathering spaces that allow diverse abilities to be physically active. Prioritise access by pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.

Open Space Strategy Implications

Creating multi-functional open spaces that cater to specific needs (different types of ability, age etc), and prioritise equitable and safe access to public open spaces is central to open space contribution to a person's health and wellbeing. This Technical report considers specific needs and access as a part of this endeavour largely through Objective 3 and Objective 5.

ACADEMIC LITERATURE

Planning for Green Open Space in Urbanising Landscapes. National Environment Research Program, Environmental Decisions Hub

School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University, Ives, C., Oke, C., Cooke, B., Gordon, A., & Bekessy, S., Prepared for Australian Government Department of Environment, 2014

This report discusses how green open space planning in Australia can maximise biodiversity outcomes in urban environments and outlines the key environmental and social considerations for best practice planning. It explores the values that communities associate with green open space in relation to ecological landscape features and provides recommendations on how understanding community values can contribute to green open space planning and design.

Green space planning requires an understanding of the values that people assign to these spaces and the benefits they receive from them. A key finding from the report is that nature appreciation activities are more highly valued than other benefits typically associated with green open space such as social interaction, health, recreation, demonstrating that it is important to strengthen the ecological features of a space.

The report recommends that community values should be integrated into planning frameworks for green open space by adopting a values-based planning approach as follows:

+ Respond to value diversity and satisfy the breadth of values held by the community. Diverse communities have a range of differences among individuals and as such will require different types of green open spaces to meet their needs and satisfy their values.
+ Deliver the values that the community finds important, so that the space will work to strengthen and support these values.
+ Manage conflicting values and the differing kinds of activities that individuals seek to engage within green open spaces. As such, it is important that planning seeks compatibility between different values.
+ The report also discusses the factors that influence people's ability to access the health benefits of green open space as follows:
+ Physical access to green open space, using green corridors, and walking and cycling paths that link green spaces to other destinations will enhance use.
+ Quality of the space will influence the community

benefit derived from the space. Quality is characterised by the diversity of facilities such as sporting fields, play space, maintenance levels, shade availability, walking tracks, access to water, general amenity, and safety.

Open Space Strategy Implications

Establishing open space networks will have significant impact on usability and community benefits of open space and strengthen conservation outcomes. Open space functions differ based on configuration and qualities, and as such deliver on different community values this is reflected in Objective 3.

Biodiversity values such as habitat preservation depend first on a habitat existing with a green open space, and second that there are habitat corridors linking these spaces. The research found that parks with moderate levels of vegetation can have a substantial contribution to conservation outcomes while also maximising social benefits of green open space, this is reflected in Objective 4.

Green space configuration influences the values people associate with green space. Larger spaces assigned more values especially with physical activity. Higher levels of vegetation improved biodiversity, distance to water is important for aesthetics and social activities. Parks near bodies of water considered more valuable for aesthetics and social activities, reflected in Objective 1, 2 and 6.

Exploring connections among nature, biodiversity, ecosystem services, and human health and well-being: Opportunities to enhance health and biodiversity conservation

Sandifer, P., Sutton-Grier, E., Ward, B., 2015

Evidence shows that biodiversity exposure supports human health and wellbeing. This publication supports a planning approach that prioritises human wellbeing and delivers spaces that promote human interaction with nature and biodiversity.

A summary of literature from ecological and environmental sciences, policy, planning, public health, and biomedical fields is provided, demonstrating that contact with nature including urban green space, parks, forests, produces psychological and physiological health benefits. These health benefits include improved mental health and mood, cognitive ability and function, and physical health and bodily function.

The report calls for multidisciplinary collaborations to enhance health and conservation, and specifically calls land use planners to action to develop policies that promote human interaction with nature.

Open Space Strategy Implications

Protecting and enhancing biodiversity and natural features of open space is captured by Objective 3 and Objective 4 of this report, as well as throughout the Design Guidelines and Standards at **Section 6.6** of this report.

4. COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY USE OF OPEN SPACE

4.1. OVERVIEW

Council undertook community consultation and engagement to gather information from the community to inform the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy, including this Technical Report and Project List.

Council engaged the services of a specialist engagement and research firm, ASDF Research to assist with providing an unbiased, independent analysis of the feedback heard during the community consultation for the new Merri-bek Open Space Strategy.

The following sections of this report rely on the information contained within the Council's Community Engagement Report and the ASDF Summary Report.

The following provides an overview of the community consultation process and the findings related to usage of open space and community preferences. More detailed analysis of open space engagement for specific reference groups can be found in the ASDF Summary Report. Specific open space function identified by both community and Council are discussed further in this report.

4.2. SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

The Open Space Strategy Engagement had three main phases. A description of the engagement phases and the associated aims were described as follows:

Phase Description	Description
1.	Engagement prior to the creation of a draft new Merri-bek Open Space Strategy
2.	Community consultation and engagement on the Draft Strategy
3.	Community consultation and engagement on the Final Strategy

Table 3. Open space Strategy Engagement phases

The data gathered from Phase 1 of community consultation has informed this technical report. The aims of Phase 1 Engagement are as follows:

- Engage widely and across the diverse municipality.
- Connect and engage with persons who have not traditionally engaged with Council / and or about open space.
- Engage in various ways and platforms (including dedicated in person events, festivals, digitally via a dedicated website, an online and written survey, etc)
- Promote the strategy and the engagement widely (including written and online newsletters, social media, signs, footpath decals, Council staff at events, etc)
- Acknowledge that Open Space Strategy engagement is not a 'clean slate' and that Council has heard from our community regularly about open space. This was further acknowledged by the release of a Discussion Paper when phase 1 engagement commenced.

Four key questions were asked of the community through phase 1 engagement activities, as follows:

1. How do you use and value open space in Merri-bek?

2. What do you like about open space in Merri-bek?

3. What barriers or challenges do you face when using / accessing open space in Merri-bek?

4. What would you like to see change?

To enact the aims of the Engagement Plan, Phase 1 engagement had various engagement events and forums designed to receive feedback (engagement activities). These were:

- The Conversations Merri-bek website, Discussion Paper and Open Space Survey [2].
- The website and Discussion Paper explored key themes for open space including:
  - Experiences of our open spaces
  - The future of our spaces
  - Access, facilities and safety
  - Biodiversity and nature
  - Dogs in our open spaces
  - Playground, parks and reserves
  - Sport

The Open Space Survey was created to receive detailed feedback about the various identified themes relevant to the Strategy as well as explore the uses and values of open space. The four key questions previously mentioned were central to this survey. The survey also collected demographic data.

The Business Open Space Strategy asked specific open space questions tailored to the Merri-bek Business Community audience which was distributed via the Merri-bek fortnightly newsletter.

[2] *A dedicated Open Space Strategy Conversations Merri-bek website was created to be used for the duration of the project. The website included the Discussion Paper which captured existing information and feedback provided to Council.*

Engagement Events included six park pop-ups events where Council staff engaged about the Strategy, including:

+ The Glenroy Music Festival, at the Glenroy Community Hub, Glenroy
+ Harmony Park, Coburg
+ Elms Court Reserve, Gowanbrae
+ Barkly Square Shopping Centre, Brunswick
+ Bonwick Street shopping strip, Fawkner
+ Fleming Park, Brunswick East

Each engagement event included visual activities assigned to each the 4 questions previously mentioned.

Deep dive workshops where Council held a longer conversation with the community about open space including opportunities, challenges and ideas for the future. The four deep dive workshops were held across different days of the week, times and locations across Merri-bek, to ensure widespread community engagement. Council also promoted the events heavily and aimed to have a mix of demographics and identified open space interests across the 4 workshops, to promote a robust conversation.

Engaging with First Nations persons where Council staff met Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders and persons from the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to discuss the new Strategy and aligning Council work. Council staff also discussed the Strategy with the Merri-bek First Nations Advisory Committee and acknowledged the role of particular sites, such as Ballerrt Mooroop in Glenroy.

Engaging with youths, recognising that youth have not traditionally engaged with Council about Merri-bek's open space. The engagement included discussions with Primary School children at the Merri-bek Children's Reference group and the Merri-bek Youth Ambassadors monthly meeting, engaging with Year 8 and 9 students of Mercy College, Coburg, as it was recognised that female youths often use open space differently to male youths. As well, Council and ChatterBox Projects held a Youths Workshop at the Merri-bek Oxygen Youth Centre.

Workshop with persons with a disability identified that persons with a disability use open space differently to other users and frequently face considerable barriers which reduce ability to use or access open space. Council staff met with the Merri-bek Disability Reference Group, as well as held in-depth workshops about open spaces and persons with disability.

CALD workshops and the Community Connectors Program held two specific workshops focussing on culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities including one women's and children only event. One workshop was in the evening and another during the daytime, with similar activities to the pop-up engagement events.

Other groups were engaged through four separate engagement sessions to engage various diverse persons in Merri-bek including:

+ Merri-bek Age-Friendly Reference Group
+ The Chain of Ponds Collaboration
+ Friends of Merri Creek and Merri Creek Management Committee
+ Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek
+ The Merri-bek LGBTQIA+ Reference Group
+ The Merri-bek Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee
+ Representatives from Growing Farmer and Fawkner Food Bowls
+ Adjoining Council's, including Moonee Valley City Council

Council promoted the above engagement activities in a variety of ways including signs, decals in public spaces, promotional posters in community spaces, alerts via Conversations Merri-bek, word of mouth, paid promotional advertisements and targeted promotional advertisements across social media.

4.3. COMMUNITY PREFERENCES AND USAGE OF OPEN SPACE FINDINGS

The Phase engagement received over 900 submissions across the various events and forums. Through the engagement activities, key themes of feedback were given around the four key engagement questions:

+ How open space is used.
+ How open space is valued.
+ Concerns people have about open space and challenges / barriers people have in accessing and using open space.
+ Suggested ideas and changes Council should explore for improving open space (and use and access).

Each of the above will be summarised in the following table.

4.3.1. HOW IS OPEN SPACE USED?

Open space is used for a mix of passive, recreational activities to more high-activity, intense activities. Open spaces are also used as spaces for celebration – including parties, cultural events. Associated discussions include suggestions of how to increase all of these differing uses across the municipality.

With respect to travel to open space, the ASDF report identified that most people who participated in the consultation survey said that they travel less than 1km to reach their local park or reserve. North-West residents are more reliant on their car to travel to their local park as the North-West region of Merri-bek is not as well serviced with close-proximity parks. Cycling to travel to the local park is particularly common in the North-East and South regions. CALD respondents show a high instance of traveling 3+km to access their local park (16%, compared to 5% other areas) and as a consequence, driving to reach the park (43%, compared to 31% non-CALD). When analysing this finding by location it is evident that CALD respondents in the North-West more often travel more than 3km to a park (26%) than their non-CALD neighbours.

Young people (under 35 year olds) more often use public transport (19%) to access their local park and LGBTIQA+ residents drive less often (18%), when compared to non-LGBTIQA+ (40%).

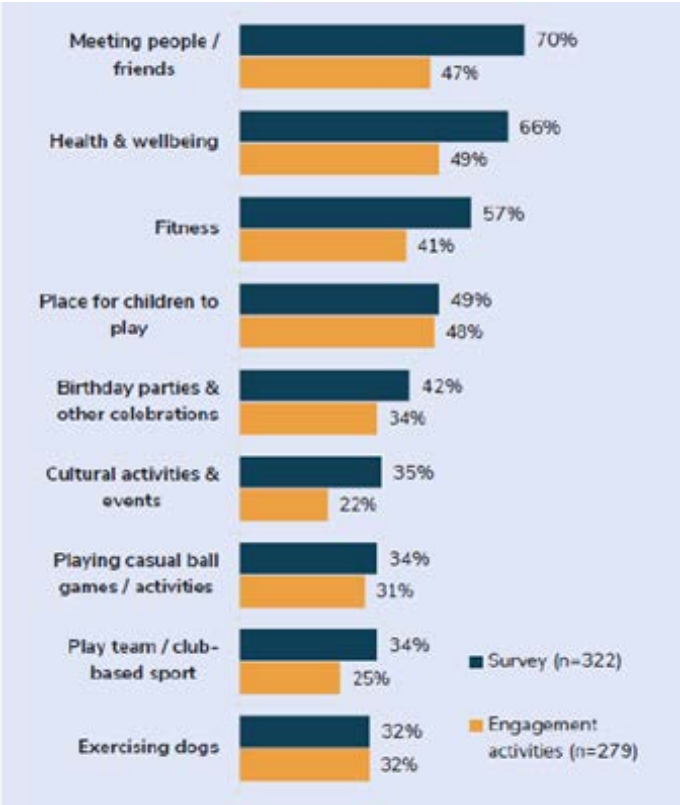


Figure 7. How people use open space in Merribek

The ASDF report further identified the following key variances, with respect to the use of open space:

+ Using parks as a place for children to play peaks amongst those aged 35-49 (39%, falling to 17% for 60+ year olds).
+ Play team sport / club based sport was more common amongst 40-59 year olds (46%, compared to 17% under 35 year olds and 13% 60+ year olds).
+ · Respondents from the North-East more often said they use open space as a place for children to play (58%, compared to 37% of those in the South).
+ Respondents from Fawkner showed a higher instance of using open space for cultural activities and events (51%, compared to 12% of those from Pascoe Vale).
+ CALD respondents showed a higher instance of using open space for playing team / club based sport (40%, compared to 27% non-CALD), place for children to play (60%, compared to 36% non-CALD), and/or cultural activities and events (44%, compared to 24% non-CALD).
+ LGBTIQA+ respondents less often said they use open space to play team sport / club based sport (12%, compared to 37% non-LGBTIQA+) and/or place for children to play (26%, compared to 51% non-LGBTIQA+).

4.3.2. WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT OPEN SPACE IN MERRI-BEK?

The most common facilities used and valued in open space by survey respondents relate to infrastructure that supports using the space for socialising, such as BBQs, shade, seating and drinking fountains; and amenities (bins and toilets). This is followed by the use of informal recreation areas such as running routes and liner corridors (53%), playgrounds (50%), outdoor fitness equipment (37%), specific sport facilities (32%), dog parks (25%) and BMX/skate/mountain bike tracks (18%).

When analysing by region, respondents from the North-West more often said they use/value BMX/skate tracks (27%, compared to 10% South), whereas respondents from the South more commonly said they use/value informal recreation areas (63%, compared to 43% North-West.

The environmental aspects of open space were highly valued by the community, in particular trees and waterways in the survey responses, and habitat for native plants & animals amongst engagement participants. Of the total survey respondents who answered the question of what they like about open space in Merri-bek, almost all selected an option relating to the ambience and their mental or physical health.

4.3.3. WHAT BARRIERS OR CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE WHEN USING / ACCESSING OPEN SPACE IN MERRI-BEK?

45% of survey respondents indicated there was something stopping them from using open space in Merri-bek, of whom 116 (82%) provided comment about what was stopping them.

When grouping the written comments into themes, the three primary things stopping people from using open space were dogs, including too many dogs and uncollected dog waste, landscape maintenance, including condition of sport fields and condition of grass areas, and safety.

Regarding safety, most of the comments simply said 'safety' without further explanation. When elaborating on safety it was mostly in reference to the Merri Creek path.

There were a broad range of topics raised as issues in the engagement activities. In the deep dive workshops, there were six key challenges identified for open space in Merri-bek:

+ Challenges associated with sharing spaces. In particular shared pedestrian / cycling paths, sharing between dogs and paths/sport, and organised sport monopolising open space.
+ Maintenance of open space. Specifically, trees, shrubs, along creeks, sports grounds and structures, weed control, mowing and litter.
+ Protecting the environment and biodiversity. Concerns were raised about tree loss due to development and the need for habitat management, as well as the need for open space without structures in it.
+ Not enough open space and the need to provide better and more open space for a growing population.
+ Lack of facilities (seating, toilets, signage, shade, bike parking etc.)
+ Lighting / safety / use of spaces at night.

People with disability identified the main reasons for stopping use of open space included poor design and maintenance of public toilets, conflicts with dog management, inadequate design of open space facilities (paths, play equipment, playground), and transport to and parking near open space. Young people revealed things preventing the use of open space included lack of lighting at night time, anti-social behaviour and litter.

4.3.4. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE CHANGE?

Amongst survey respondents, environment and landscaping was the most common theme including more native planting, improved biodiversity, more trees, community gardens, upgrading pitch surfaces. At the engagement activities a common response was a request for more community engagement and events.

In response to facilities missing in open space in Merri-bek, respondents identified the need for more shade / shelter, more toilets, more seating (including picnic areas), the need for more dog parks (off-lead and fenced) to reduce the reliance on sports fields, and nature play areas.

A variety of ideas were provided to Council for improving open space infrastructure. Broadly, the following suggestions were put forward:

- More open space needed, spaces of various scales or types, increase lighting for safety, developers to contribute open space, partner with other schools to open up private owned open spaces and purchase land on the border of parks to expand existing open space.
- Challenges with sharing spaces, requirement for increase communication to ensure people know where certain open space are being used for different purposes, community building activities in open spaces, information and signage about the history and culture, multi-purpose spaces, separate/ widened paths/more on-street bike paths and maintained open space.
- Protecting the environment including making some areas just for biodiversity, increasing nature-based play rather than playgrounds, use sensor lighting, planting more trees, and expanding natural areas along the creek.
- Lack of facilities including seating, bins, shade, signage, dog facilities, park libraries and dog-ball sharing buckets.

4.4. CONSULTATION CONCLUSIONS

A broad cross-section of demographics were captured by the community consultation and highlighted the existing usage of open space, the valued facilities and features of open space in Merri-bek and the areas where open space facilities could be improved.

The input from the community consultation is a key consideration in the formulation of the Project Objectives as set out at **Section 6.4**. The key themes from the community consultation have been considered in the creation of the Objectives and has included establishing a specific methodology for assessing open space projects on their capacity to respond to a clear community need.

Key outcomes of the community consultation relevant to each suburb have been included in the analysis of each suburb in Section 8 and have informed the identification of recommended open space projects at the suburb level to develop the overall Projects List.

5. FORECAST CHANGE AND OPEN SPACE NEEDS

This Section has been informed by a range of data both publicly available and provided by Council for the years 2021-2041. Further forecasting may be required prior to implementation into the Planning Scheme, dependent on the timing of the Planning Scheme Amendment process to ensure the forecasting is current to the time period the Open Space Strategy is anticipated to cover.

5.1. FORECAST RESIDENTIAL GROWTH

5.1.1. EXISTING RESIDENTIAL POPULATION

The estimated residential population in 2021 was 195,418 (id.consulting, 2020). Merri-bek's residential population has increased in excess of 48,000 additional residents since 2011. On average between the years 2017-2019 Merri-bek had an average net population growth of 4,400 people per year.

In 2021, the largest age group is 25 to 29 followed closely by 30-34 year olds. Between 2016 and 2021, these two age groups showed the highest increase in population.

Merri-bek's current population comprises equal proportions of young workforce, those aged between 25 and 34 years old, and parents and homebuilders, aged between 35 and 49 years old. Collectively these two service age groups make up 44% of the current population. Compared to Greater Melbourne, there is a lower proportion of children under 18 years of age and persons aged 60 years and older in the City of Merri-bek.

The Moreland Open Space Strategy (2012-2022) anticipated that the 2011 population of 147,000 people would increase by 30,000 additional residents over a 20-year timeframe. The actual rate of growth in the last 10 years has resulted in a net population increase of more than 48,000 residents which far exceeds that forecast in the Moreland Open Space Strategy (2012-2022).

5.1.2. RESIDENTIAL POPULATION FORECASTS

As illustrated in Table 4 Merri-bek's population is forecast to increase by approximately 63,000 residents between the years 2021 and 2041 to 258,000 residents by 2041.

This increased level of population growth is due to higher levels of residential development with an average of 1,500 additional dwellings per annum. The resident population of all suburbs except Gowanbrae is expected to increase, with all suburbs except Gowanbrae and Hadfield projected to accommodate in excess of approximately 4,000 additional residents in the next 20 years. Most of this growth is to be accommodated within the suburbs of Brunswick, Brunswick East, Brunswick West, Coburg and Pascoe Vale. Collectively these suburbs will accommodate approximately 70% of the projected residential growth.

The age of the forecast population is expected to vary across the suburbs however the majority of the population aged between 0 and 49 years of age will be accommodated within the southern suburbs. Brunswick and Coburg alone will accommodate over 43% of all new residents aged between 20 and 39 years of age.

The distribution across the 5-year age groups remain relatively consistent with the 2016 census base data and the largest age groups remain 25 to 29 years, 30-34 years and 35 to 39 years and the smallest groups are those 70 years and older.

Whilst Brunswick and Coburg are projected to have the highest proportion of residents aged between 20 and 49 years of age, overall there is good diversity of age groups across all suburbs.

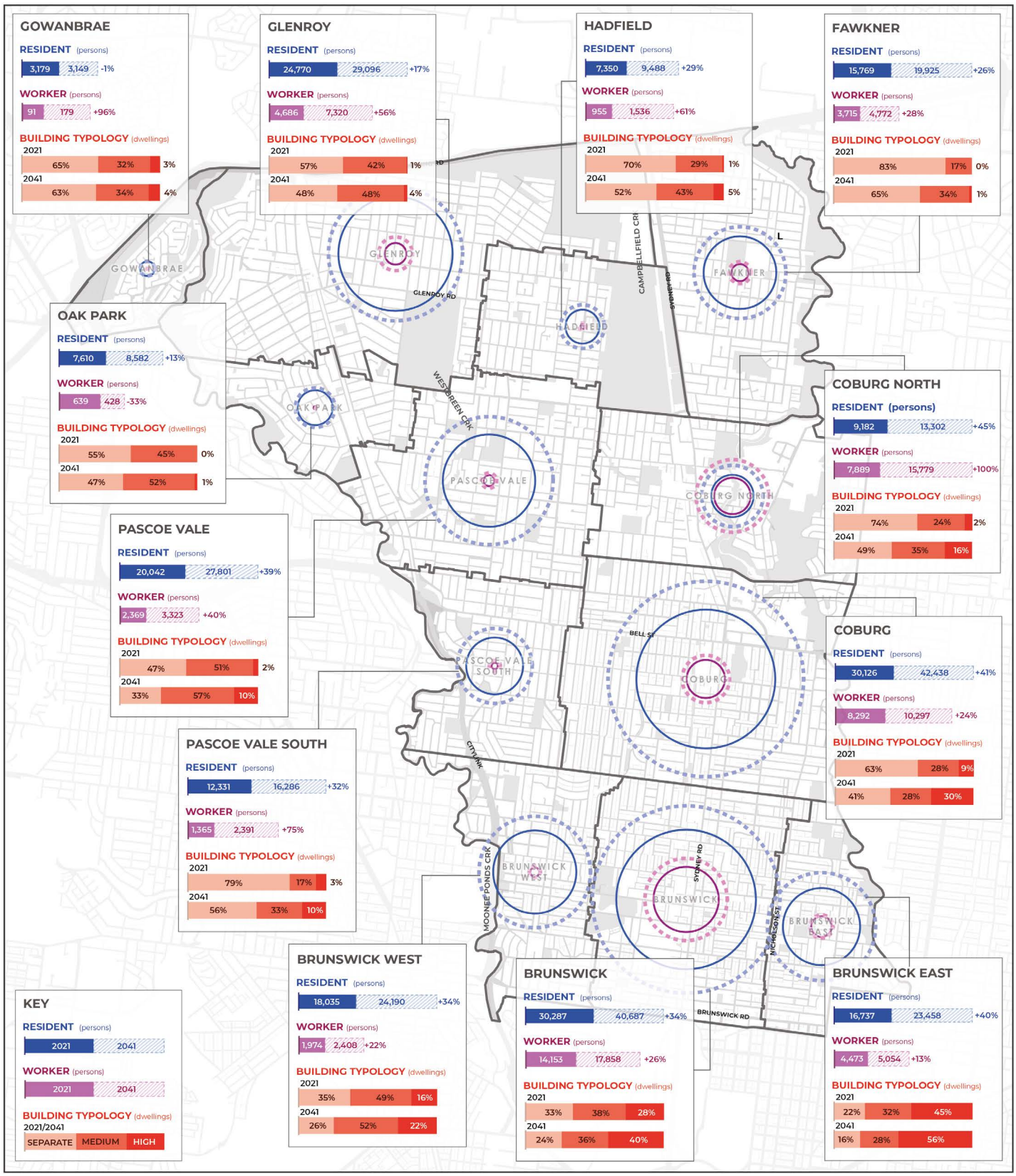
In 2021, there were 76,646 households of which 28% comprise of a couple with dependents, 24% couples without dependents and 27% of lone person households. This trend is consistent with the 2016 census data and is projected to continue through to 2041.

To accommodate the forecast residential growth it is anticipated that 27,440 additional households are required. By 2041, there will be the need for an additional 8,500 lone person households, followed by 6,800 households for both couples without dependents and couple families with dependents. Brunswick currently has the highest proportion of couples without dependents and lone person households and this trend is to continue through to 2041. Coburg has the highest number of couple families with dependents and this is forecast to continue of the next 20 years.

The residential population, dwellings and household forecasts for the 20 year horizon 2021-2041 have been developed by id. Consulting (November, 2020) by suburb. These forecasts were prepared prior to release of the 2021 Census data and are therefore based on the 2016 Census data and it does not consider the impacts of Covid-19. As a result, it is understood that the forecasts completed by id.consulting in 2020 potentially overestimate the projected population and dwellings forecasts. It is anticipated that updated forecast will need to be completed at a later date to refine forecasts and inform Planning Scheme implementation.

Suburb	2021 Resident Population	2041 Resident Population	Residential Population Change(2021-2041)	% Change
Brunswick	30,287	40,687	10,400	34%
Brunswick East	16,737	23,458	6,721	40%
Brunswick West	18,035	24,190	6,155	34%
Coburg	30,126	42,438	12,312	41%
Coburg North	9,182	13,302	4,120	45%
Fawkner	15,769	19,925	4,156	26%
Glenroy	24,770	29,096	4,326	17%
Gowanbrae	3,179	3,149	-30	-1%
Hadfield	7,350	9,488	2,138	29%
Oak Park	7,610	8,582	972	13%
Pascoe Vale	20,042	27,801	7,759	39%
Pascoe Vale South	12,331	16,286	3,955	32%
Total	195,418	258,402	62,984	32%

Table 4. Forecast Residential Population Change 2021-2041 by Suburb
(source: id consulting 2020)



DRAWING KEY

Suburb Boundary

Road

2021 (EXISTING)

Resident (persons): 16,000 - 30,000; 3,000 - 16,000; 0 - 3,000

Worker (persons): 3,000 - 14,000; 100 - 3,000; 0 - 100

2041 (PROJECTION)

Resident (persons): 22,000 - 42,000; 3,000 - 22,000; 0 - 3,000

Worker (persons): 4,000 - 18,000; 200 - 4,000; 0 - 200

N

0 1 2km

5.1.3. SETTLEMENT TYPE AND PROPOSED DISTRIBUTION

As noted above, the resident population of all suburbs except Gowanbrae is expected to increase. Id.consulting forecast that 27,440 additional households are required to accommodate the additional population which translates to an 29,010 additional dwellings by 2041 (this includes an allowance for unoccupied dwellings). Approximately 70% of the projected additional dwellings are to be accommodated within Brunswick, Brunswick East, Brunswick West, Coburg and Pascoe Vale which will result in higher densities across these suburbs.

Whilst the highest percentage of projected growth is forecast to be delivered within the southern suburbs, Table 5 illustrates that all suburbs with the exception of Gowanbrae are projected to experience a significant increase in population and dwellings compared with the current provision in 2021.

Suburb	2021 Dwellings	2041 Dwellings	Dwelling Change (2021-2041)	Suburb % of Total Dwelling Change	% Change
Brunswick	13,555	18,777	5,222	18%	39%
Brunswick East	7,849	11,136	3,287	11%	42%
Brunswick West	8,268	11,074	2,806	10%	34%
Coburg	11,949	17,892	5,943	20%	50%
Coburg North	3,633	5,399	1,766	6%	49%
Fawkner	5,414	6,873	1,459	5%	27%
Glenroy	9,519	11,473	1,954	7%	21%
Gowanbrae	1,239	1,285	46	0%	4%
Hadfield	2,878	3,759	881	3%	31%
Oak Park	2,935	3,413	478	2%	16%
Pascoe Vale	8,293	11,742	3,449	12%	42%
Pascoe Vale South	4,521	6,240	1,719	6%	38%
Total	**80,053**	**109,063**	**29,010**	**100%**	**36%**

Table 5. Forecast Private Dwelling Change 2021-2041
Source: id.consulting (2020)

By 2041, single person households are projected to replace couple families with dependents as the most common household type which will result in a decrease in household size over the next 20 years. As Merri-bek has no remaining greenfield land and little brownfield land, the majority of new homes will be medium density or high density dwellings as opposed to detached houses.

There has been a gradual shift in supply with the share of high density housing being delivered increasing in recent years. Between 2016 and 2021, new medium density and high density dwellings accounted for approximately 85% of all new dwellings over this 5 year period. This trend is set to continue with high density dwellings becoming the main housing type as new apartments are being constructed within the activity centres, particularly in the southern suburbs. Table 6 projects that over the next 20 years high density dwellings will comprise 50% of the total new supply required.

Suburb	High Density	Infill	Demand for Total Dwellings
Brunswick	3,578	1,644	5,222
Brunswick East	2,670	617	3,287
Brunswick West	1,146	1,660	2,806
Coburg	4,224	1,719	5,943
Coburg North	789	977	1,766
Fawkner	86	1,373	1,459
Glenroy	390	1,564	1,954
Gowanbrae	8	38	46
Hadfield	129	752	881
Oak Park	24	454	478
Pascoe Vale	964	2,485	3,449
Pascoe Vale South	478	1,241	1,719
Total	14,485	14,525	29,010

Table 6. Projected Dwelling Type by Suburb 2021 - 2041
(Source: Forecast ID 2020 dwelling projections for Merri- bek by suburb)

The distribution of housing supply by type across Merri-bek illustrates a spatial pattern that follows the following three groups.

Southern Suburbs

This includes the suburbs of Brunswick East, Brunswick, Brunswick West and Pascoe Value South. Over the last 15 years these suburbs have experienced the majority of high density dwelling growth and some medium density. This trend is projected to continue, and these suburbs are forecast to deliver 45% of all new housing supply, the majority of which will be high density.

Both the Coburg and Brunswick Major Activity Centres will play important roles in accommodating this growth. The Housing Capacity Study (2022) notes that activity centres in Brunswick East and Brunswick West will exceed their apartment capacity over the next 15 years. As a result, dwelling capacity within the Brunswick activity centre will likely be utilised to meet the supply requirements and Council will need to determine a preferred growth strategy going forward.

Central Suburbs

This includes the suburbs of Coburg, Coburg North and Pascoe Vale. These suburbs accommodate both medium and high density dwellings and the over the last 15 years the number of medium density dwellings delivered has increased rapidly. Between 2021-2041 these suburbs are projected to deliver an additional 11,158 dwellings comprising almost equal portions of medium and high density.

Northern Suburbs

This includes the suburbs of Fawkner, Hadfield, Glenroy, Gowanbrae and Oak Park. Housing growth in this part has been almost entirely medium density development, however as shown in Figure 8: Existing and Forecast Residential Population (2021-2041), Glenroy and Hadfield are projected to deliver additional high density dwellings by 2041.

Figure 9 illustrates the Merri-bek Housing Framework Plan which is included in Clause 02.04 of the Merri-bek Municipal Planning Strategy. Figure 9 shows that the significant housing change is to occur within the activity centres which are generally surrounded by incremental change areas.

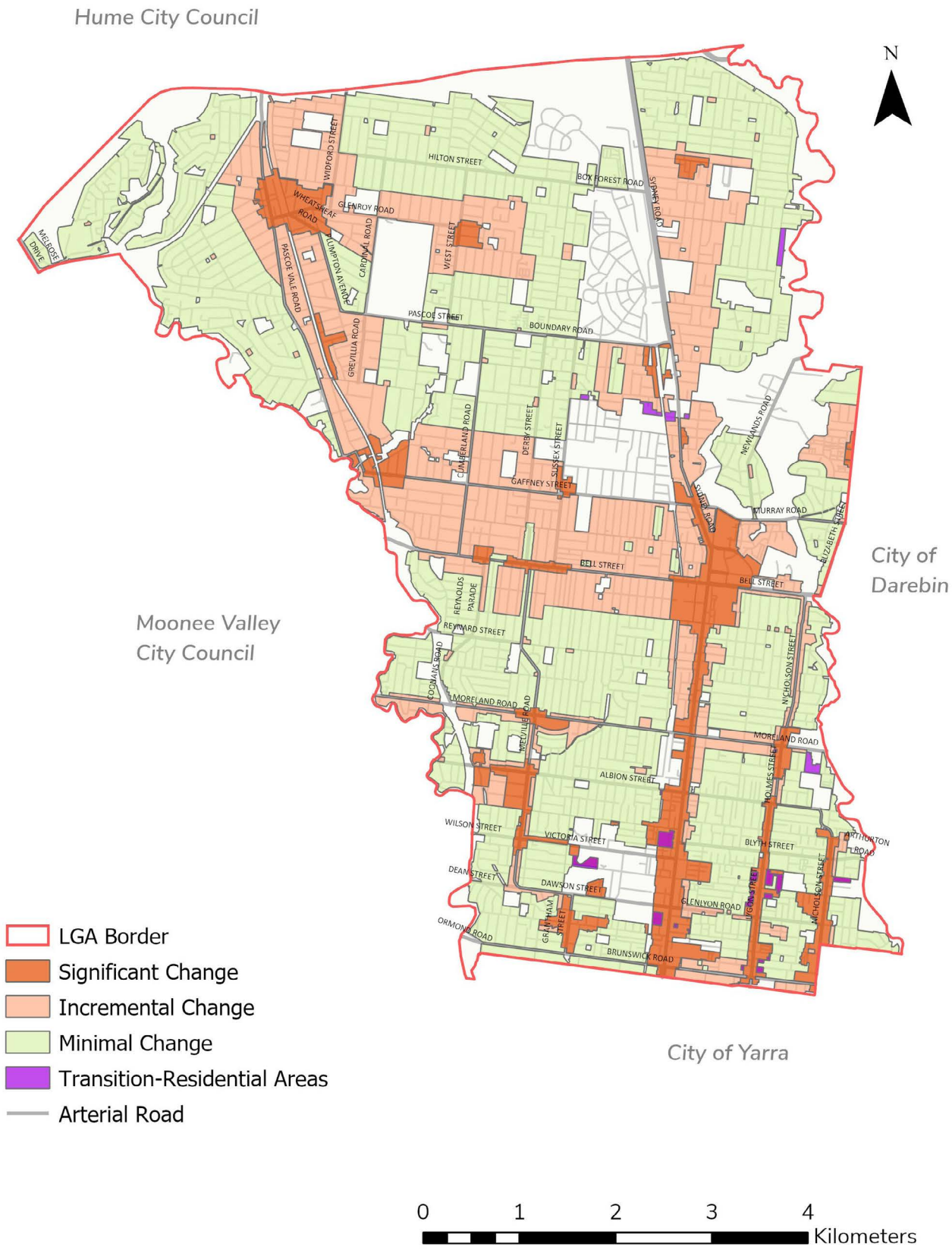


Figure 9. Merri-bek Housing Framework Plan (Clause 02.04)

5.2. FORECAST EMPLOYMENT GROWTH

5.2.1. EMPLOYMENT/WORKER POPULATION FORECASTS

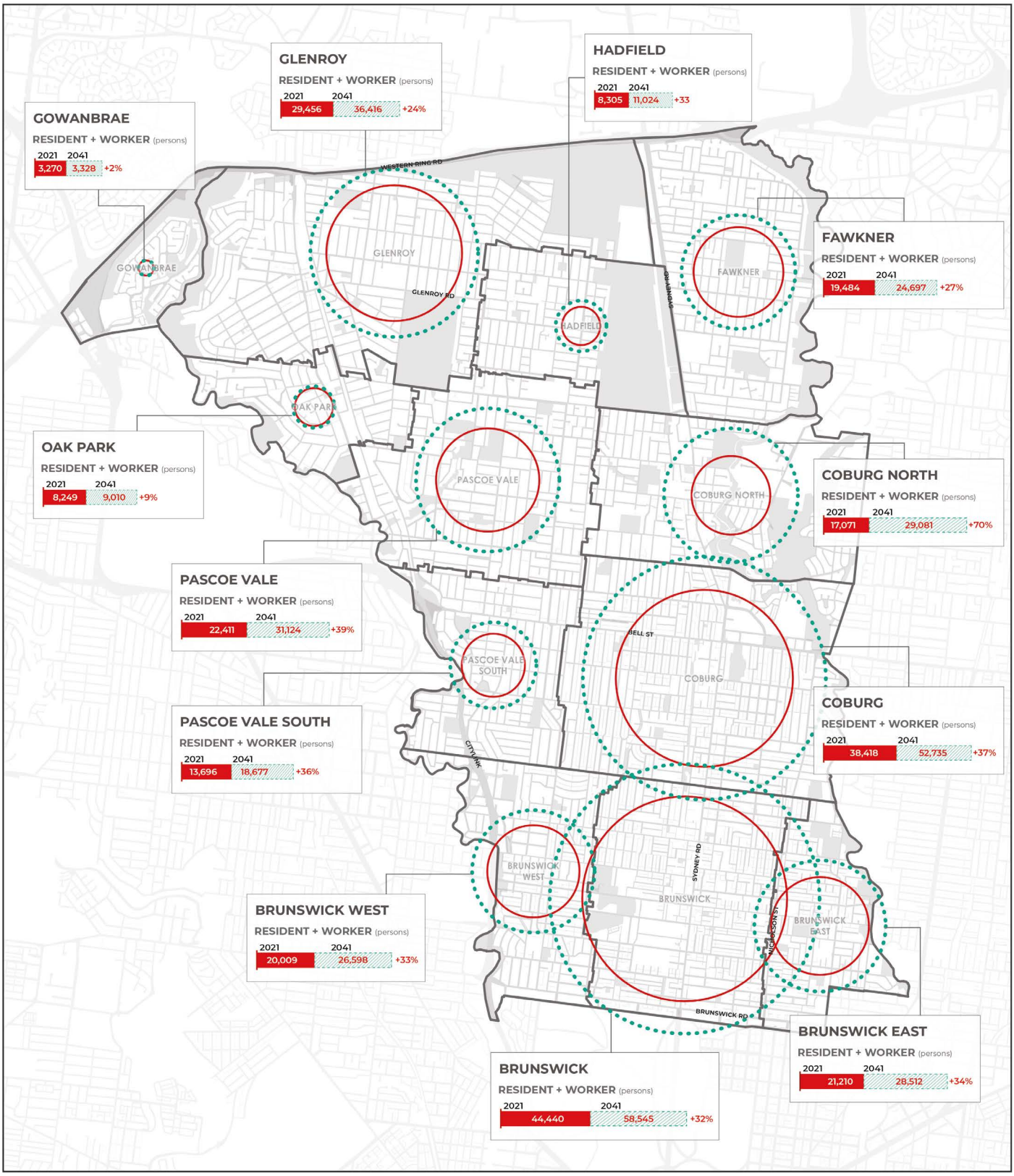
In 2021, Merri-bek was home to an estimated 50,600 jobs ('A Job in Moreland', HillPDA, 2020 - updated with 2023 property and subdivision data), requiring a diverse range of skills, services across many industries and occupations. .id Consulting (2021) notes that these jobs are provided by 14,333 businesses, many of which are micro and small businesses.

Several industries are identified as important drivers of future growth in Merri-bek. These 'strategic industries' have been categorised as large and growing (Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail and Food Services, Education and Training, and Construction), Emerging (Professional, Scientific and Technical Services) and Specialised (Creative and Cultural and Manufacturing) (.id Consulting, 2021).

The continued shift towards service sector jobs is likely to reinforce the importance of Merri-bek's bigger Activity Centres like Brunswick and Coburg. As illustrated in Table 7, the number of jobs provided in Merri-bek is forecast to increase by approximately 20,700.

Suburb	2021 Employment Population	2041 Employment Population	Employment Population Change (2021-2041)	%Change
Brunswick	14,153	17,858	3,704	26%
Brunswick East	4,473	5,054	581	13%
Brunswick West	1,974	2,408	433	22%
Coburg	8,292	10,297	2,005	24%
Coburg North	7,889	15,779	7,890	100%
Fawkner	3,715	4,772	1,057	28%
Glenroy	4,686	7,320	2,635	56%
Gowanbrae	91	179	87	96%
Hadfield	955	1,536	581	61%
Oak Park	639	428	-211	-33%
Pascoe Vale	2,369	3,323	954	40%
Pascoe Vale South	1,365	2,391	1,026	75%
Total	50,602	71,344	20,742	41%

Table 7. Forecast Employment Population Change 2021-2041 by Suburb
Source: 'A Job in Moreland', HillPDA 2020 - updated with 2023 property and subdivision data



DRAWING KEY

Suburb Boundary

Road

2021 (EXISTING)

Resident + Worker (persons)

- 20,000 - 44,000
- 3,000 - 20,000
- 0 - 3,000

2041 (PROJECTION)

Resident + Worker (persons)

- 28,000 - 51,000
- 3,000 - 28,000
- 0 - 3,000

N

0 1 2km

Figure 10. : Existing and Forecast Worker Population (2021-2041)

5.3. SUMMARY

Between 2021 and 2041, the Merri-bek municipality is projected to increase by 62,984 residents (32%) and 20,742 workers (41%) resulting in a residential population of 258,402 and worker population of 71,344 by 2041. It is estimated that 29,000 new dwellings will be required to accommodate the forecast additional residents. Approximately 70% of the projected additional dwellings are to be accommodated within Brunswick, Brunswick East, Brunswick West, Coburg and Pascoe Vale which will result in higher densities across these suburbs.

The majority of this growth is to occur within the existing activity centres which will comprise of higher density housing including townhouses and apartments. These high and medium density housing types will typically have limited backyard spaces and landscaping which will place greater pressure on existing open spaces and result in a greater need for new open space and the provision of high quality accessible open spaces.

This report clearly quantifies the projected growth and additional dwelling requirements across the suburbs and the anticipated location of this growth. This information, together with the analysis of the existing open space network is examined in further detail in the suburb analysis in Section 10.

Suburb	2021 Resident Population	Residential Population Change (2021-2041)	Total Jobs 2021	Total Jobs Change(2021-2041	Total Combined Residential and Worker Population Change (2021-2041)
Brunswick	30,287	10,400	14,153	3,704	14,104
Brunswick East	16,737	6,721	4,473	581	7,302
Brunswick West	18,035	6,155	1,974	433	6,588
Coburg	30,126	12,312	8,292	2,005	14,317
Coburg North	9,182	4,120	7,889	7,890	12,010
Fawkner	15,769	4,156	3,715	1,057	5,213
Glenroy	24,770	4,326	4,686	2,635	6,961
Gowanbrae	3,179	-30	91	87	57
Hadfield	7,350	2,138	955	581	2,719
Oak Park	7,610	972	639	-211	761
Pascoe Vale	20,042	7,759	2,369	954	8,713
Pascoe Vale South	12,331	3,955	1,365	1,026	4,981
Total	195,418	62,984	50,602	20,742	83,726

Table 8. Summary of Residential and worker population Change

6. OPEN SPACE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

6.1. OVERVIEW OF FRAMEWORK

This Section outlines a clear framework through which open space in Merri-bek is described, analysed and assessed. This will then allow the scale, scope and quality of existing assets to help guide the prioritisation of future open space projects.

The purpose of the framework is to:

+ Establish a clear picture of the existing open space network in Merri-bek and define its existing characteristics, hierarchy, functions and infrastructure assets.
+ Establish appropriate catchments for each open space in the overall open space network to facilitate the identification of 'gap' areas, areas of underservicing
+ Identify the key goals and objectives that are sought to be achieved in the development of future open space projects
+ Outline the types of gap analysis that will be undertaken to help identify future open space projects that respond to the key goals and objectives
+ Outline how future open space projects should be assessed against the identified objectives.

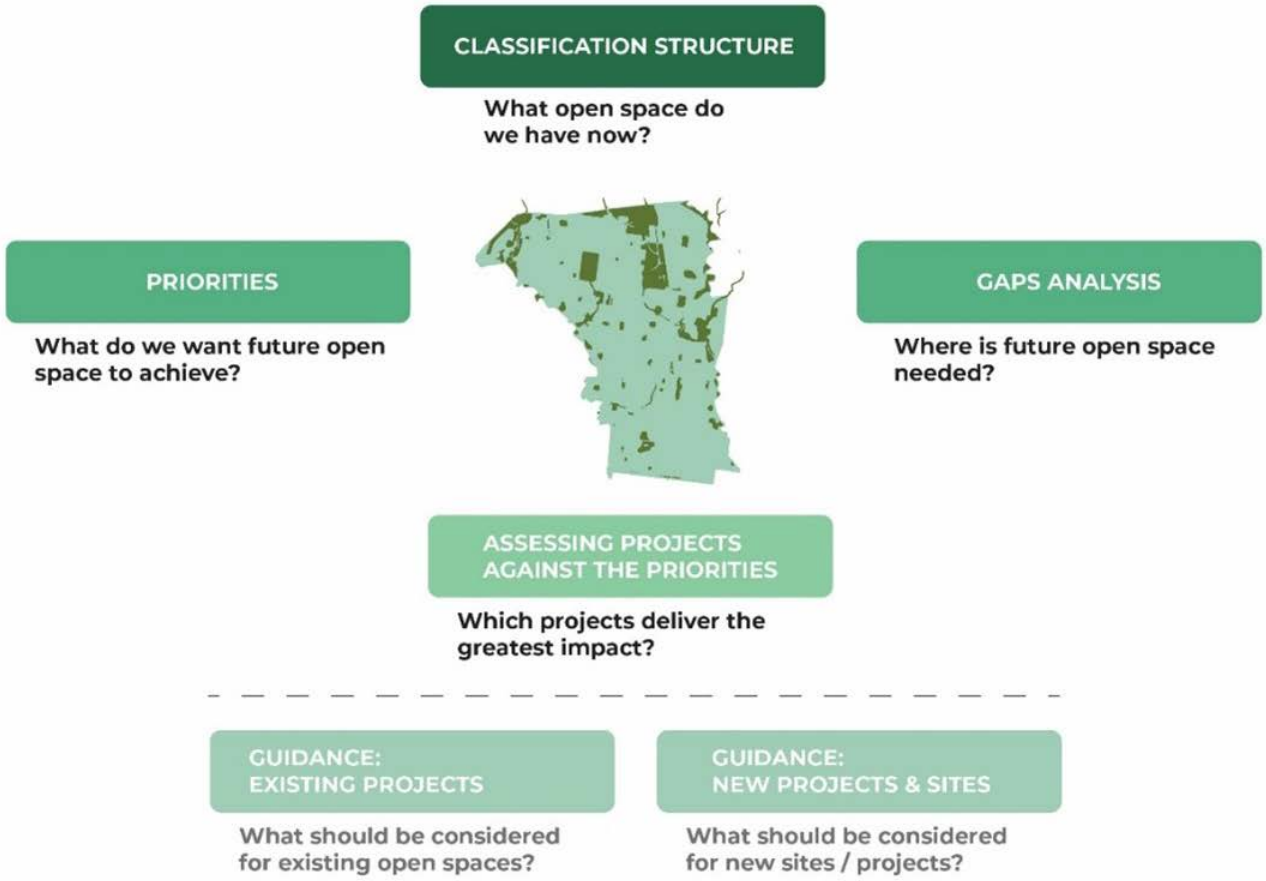


Figure 11. Open Space Framework Diagram

This Section is comprised of the following subSections:

6.1.1. CLASSIFICATION STRUCTURE

The classification structure outlines the system through which the key characteristics of public open space within the municipality have been documented. This classification system establishes a consistent approach to the identification of open space within the municipality to facilitate subsequent analysis for the purposes of understanding what open space assets currently exist and what future open space projects might deliver.

The classification structure is made up of a number of different parameters which together, provide a clear description of the role and contribution of any given open space within the broader open space network. These parameters are:

Definition

A description of the land's level of 'publicness': This parameter distinguishes whether the open space is fully accessible public land, public land with some level of restricted access or function, or private land.

Hierarchy:

A description of the scale and significance of the open space within the context of the open space network. An accessibility catchment (measured in metres from the edge of the open space) is attributed to each type of open spaces based on its level of significance with smaller open spaces servicing a smaller catchment while larger open space provide a larger catchment. This parameter assists in distinguishing smaller open spaces, intended to service the immediate neighbourhood, from district and regional open spaces which offer open space amenities that are likely to attract users from further afield, both within and beyond the municipality.

Functions

A description of the types of uses and activities that the open space primarily caters for. This parameter identifies whether the park offers clear spaces intended for specific functions encompassing a range of functions such as play, formal sports or conservation/wetland areas. The purpose of this parameter is to understand the types of functions that the open space facilitates. This parameter adopts a 'tag' like approach with multiple functions able to be attributed to a single open space.

Elements

This Section Identifies and describes individual furnishing, fixtures or assets within an open space that contribute to their functionality and operation. This parameter captures whether a park includes lighting, play equipment, bocce courts, seats, BBQ's and a myriad of other elements.

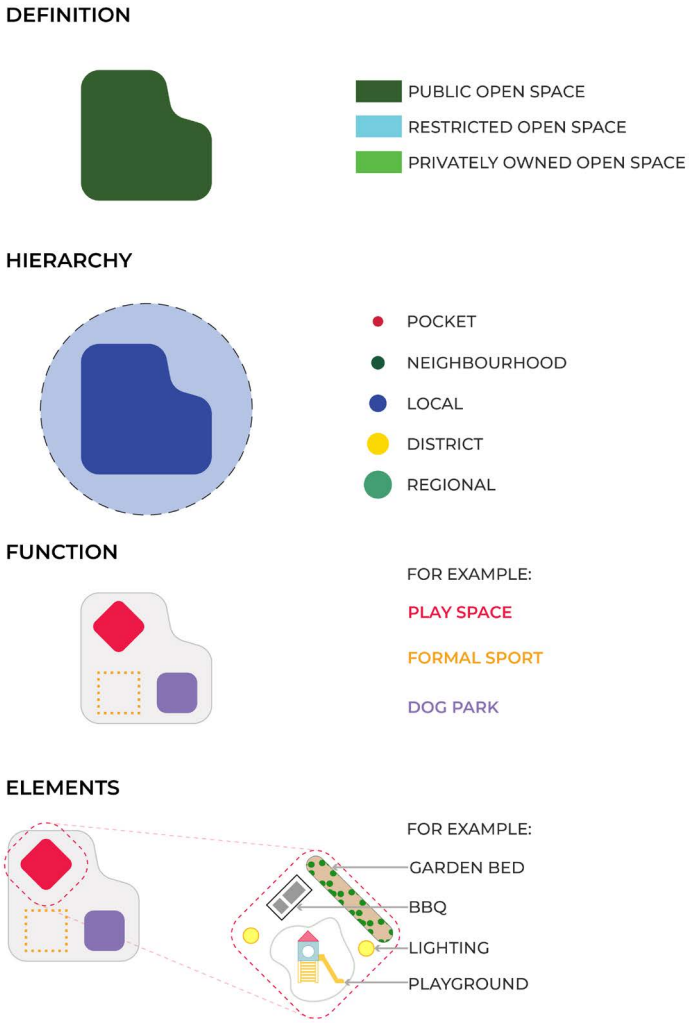


Figure 12.Classification Structure

6.1.2. CHARACTERISTICS

Supporting the classification structure are two additional parameters – Form and Landscape Setting – which are also identified to help provide a more holistic understanding of the types of open spaces located within the municipality.

These characteristics have been separated from the other classification parameters as they are considered to have less impact on the assessment for the future need for open space within the municipality. These characteristics are:

Form

Describes the shape and spatial qualities of an open space. This assists in identifying linear reserves from more regularly shaped formal parks or from organically shaped linear creek corridor reserves each which have their own spatial limitations. In combination with information from the classifications structure (such as hierarchy and function), this information provides an opportunity to identify specific open space projects that may be more conducive to a certain form of open space, such as a shared path along a linear reserve.

Landscape Setting

This describes the dominant landscape setting within the open space. This provides an understanding of the diversity of landscape settings offered within the municipality's open space network as well as the opportunity to review and consider the appropriateness of an existing landscape setting within the open space's broader context (such as a creek corridor).

6.1.3. OBJECTIVES

This sub-section introduces the key Objectives which define the objectives for future open space projects, outlining the goals of Council's Open Space Strategy. The purpose of these Objectives is to guide the selection and prioritisation of future open space projects to ensure that they deliver outcomes that align with the goals and vision of the Open Space Strategy. All future open spaces are intended to be evaluated against their ability to achieve one or all of these Objectives.

Each Objective has been identified and confirmed through analysis and discussion with Council to directly address the opportunities and challenged faced in the municipality. This evaluation helps establish the order of priority between differing open space projects, impacting the order of the Projects List and implementation.

6.1.4. ASSESSING OPEN SPACE PROJECTS AGAINST THE OBJECTIVES

This sub-section outlines how open space projects are assessed against the Objectives using a range of indicators as Key Considerations. These provide a mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators to support the assessment of an open space project's impact in the delivery of one or more of the Objectives. Key considerations include the extent to which an open space project reduces or services a gap area as illustrated in a gaps analysis (quantitative) to whether the project responds to a substantiated and known community need (qualitative).

6.1.5. GAPS ANALYSIS

This sub-section outlines the methodology of the gaps analysis that has been undertaken to establish areas of no, low or limited open space coverage and the range of analysis that has taken place from simple accessibility to a public open space of any kind, to more nuanced catchment analysis based on the relative hierarchy of each open space, to specialised gaps analysis looking at accessibility within the municipality to specific functions (such as proximity to a dog park).

Guidance – upgrades to existing open spaces

This sub-section provides additional information on the factors that should be considered in the evaluation of upgrades to existing open spaces.

Guidance – new projects and site acquisition

This sub-section provides additional information on the factors that should be considered in the evaluation of new projects and site acquisitions noting that some of these considerations are intrinsically different to an upgrade of an existing open space area.

6.2. CLASSIFICATION STRUCTURE

6.2.1. DEFINITION

This parameter denotes the nature of the land and the level to which it is utilised as 'public' open space within Merri-bek. 'Public open space' in this strategy means public land and waters that provide for outdoor recreation, leisure, environmental and cultural benefits and/or visual amenity.

Three definitions of open space are utilised within this report denoting land as either **public, restricted or privately owned** open space. For the purpose of this Technical Report, 'public open space' has been abbreviated to 'open space'.

These definitions have been based on and refined from the definitions established in Victoria's open space strategic framework . ***Open Space for Everyone (DTP, 2021).***

The inclusion of waterway within restricted public open space is a key inclusion to denote its primary purpose as a waterway rather than as a public open space. While the vast majority of the time the community enjoys unlimited access to these spaces, their role as a conveyor of water, particularly during storm events, distinguishes these spaces from more conventional public open spaces which have been created exclusively for their open space purpose.

It is important to note that the identification of an open space as a restricted public open space does not necessarily reduce its value as a functioning public open space that delivers public benefit to the community.

This Technical Report is focussed on the analysis and provision of public open space within Merri-bek and consequently does not assess privately owned open spaces. Privately owned open space includes a myriad of spaces ranging from small residential backyards to private grounds and sprawling golf courses. This Technical Report only identifies privately open spaces where they are of such a size or significance within the municipality that they warrant consideration as potentially contributory elements. While these significant privately open spaces are not public and do not provide any meaningful access to local residents, they are identified in this Technical Report as their contributory elements may influence the function and opportunities within adjacent or nearby open spaces which have an opportunity to leverage any benefits of their proximity to these privately owned open spaces (such as through extending existing biodiversity corridors).

Category	Public Open Space	Restricted Open Space	Privately Owned Open Space
Description	Open space that is **publicly owned and managed**, either by local council, state government or public authority. It is accessible by the public at all times and serves a primary purpose for active and passive recreation, leisure and amenity.	Open space that is **publicly owned and managed** but is **restricted in either accessibility or function** through closing times or paid membership, or through its primary purpose being for a use other than recreation, leisure or amenity (registered waterway)	**Open space that is privately owned and managed**. The open space may provide direct or indirect public benefit but the ongoing use of the land for public benefit is not in the control of either local council, state government or a public authority.
Contributory	Contributory to the public open space network	Contributory to the public open space network	Not contributory to the public open space network
Examples	Parks, squares, plazas, pocket parks	Formal sports facilities with controlled entry such as tennis courts, waterways, community gardens	Private golf courses, race courses, school grounds
Merri-bek Examples	Bulleke-bek Park, Gilpin Park and Coburg Railway Station Reserve.	Coburg Olympic Swimming Pool, Brunswick Bowling Club and Box Forest Retarding Basin	Northern Golf Course

Table 9. List of Open Space Definition

The following map outlines all open spaces based on definition.

Figure 13. Open Space Definition

6.2.2. HIERARCHY

Hierarchy seeks to establish the scale and role of an open space within the open space network. This is primarily based of the open space's size with larger open spaces generally being of greater significance, and catering for a larger user catchment than smaller open spaces which cater for more local open space needs. Through this categorisation we establish a hierarchy with larger open spaces fulfilling a district or regional role while smaller open spaces fulfil a local or neighbourhood role.

MOSS 2012-2022 included three different classifications of hierarchy (identified as catchment tiers in MOSS 2012-2022). These were local, district and regional. In the context of Merri-bek's dramatic population growth coupled with more diverse community open space needs, there is a recognised requirement to refine and expand the existing open space hierarchy to represent a greater range of spaces. This is, particularly important at the smaller end of the hierarchy scale where higher density redevelopment in Merri-bek is giving rise to the need for the delivery of smaller pocket and neighbourhood spaces to support a more compact, inner city living style.

As a result, the hierarchy has been expanded from three to five with open spaces being classified (in order of largest to smallest) as either regional, district, local, neighbourhood or pocket. These classifications have built on the existing hierarchy and utilised terminology consistent with current industry best practice including references to State documents including the Metropolitan Open Space Network Provision and Distribution (VPA, June 2017) and Open Space for Everyone (DTP, 2021).

Catchments have been applied to each of the hierarchy classifications which are proportional to the immediate area the open space is intended to service, for the purposes of providing close and convenient access to open space. Smaller open spaces are assigned smaller catchment areas as their role is intended to provide open space to more local residents. Larger open spaces have larger catchment areas as they are intended to cater for more local residents. Further, larger open spaces are acknowledged to typically include a greater number of functions and are consequently more attractive destinations which residents and workers would be reasonably expected to travel longer distances to. It is acknowledged that users of parks will come from anywhere and everywhere as desired to utilise parks. Particularly attractive parks or open spaces with unique features may attract destination based visits from outside their catchment areas. The catchment areas do not seek to define the total area of influence of an open space and the finite area from which users will be drawn to the open space. Rather the catchment area utilised to define a reasonable catchment to an open space within which residents and workers are considered to have convenient, walkable access to open space – a key goal of the Open Space Strategy, the Merri-bek Planning Scheme and fundamental principle within Victoria's leading open space policy, Open Space for Everyone (DTP, 2021).

Regional vs District: Why the distinction?

Regional and district scale open spaces both represent open spaces of significant size and importance but there is an important difference.

Regional open spaces represent exceptionally large or unique open spaces within the municipality that have a strong connection to the regional context well beyond the municipal boundaries. This includes creek corridors, metropolitan significant parks (such as Royal Park) as well as recognised clusters of open spaces that create a regionally significant 'precinct'. District open spaces do not share these attributes and represent the largest discrete open spaces and occur wholly within the municipality.

Further discussion of the open space hierarchy including a breakdown of each open space category is provided at **Objective 2** of **Section 6.4**.

Refer to **Section 6.6** for a description of the Hierarchy Catchment Gap Analysis based on the open space hierarchy and associated walking catchments.

Table 10 sets out the open space hierarchy by size, catchment and purpose.

Hierarchy	Size (sqm)	Local Catchment	Purpose and function
Regional	**Undefined**	**500 meters** The report acknowledges that regional open space typically attract users beyond the local area. The gaps analysis undertaken in this report is concerned with identifying the total catchment within an easy convenient walking distance - not the total possible catchment.. Consequently a catchment of 500 meters has been applied to regional open spaces to reflect convenient walking access.	Open space that forms part of a larger open space (or linked sequence of open spaces) that continues beyond the boundaries of the municipality, is a regional destination attracting users from within and beyond the municipality and/or provides protection of regionally significant environmental and biodiversity values. **An undefined number** of functions are expected to be offered in these open spaces. Examples of Regional open spaces in Merri-bek include: - Moonee Ponds Creek and Merri-Creek - Royal and Princes Parks (adjacent in the City of Melbourne)

Hierarchy	Size (sqm)	Local Catchment	Purpose and function
District	**30,000+ sqm**	**500m** A walking distance of 500 meters is applied to these spaces as they have the potential to provide a number of functions and/or facilities to both the nearby population but also to the municipality more broadly. People within Merri-bek or adjacent municipalities may also be expected to travel by car to these open spaces.	Provides open space to the municipal or district population, but also, to a lesser extent, services users from other municipalities. These open spaces provide functions and/or facilities that service residents and workers across the municipality including formal and informal sporting facilities, lager scale recreation or play facilities, historical sites of significance. **5 or more functions** can be offered in these open spaces. Examples include Brunswick Parklands and Jones Park.
Local	**5000-29,999 sqm**	**400m** A walking distance of 400 meters is applied to these spaces as they provide a function that is generally servicing the local and/or suburb population. These open spaces should be in easy walking distance for both residents and workers of Merri-bek.	Provides for an open space to a local or suburb level population that is in safe walking distance from a dwelling or workplace. **A minimum of 4 functions** are expected to be provided in these open spaces, for example a play space (playground), formal and informal space (oval and basketball half court) and passive recreation (seating and shelter).
Neighborhood	**1,000-4,999 sqm**	**300m** A walking distance of 300 meters is applied to these spaces as they provide a neighbourhood function generally servicing the nearby population and/or a subsegment of a suburb. These open spaces are in easy walking distance for both residents and workers of Merri-bek.	Provides for accessible open space to a neighbourhood population that is in safe walking distance from a dwelling or workplace. **A minimum of 3 functions** can be provided in these open spaces, for example an informal sport (small pump track), horticulture (community garden), linking space (connecting path or walking loop). Examples include Anderson Park, Bell Street Reserve and Jack Mutton Reserve.
Pocket	**<1000sqm**	**200m** A walking distance of 200 meters is applied to these open spaces as they provide open space intended to provide convenient and or/ incidental function. They are of a size that limits the total number of users of the open space and consequently are intended to service the immediate population within a few streets of the open space and transient visitor/workers through the area. These open spaces are in easy and accessible walking distance for both residents and workers of Merri-bek.	Provides for incidental or convenient open spaces to the population in the immediate vicinity, both dwellings and workplaces. These open spaces can offer small instances of greenery or canopy cover in a street or a pause point with a playground. These open spaces can act a both pauses in a journey or as a destination. **Between 2 and 3 functions** are expected to be offered in these open spaces such as passive recreation (seating or shelter), nature conservation (native tree planting) and or/utility function (easement).

Table 10. List of Open Space Hierarchy

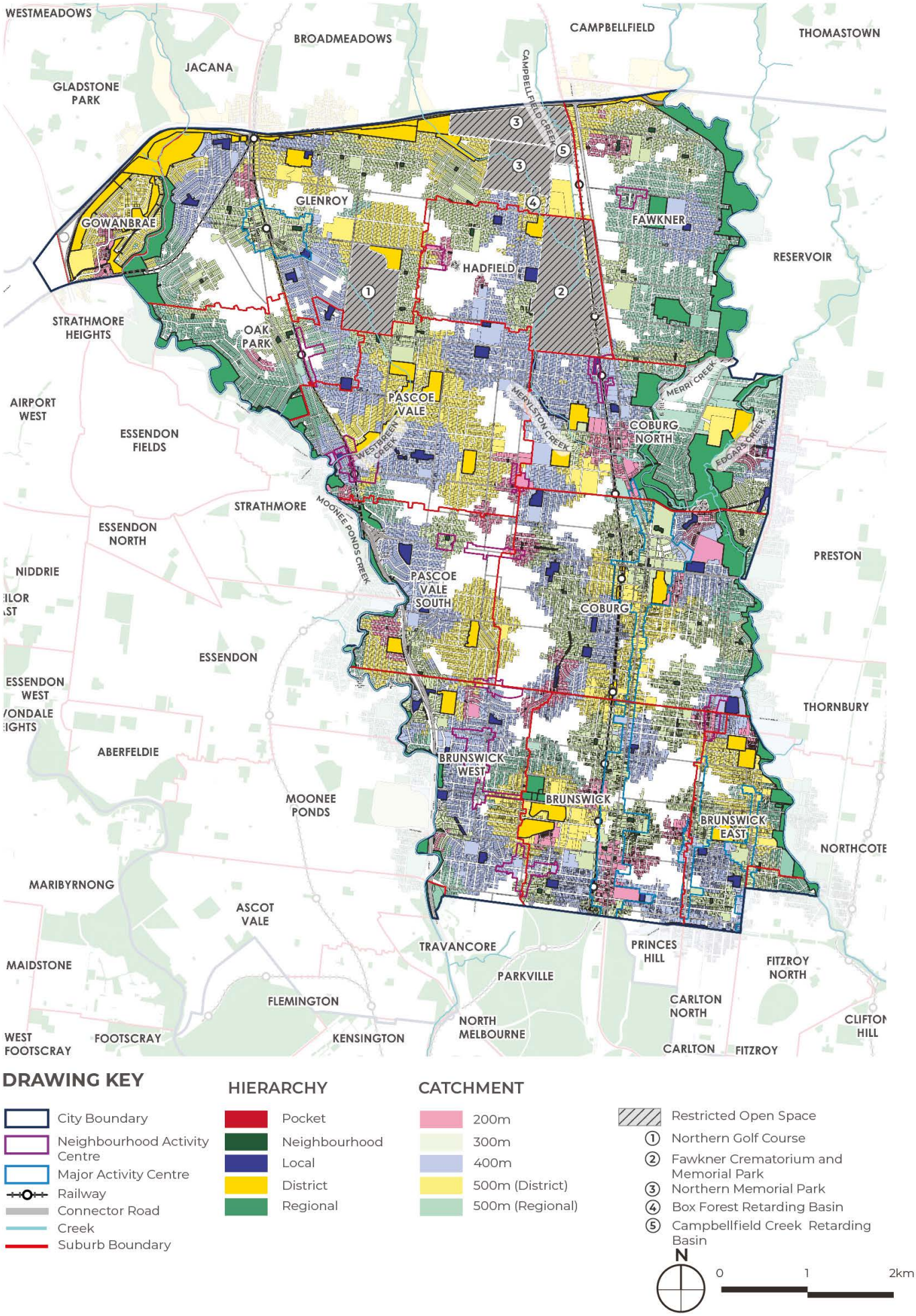


Figure 14. Municipal Hierarchy Catchment

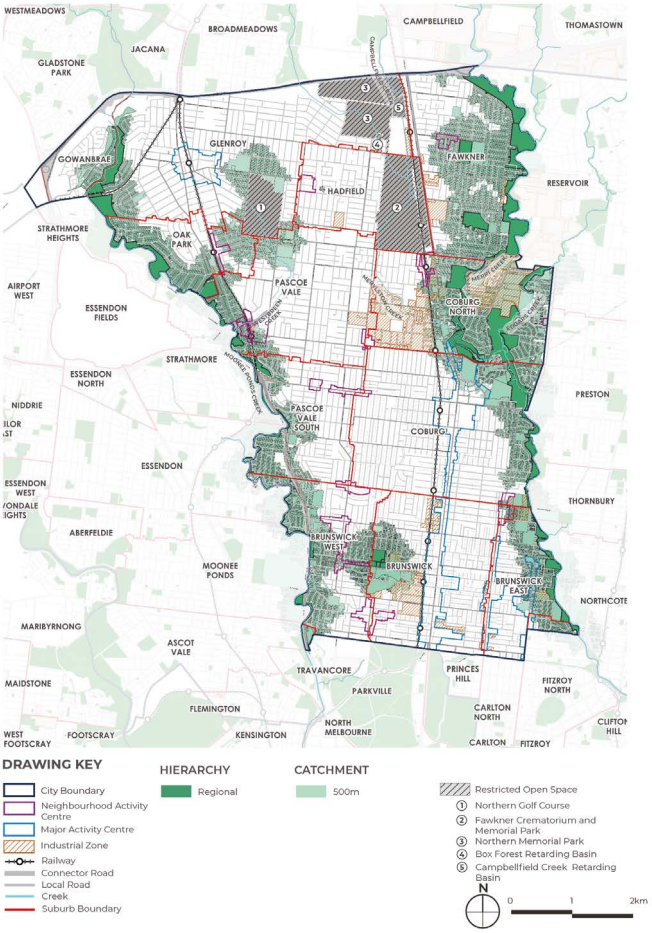


Figure 15. Regional Park Catchment

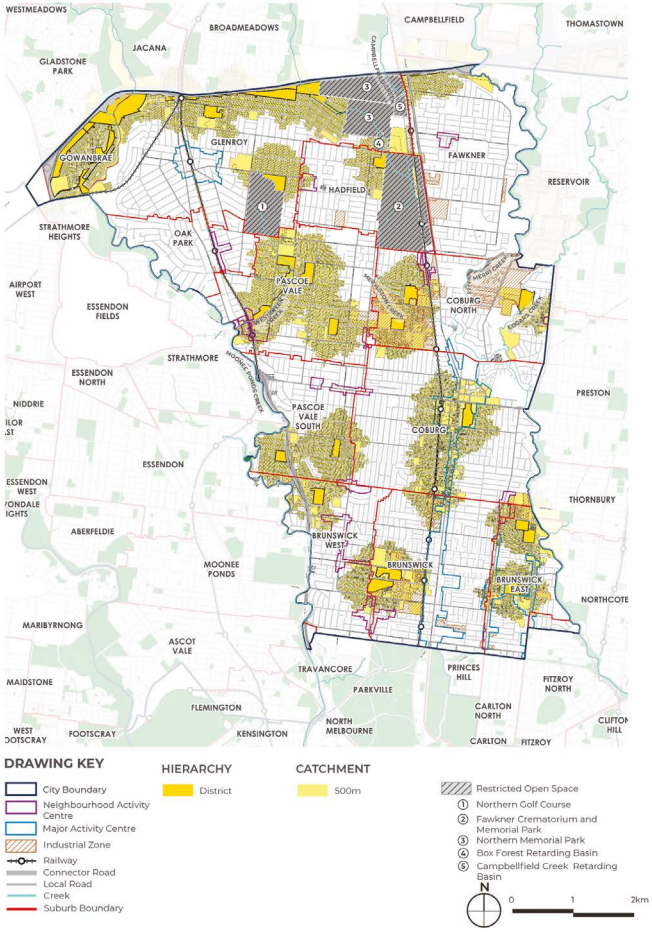


Figure 16. District Park Catchment

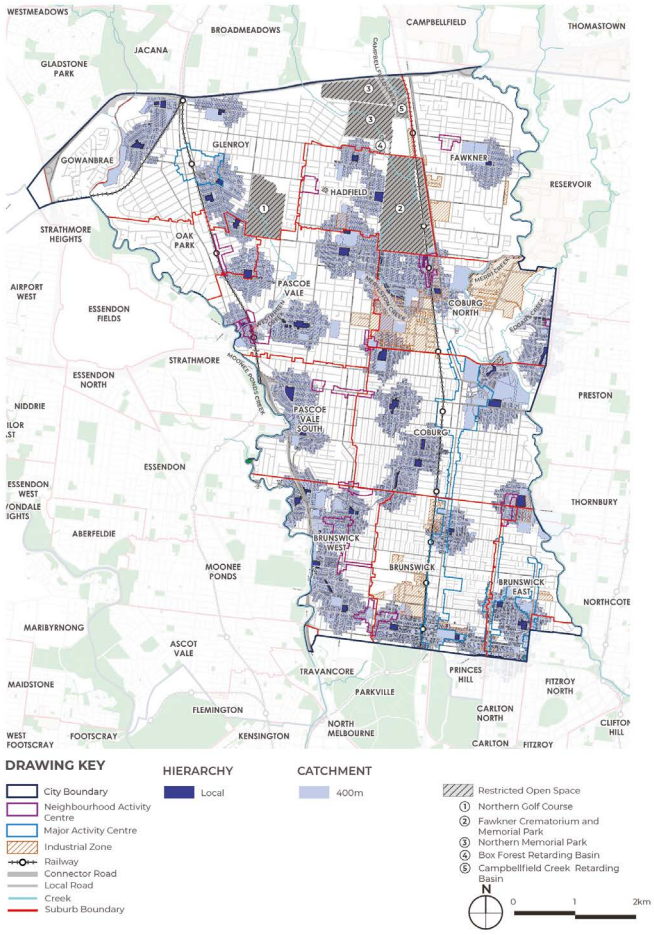


Figure 17. Local Park Catchment

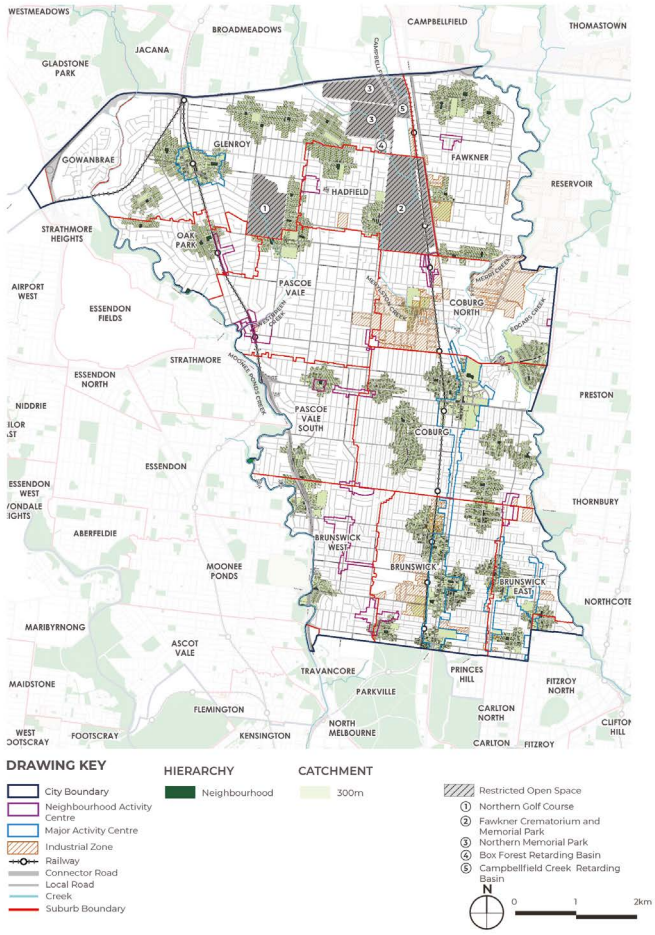


Figure 18. Neighbourhood Park Catchment

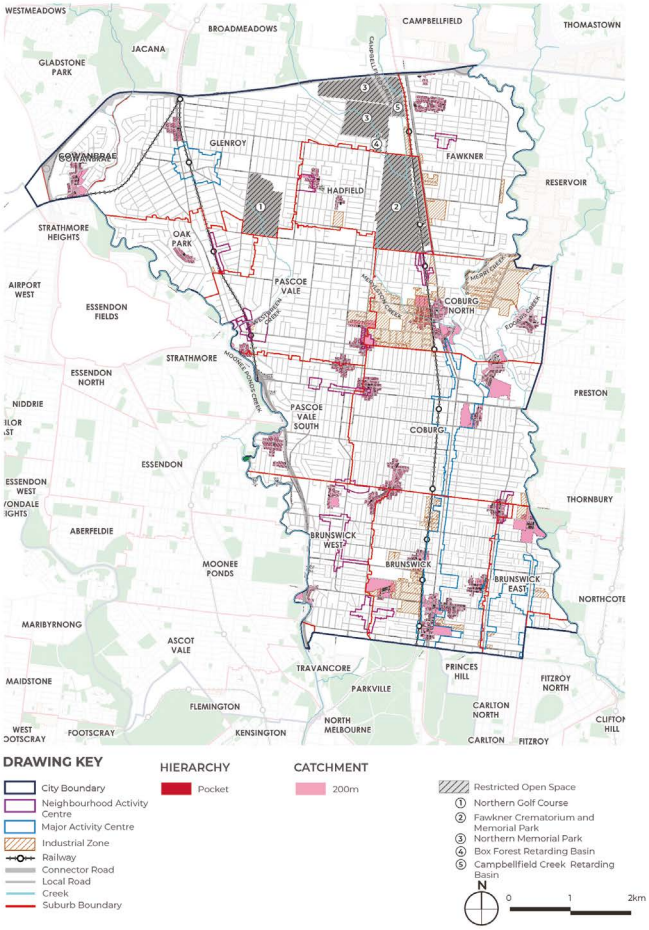


Figure 19.Pocket Park Catchment

6.2.3. FUNCTIONS

Functions describe the types of uses and activities that the open space primarily cater for. This parameter identifies whether the park offers clear spaces intended for specific functions such as play, formal sports or conservation/wetland areas.

The list of functions (see Table 11 below) builds upon and refines the 'List of Primary Classifications' from MOSS 2012-2022 which outlined a total of 11 primary function classifications. These primary functions have been refined to 14 functions introducing some additional functions to better reflect the increasing diversity of open space within Merri-bek as well as rationalising some existing function classifications.

This Technical Report applies functions to an open space as a series of 'tags', allowing for multiple functions to be attributed to a single space, rather than a single 'primary function' being identified for an open space that is genuinely multi-functional. Through this 'tag' approach a fuller picture is established of what type of open space offering is provided in any given open space.

This system avoids identifying 'primary' and 'secondary' uses in favour of the 'tags' based approach to ensure that a primary function (such as formal sports) is not privileged over a 'secondary' function (such as dog park) when both play an equally important role for different segments of the community (people who want to play sport and people who want to run their dog off-lead). The 'tag' system captures the multi-functional nature of open space and acknowledges that differing segments of the community will value open space for different functions, be it through providing formal sports opportunities, passive parklands, dog-off lead areas or conservation areas.

The Functions list of possible open space uses is not exhaustive. This Technical Report acknowledges that the varying ways open spaces can be used are virtually unlimited and the community will utilise spaces in increasingly creative and diverse ways into the future. A function is identified where the innate qualities, design or assets and infrastructure of the open space clearly support certain functions taking place in the open space. A 'common-sense' approach is taken to the identification of functions upon visual inspection of the open space, generally occupying sufficient area to provide its function meaningfully.

Function	Definition	Example
Linking Space	Open Spaces which clearly facilitate through movement between two public streets or other public spaces. They include infrastructure such as a path or walking trail that clearly indicate and facilitate the public link.	Anderson Reserve
Play Space	Open spaces that provide clearly identifiable opportunities for play through play features specifically intended for that purpose (including natural elements such as logs or rocks for wild/nature play opportunities)	Doug Hill Adventure Park
Formal Sport	Open spaces designed to accommodate organised sporting pursuits for example baseball, soccer, lawn bowls or cricket	AC Gillon Reserve
Informal Sport	Open spaces that provide clearly identifiable opportunities for sports that are not associated with organised sporting activities and can occur on an informal or ad-hoc basis. These include half-courts, unfenced bocce court and pump / BMX tracks.	Jones Reserve (BMX track)
Civic Space	Open spaces that provide a space for gathering and other activities in a primarily formal urban setting.	Pentridge Piazza

Function	Definition	Example
Nature Conservation	Open space where a significant area provides vegetation and landscape that contributes primarily to the retention and strengthening of local ecological and biodiversity values. These can typically occur within areas identified under environmental overlays within the Planning Scheme including the LSIO, ESO and SBO.	Merri Creek Linear Reserve
Creek Corridor	Open space that is located within 50m of an identified creek or is contiguous with open spaces (or a series of open spaces) that ultimately link to open space located within 50m of an identified creek. Open spaces identified with this function need to demonstrate some level of positive contribution to the ecological value of the creek corridor, whether through the provision of tree canopy, or retention in some form of creek corridor environments.	Edgars Creek Parkland
Heritage	Open Space that includes areas or structures of known heritage value (typically through inclusion within a site-specific heritage overlay) or celebrates and highlights heritage elements in the surrounding area (such as through deliberate view lines to heritage structures).	Pentridge Piazza
Memorial Park	Open spaces that includes areas dedicated to the memory of people or events.	Fawkner Cemetery
Passive Recreation	Open space that intentionally provide areas for flexible informal recreation including gathering, rest, relaxation and contemplation.	Bulleke-bek Park
Utility	Open space that has a clear purpose in accommodating utility infrastructure including the accommodation of electric supply lines, gas pipes or water supply infrastructure. Areas of open space designated for drainage / water quality treatment functions, floodway or retardation.	Box Forest Retarding Basin
Horticulture	Open space that includes a dedicated area for horticultural or agricultural recreation activities.	Robinson Reserve (Reynard Street Community Garden)
Dog Park	Open spaces that include designated off-lead areas for dogs, whether that is in fenced or unfenced environments.	Brady Reserve
Undeveloped	Open spaces which have no other identifiable function. This 'function' is only attributed to open spaces where no other single function applies (including utility)	Jewell Crescent Reserve

Table 11. List of Open Space Functions

6.2.4. ELEMENTS

Identifies and describes the open space infrastructure and features present within an open space. This infrastructure typically supports the identified functions but may also include individual or isolated elements which do not necessarily trigger the identification of the site for a specific function (e.g. The provision of a bench element is not sufficient to warrant identification of the entire open space as having a 'passive recreation' function in and of itself). The names of the elements are intended to be self-explanatory and do not require individual descriptions. The individual condition or quality of each element is not identified through this classification structure.

The list of open space elements is not an exhaustive list of all possible open space elements but represents those elements present within the open space network within Merri-bek. It has been informed by existing Council data and created through desktop and visual assessment of open spaces.

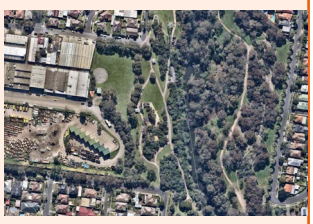
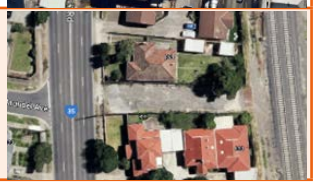
Elements			
Playground	Signage	Cricket Wicket	Velodrome (Track)
Play Shade	Table and Chairs	Cricket Net	Skate Park
Accessible and All Abilities Play	Wetland	Cricket Pitch	Exercise Equipment
Nature Play	Shared User Path	Cricket Pitch oval	Synthetic Sport Field
Sandpit	Lighting (Path)	Tennis Court	Table Tennis
Off-leash Dog Park	Lighting (Park)	Soccer Pitch	BMX
Enclosed Dog Park	Community Garden	Bocce Court	Wi-Fi
Toilet	Obstacle Course (Playground)	Croquet Green	Shotput
DDA Toilet	Garden Bed	Bowling Green	Baseball
Barbecue	Seat	Oval	Discus
Carpark	Multi-use Courts	Athletics - Field	
Drinking Tap	Basketball Full Court	Athletics- Track	
DDA Drinking Tap	Basketball Half Court	Long Jump Pit	

Table 12. List of Open Space Elements

6.3. OPEN SPACE CHARACTERISTICS

6.3.1. FORM

Form describes the shape and spatial qualities of an open space. This assists in identifying linear reserves from more regularly shaped formal parks or from organically shaped linear creek corridor reserves each which have their own spatial limitations. In combination with information from the classifications structure (such as hierarchy and function), this information provides an opportunity to identify specific open space projects that may be more conducive to a certain form of open space, such as a shared path along a linear reserve.

Function	Definition	Example	
Regular	Open space the form of which is generally rectilinear in shape, being square or rectangular. Open spaces with this form typically fit seamlessly within the existing subdivision pattern	Temple Park	
Irregular	Applies to open space where the form is not rectilinear and has one or more irregular, curilinear or angled sides.	Gilpin Park	
Linear	Applies to open spaces that are significantly longer than they are wide resulting in thin directional spaces.	Soudan Reserve	
Linear Organic	Applies to open spaces that are meandering and organic in shape but result in spaces that are significantly longer than they are wide. These typically occur where open spaces are influenced by natural features such as a waterway.	Kirkdale Park	
Street Closure	Open spaces where the form has been created within an existing street for the purposes of closing the street.	Wilson Avenue Park	
Residual	Open space where the form of the land is left over from nearby development or infrastructure requirements.	Arundel Avenue Extension	

6.3.2. LANDSCAPE SETTING

Landscape setting describes the dominant landscape setting within the open space. This provides an understanding of the diversity of landscape settings offered within the municipality's open space network as well as the opportunity to review and consider the appropriateness of an existing landscape setting within the open space's broader context (such as a creek corridor).

Each open space is attributed one primary landscape setting noting that this attribute is intended to provide a general indication of the predominant landscape setting for the entire open space rather than an exhaustive list of the different landscapes that exist within it.

Function	Definition	Example
Open grassy area	Open areas of exotic grass that may not be specifically cultivated as turf for sports	Sumner Park (Figure 20)
Treed parkland	Parkland with scattered trees throughout and possible around the boundaries, as well as open grassy areas in between	Gilpin Reserve (Figure 21)
Paved area	A sealed or paved area such as a plaza, or square	Victoria Street Mall (Figure 22)
Waterbody/ wetland	A waterway and wetland, typically including a riparian zone and vegetation	Merri Creek Linear Reserve, Coburg Lake (Figure 23)
Lawn or managed turf	Areas of turf managed for sports, aesthetic purposes, picnics or ball games.	ATC Cook Reserve (Figure 24)
Specialised sport facilities	Specialised sports surface Areas of synthetic turf or specialised playing surfaces used for sports such as tennis.	Coburg Tennis Club (Figure 25)
Ornamental garden	Planted area with flowering plants typically exotic, ornamental or specimen plantings	Municipal Office Forecourt (Figure 26)
Bushland / native grassland	A landscape predominantly defined by extensive and substantial indigenous and native vegetation	Bababi Djinanang Grasslands (Figure 27)
Horticulture	A landscape cultivated for food or wine such as pasture, crop, vegetable garden, or vineyard	CERES (Figure 28)

Table 14. List Of Open Space Landscape Settings

Figure 20. Sumner Park

Figure 21.Gilpin Reserve

Figure 22. Victoria Street Mall

Figure 23. Merri Cree Linear Reserve

Figure 24. ATC Cook Reserve

Figure 25. Coburg Tennis Club

Figure 26. Municipal Office Forecourt

Figure 27. Bababi Djinanang Grasslands

Figure 28. CERES

6.4. OBJECTIVES

Six Objectives have been established to address the issues and opportunities identified by Council and the community as they relate to open space projects in Merri-bek and in the context of this Technical Report.

These Objectives summarise the key goals of the Technical Report to assist with the identification of projects that integrate back to the Themes, Strategies and Actions of the Open Space Strategy. These Objectives should not be read in isolation and should be understood as a series of interrelated goals that are not mutually exclusive.

The Objectives have been defined to be easily understandable and useable to assess open space projects in a straightforward manner.

Each Objective is described by:

Summary and Purpose; outlines what the Objective is and the key reason for the Objective.

Strategic context; identifies the relevant documents and strategic support for the Objective, including consideration of community identified need within community consultation.

Key considerations; outlines the key considerations that support the assessment of the Principle, this includes relevant considerations required to support a proposed open space project.

The Objectives for project identification are as follows:

1. Support a baseline service of open space by providing open space within 500m of all residential properties, and within 300m to all activity centres.
2. Improve the provision, scope, and quality of open space in Merri-bek through the open space hierarchy and associated catchment.
3. Create open spaces that address gaps for specific open space needs.
4. Strengthen creek corridors and biodiversity links to support sustainability and biodiversity across Merri-bek.
5. Identify and complete 'missing links' in linear open space networks.
6. Enhance availability of larger open space assets within and beyond Merri-bek including to restricted or private open space.

6.4.1. OBJECTIVE 1

SUPPORT A BASELINE SERVICE OF OPEN SPACE BY PROVIDING OPEN SPACE WITHIN 500M OF ALL RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES, AND WITHIN 300M TO ALL ACTIVITY CENTRES.

Summary and Purpose

Providing for appropriate access to open space close to where residents live is central to this Strategy. It ensures a baseline standard of service is delivered to existing and future residents.

Priority 1 aims at delivering open space in locations that do not currently offer walkable access to open space of any size, type or use. Objective 1 calls for open space to be located:

+ within 500m of a residential property outside an activity centre to provide access to residents, and
+ within 300m of activity centres (any property within a Neighbourhood or Major Activity Centre, excluding Local activity centres, as identified by the Merri-bek Activity Centre Framework Plan, Clause 02.04 of the Planning Scheme) to provide access to residents and workers.

Objective 1 works two-fold, to ensure that all residents are within reasonable walking distance of any open space, but also recognises that open space should occur more frequently in and around areas of higher density such as activity centres.

Objective 1 aims to deliver a baseline service of open space, meaning its purpose sets a target to meet the minimum requirement of open space delivery for residents. It therefore does not take into consideration the size, function or utilisation of open space, it instead aims for broad access to open space for residents across the municipality. The Objective provides a focus on open space delivery for residents, the delivery of open space access for workers is inadvertently improved, and in particular through the activity centre catchment.

Strategic Context

Plan Melbourne and associated State Policy echo the support for 20-minute neighbourhood, including accessible and walkable distances to public open space. This follows the research that a 20-minute journey represents an 800m walk from home to a destination and back again.

The measures of this Objective, namely the location of open space within 500m of residential properties and 300m of activity centres are underpinned by the legacy documents 'Metropolitan open space plan (1988)' and 'Planning guide for urban open space (Ministry for Planning and Environment, 1989)' [the 1989 Guide).

According to the 1989 Guide, local parks should be ideally within 500 metres safe walking distance of all households, and in 'established' urban areas a 300 metre criterion is applied, although the first priority should be to provide some open space within 500 metres of all residents.

Merri-bek 2012-2022 Open Space Strategy (MOSS) and Park Close to Home: A Framework to Fill Open Space Gaps (2017) retain the open space 300m and 500m criterion from the 1989 Guide. Simply put, both documents aim to provide parks (open space) close to home (residents). Accordingly, the objectives that inform **Objective 1** have been strategically embedded in Merri-bek's open space policy for over 35 years and reinforce the minimum expectation for open space delivery across the municipality.

The Merri-bek Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017, also reflects this though its Objective 6 being '*Moreland residents have access to open spaces close to where they live*', which aims to protect and improve public open space and ensure that all residents have quality and accessible open space within safe walking distance.

Key Considerations

Objective 1 looks at each open space and applies the relevant 300m and 500m walking catchment, depending on whether the open space is located within or outside an activity centre. An activity centre in this context is defined as either a Major Activity Centre (MAC) or Neighbourhood Activity Centre (MAC) as identified at Clause 02.04 Activity Centre Framework Plan of the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.

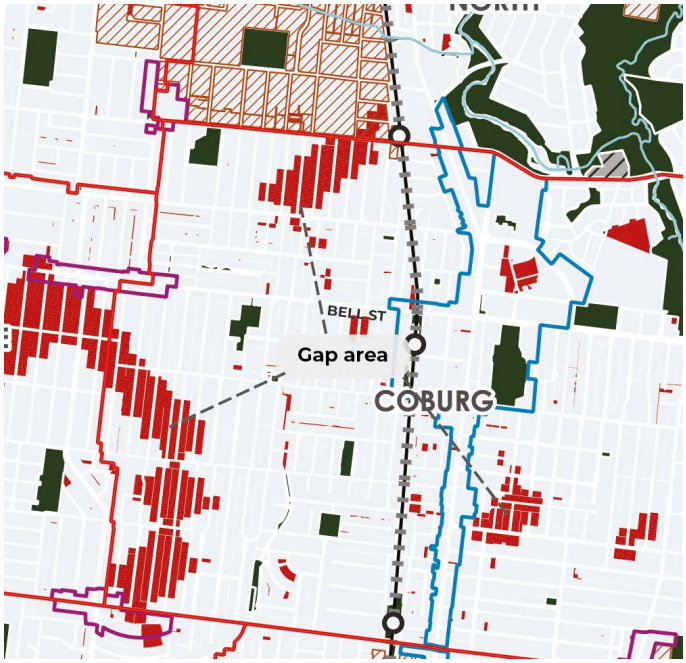


Figure 29. Baseline Service Gap Analysis

All existing and accessible public open spaces within Merri-bek are measured by the 300m and 500m walkable catchment. Where there are properties identified outside the 300m and 500m walkable catchment, they are identified to be within a gap area. This is illustrated in the **Baseline Service Gaps Analysis** discussed further in **Section 7**.

The **Baseline Service Gaps Analysis** informs the assessment of projects that achieve **Objective 1**.

If a project is identified by the Baseline Service Gaps Analysis as servicing an identified gap, either by being within a gap area or within a 100m distance of a gap area then the project is considered to achieve **Objective 1**. The use of a 100m buffer from a gap area works to consider potential future open spaces that may be located just outside a gap area that would help to service a portion of an existing gap as achieving **Objective 1**.

Further, an assessment of a project against Objective 1 considers the population serviced by the open space. The existing and forecast population density serviced by the potential open space catchment (300m or 500m) works to better understand the current and future utilisation of a potential open space. It may also assist with directing the prioritisation of potential open space opportunities across the timeframe of the Strategy.

6.4.2. OBJECTIVE 2

IMPROVE THE PROVISION, SCOPE, AND QUALITY OF OPEN SPACE IN MERRI-BEK THROUGH THE OPEN SPACE HIERARCHY AND ASSOCIATED CATCHMENT.

Summary and Purpose

Providing open space at a variety of scales works to expand the scope and quality of open space as well as strengthens the capacity of the open space to support its surrounding population catchment. While access to any type of open space is important to this Strategy, the delivery of a variety of open space scales is equally as critical. The scope of an open space is principally determined by its physical size. The size or scale of the open space defines its ability to provide various open space functions, elements and in some cases multiple landscape settings.

The capacity of an open space will influence its reach i.e., its ability to service a particular population catchment. For example, the function of a pocket park at the end of a residential street will have a different scope or capacity as compared with a large open space with a sporting field, playground and shelter. Accordingly, the general rule follows; the larger the space, the larger the catchment it will service.

There are exceptions to this rule, particularly when

the value of an open space is greater than its given catchment. An example of this is where an open space with cultural significance is used by residents from the opposite side of the municipality or by visitors from another municipality.

The purpose of **Objective 2** is to understand the distribution of open space at its various scales across the municipality, understand capacity for multiple open space functions and identify opportunities for creating open space or expanding existing open space. Where the provision of open space at a particular scale is resulting in a catchment gap, **Objective 2** aims to provide support for the upgrading of open space to another open space hierarchy. For example, if there is a high concentration of pocket parks in an area that is resulting in an open space gap, a project opportunity might consider the expansion of an existing Pocket open space to become a Neighbourhood open space. Alongside this, **Objective 2** considers the number of programmed functions that a space can reasonably offer given its size to optimise the utilisation of an open space. **Objective 2** will aim to enhance the number of programmed functions within an open space as well as strengthen the distribution of open space at different sizes.

An outline of the open space hierarchy and its purpose is set out at **Section 6.2** and a summary of the open space hierarchy is illustrated at **Table 15** below.

Strategic Context

The Victorian Planning Provisions (VPP), being the state-wide planning framework for all Planning Schemes includes Particular Provisions for Residential Subdivision relating to public open space, namely **Clause 56.05-2** Public open space provision objectives. These provisions apply to new 'greenfield' areas rather than established urban areas but provide a clear reference for State level objectives to 'provide a network of quality, well-distributed, multi-functional and cost-effective public open space that includes local parks, active open space, linear parks and trails, and links to regional open space' (Clause 56.05-2). The Standards of Clause 56.05-2 include requirements for various types of open space (local parks, small parks, active open spaces) providing a network of well-distributed neighbourhood public open spaces.

Hierarchy	Size	Catchment	Purpose and Function
Regional	Undefined	500 meters+	**An undefined number** of functions can be provided in these open spaces.
District	30,000sqm	500m	**5 or more functions** can be provided in these open spaces.
Local	5,000-29,999sqm	400m	**A minimum of 4 functions** can be provided in these open spaces.
Neighbourhood	1,000-4,999sqm	300m	**A minimum of 3 functions** can be provided in these open spaces.
Pocket	<1,000sqm	200m	**Between 2 and 3 functions** can be offered in these open spaces.

Table 15. Open Space Hierarchy Summary

Open Space for Everyone (DTP, 2021) has been prepared in line with Plan Melbourne's Policy 6.4.2 Strengthen the integrated metropolitan open space network of Outcome 6 – Melbourne is a sustainable and resilient city. A principle of the document includes Fairness and equity, to 'make diverse types of high-quality open spaces equitably accessible to everyone'. It considers access to a wide range of open spaces from small laneways to regional parklands.

The Metropolitan Open Space Network: Provision and Distribution (VPA 2017) similarly supports diversity as one of the six pillars of the document. That is to "*Deliver a network of open space types (pocket, neighbourhood, community, district, municipal and regional parks) that provide for a range of uses, functions and differing levels of amenity.*" The hierarchy of open space of open space within this document is outlined in **Table 16** below.

The Merri-bek open space hierarchy is slightly varied from the categories above in response to the existing distribution of open space at various scales. A discussion of each Merri-bek open space category and the associated catchment is provided under the following subheadings.

Hierarchy	Size	Catchment
Metropolitan	Greater than 50 hectares	Up to 50km
Municipal	15-50 hectares	0-5km
District	5-15 hectares	1.2km
Community	1.0-1.5 hectares	800m
Neighborhood	0.2-1 hectare	400m
Pocket	Less than 0.2ha	200-400m

Table 16. Excerpt from Appendix 4 of Metropolitan Open space Network (VPA 2017)

Regional (Unlimited)

Regional open spaces are areas of regional significance and as a result do not have a prescript size. These are open spaces that serve regional catchments, including the whole of or broader than, the municipality. They may host significant sites or species of flora and fauna, or by virtue of their size, diversity of functions or level of development. Regional spaces my attract high numbers of people including tourists.

The expectation is that residents and workers would not necessarily expect regional spaces to be available for all open space functions and may be few in every municipality, and as such will not be located in or walkable to every suburb. Many users of Regional open spaces will access them by car or in some cases public transport, with the exception of those in the surrounding vicinity.

The Merri-bek open space hierarchy designates a walkable catchment of 500m to District open spaces.

District (>30,000 sqm)

District open spaces are large open spaces that generally serve a group of suburbs. They may have significance for the whole suburb or a substantial part of it, due to the size, function or diversity in the space. These spaces may also have local significance for nature conservation, informal and formal sports, heritage values and so on.

Accordingly, some residents may be prepared to drive to these open spaces. These spaces will be generally larger and of a greater complexity than Local and Neighbourhood open spaces. These open spaces have capacity to provide 'access for all' facilities designed to cater for a wide range of people from the area along with a capacity to draw a tourist element from the surrounding districts. The standard of facilities serving the catchment will be higher than that at Local, Neighbourhood and Pocket levels given a greater catchment reach and utilisation of the spaces is to be expected.

As an example, District play spaces are custom designed for a site and have the capacity to provide a wide variety of play. For sporting and recreation facilities, district spaces will provide for a variety of facilities as compared with Local open spaces. The Merri-bek Sport and Recreation Strategy 2020 supports the strategic analysis of Merri-bek's open spaces to accommodate sports and recreation facilities.

The Merri-bek open space hierarchy designates a walkable catchment of 500m to District open spaces.

Local (5,000-29,999 sqm)

Local open spaces are defined as moderately sized spaces that contribute the surrounding open space network. There is generally one or two local open spaces within a particular suburb. Similar to Neighbourhood open spaces, these open spaces are predominantly provided to serve the surrounding catchment, and service daily and weekly suburb population use and will generally be accessed by bicycle or foot from the surrounding catchment.

Local open spaces will provide for a variety of functions, including play spaces, formal and informal sports, passive recreation, linking spaces and so on. Based on its more generous size, it has capacity to provide for more complex design and development elements, including more formal sports facilities, than Neighbourhood and Pocket open spaces are able to accommodate.

Local play spaces will generally be located within these open spaces, being generous in size and able to cater for both junior and older users. Local play spaces draw users from a wider area and attract family and social groups on weekends. Significant local play spaces often contain more amenities (such as toilets and barbeques) to facilitate these gatherings as outlined in the Merri-bek Play Strategy (2016-2022).

The Merri-bek open space hierarchy designates a walkable catchment of 400m to Local open spaces.

Neighbourhood (1000- 4,999 sqm)

Neighbourhood open spaces capture small local spaces that contribute the neighbourhood network. There are generally multiple neighbourhood spaces within a particular suburb. Similar to Local open spaces, these open spaces are predominantly provided to serve the immediate or surrounding catchment and service daily and weekly neighbourhood use and will generally be accessed by bicycle or foot.

These open spaces are large enough to provide for multiple functions however will not be large enough to facilitate a formal sports use. At this level, function provisions will include facilities for play spaces, passive recreation and informal sport, with a relatively low level of complexity of design and development elements.

Small local play spaces will generally be located within neighbourhood spaces, being smaller sites primarily targeted at children aged 3-7 years but also framed as spaces that older children can access on their own, fostering their independence as outlined in the Merri-bek Play Strategy (2016-2022).

The Merri-bek open space hierarchy designates a walkable catchment of 300m to Neighbourhood open spaces.

Pocket (Less than 1000 sqm)

Pocket spaces or parks are the smallest sized open spaces that include the many micro open spaces within Merri-bek such as small parks, pause points and street closures. These spaces can be used as a convenient destination or as an incidental open space along a longer walkable journey.

Pocket parks, being small in nature will have a reduced ability to provide a number of functions or provide for a broad array of specific community needs in the one space. That said, pocket parks provide opportunities for reprieve in urban environments for residents and workers through the provision of small green spaces that include canopy trees. As such, these open spaces can contribute to urban cooling, as identified in the Merri-bek Urban Forest Strategy 2017-2027 (see page 20). Further, pocket parks are also noted as important contributions to more vulnerable populations, including elderly populations of Merri-bek that require more frequent opportunities to rest in the outdoors and in areas of shade, as referenced in the Living and Aging well in Merri-bek Framework 2019 (see page 10).

The Merri-bek open space hierarchy designates a walkable catchment of 200m to pocket parks.

Key considerations

Objective 2 supports the diversity and distribution of open space and the associated walkable catchment of open space at various open spaces scales. As mentioned, a catchment is defined as the walkable distance to an open space from a residence or workplace.

A walkable catchment is applied from all accessible public open space at either 200m, 300m, 400m or 500m depending on classification of the open space. Where an open space is restricted, namely it is completely privatised, physically inaccessible or encumbered a **no catchment is applied**. Where properties are identified outside any catchments, they are identified to be within a gap areas. This is illustrated in the **Catchment Gaps Analysis** discussed further in **Section 7**.

The Catchment Gaps Analysis informs the assessment of projects that achieve Objective 2.

If a project is identified by the Catchment Gaps Analysis as servicing an identified gap, either by being within a gap area or within a 100m distance of a gap area then the project is considered to achieve Objective 2. The use of a 100m buffer from a gap area works to consider potential future open spaces that may be located just outside a gap area.

An assessment of a project against Objective 2 broadly considers the population serviced by the open space based on the forecast resident and worker population increases per suburb, will take into consideration the open space hierarchy (regional district, local, neighbourhood or pocket), and support the expansion of existing open spaces through land acquisition and help direct the prioritisation of potential open space opportunities across the timeframe of the Strategy.

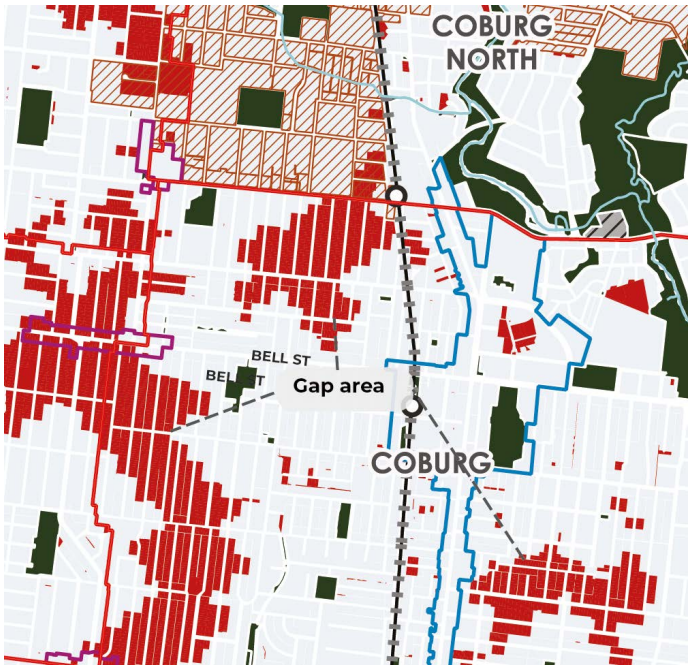


Figure 30. Hierarchy Catchment Gap Analysis

The number of functions are a considered when an open space is underutilised and has capacity to offer additional functions. The number of functions at **Table 15** is used as a guide to illustrate the potential number of functions an open space can offer based generally on the area categorisation of that space.

6.4.3. OBJECTIVE 3

CREATE OPEN SPACES THAT ADDRESS GAPS FOR SPECIFIC OPEN SPACE NEEDS.

Summary and Purpose

Addressing the specific open space needs of Merri-bek's diverse community includes both identifying the open space need and understanding how to service that need. Objective 3 aims at delivering more specific types of open space functions.

Importantly, Objective 3 recognises that open spaces should not be confined to one or two primary functions. Open space use is maximised through the delivery of multiple open space functions to cater for a variety of community needs to improve the efficiency and reach of that space. This applies to open space at all scales, whereby smaller parks may only be fit out for a singular function but have the capacity to offer two functions. For larger open spaces, a number of functions may exist within them, however the perceived 'principal' focus of that function may have the embellishments required to support that function while 'secondary' functions may not have the required embellishments to operate as effectively.

For example, an open space of district scale may be principally occupied by two well-managed sports fields, but also offers an unfenced dog park and small playground for early years (3-7 years old) built 15 years ago. While this open space may cater for the population requiring formal sports it may not be meeting the needs of dog owners or places for children 7 years old and above.

The purpose of Objective 3 is to support the delivery of open spaces with a variety of functions, particularly where a gap is identified for a specific open space need. Fourteen functions have been identified, as described in **Section 6.2** of this report. The Design Guidelines and Standards for particular open spaces and specific functions are outlined in **Section 8** of this report.

Recognising the number of functions within an open space and the expected quality of those functions is central to addressing specific community needs.

Strategic Justification

Open space functions are defined by the categorised use of an open space based on key characteristics and infrastructure that support the operation of that open space in a certain way. Each of the fourteen functions of Merri-bek's open space are defined in **Section 6.2**.

The functions identified are derived from the existing MOSS 2012-2022, as well as from emerging open space functions, functions identified by Council and functions identified by the community through consultation.

The strategic context of each function within Merri-bek's open spaces are discussed in turn under the following sub-headings.

Linking Space

Linking spaces influence the capacity for an open space to function as a connection to the broader the open space network for greater accessibility as well as to strengthen the design of the linking space as an enjoyable open space within its own right. A linking space can include a footpath connection through a larger open space or a linear trail through a nature reserve.

Paths and wayfinding are a central design element of linking spaces. Community consultation identified the need for improvements to footpaths. In particular, the people with disability reference group identified inadequate consideration of people with disabilities in the design of facilities in shared open space (paths not suitable for wheelchairs, 'Chaotic Points' at shared paths and crossings - lack of clear direction for different users). These challenges are echoed in the Merri-bek Disability and Inclusion Plan 2016-2020.

More broadly, in community consultation both cyclists and pedestrians suggested that pedestrian and cycle paths need to be separated to reduce collisions between bikes and people/dogs. There were also mention of the need for more connections between paths (walking and cycling). Refer to **Objective 5** for further discussion.

Play Space

Play Spaces are defined as open spaces with elements or infrastructure associated with play. There are a variety of open space needs, to cater for a variety of ages and needs. The Merri-bek Play Space Strategy (2016-2020) guides Council in the management and maintenance of existing play spaces, and identifies priorities for design, development and funding allocation for new play spaces.

The Moreland Play Strategy (the Play Strategy) aims to find a balance between the maintenance and management of play spaces and childrens' needs for exciting and interesting places to play throughout the

municipality.

The Proximity of a play space is a measure of the Play Space Strategy that states that "all homes should have a local park within 500 metres safe walking distance". In developing this strategy, 'safe walking distance' was defined as not having to cross any roads that have a speed limit of more than 50km/hr (unless a pedestrian crossing is provided).

The Play Strategy defines a hierarchy of play spaces including small local play spaces (within a 5 minute walk from homes, play opportunities aimed at younger children), local play spaces (within a 10 minute walk from homes, includes play equipment for older and younger children) and district play spaces (within a 30 minute walk, includes play equipment for older and younger children).

The Play Strategy also includes nature play as play space opportunities for play and activities in the natural environment, focusing on playing in nature. Nature play spaces are designed predominantly using natural features, such as trees, shrubs, grass, rocks, etc, to facilitate play.

Sports

The Merri-bek Sports and Recreation Strategy 2020 supports the strategic and integrated analysis of Moreland's open spaces and recreation facilities (involving all relevant sections of Council). The analysis of this the Sports and Recreation Strategy is used to inform and prioritise Council's capital investments in recreation, open space and community infrastructure.

The Strategy captures trends in sports and recreation activity, including sports participation. Broadly the rates in most outdoor recreation activities have risen, particularly in junior and women's teams in competition sports, youth and young adults in social unstructured sport and middle and older adults in informal recreational activities like cycling, running, gym, swimming and dog walking.

Formal Sports

Formal sport is defined as competitive and social sport in which teams and individuals participate in a structured way. The principal sports associated with formal sports include basketball, AFL, soccer, tennis, netball, lacrosse, athletics, hockey, baseball/softball and cricket. Many of these sports require larger facilities and infrastructure associated with them including pavilions, public toilets and lighting.

An accessible walking catchment is not typically applied to access formal sports facilities, given that many who require formal sports facilities are likely to travel distance to access these facilities.

Community consultation revealed that playing team / club based sport was mentioned by over a quarter of respondents as a reason why they use open space in Merri-bek. When asked to put forth ideas for improvement, respondents suggested there needed to be better management of shared use facilities (sport and dog walking).

Informal Sports

Informal sport is defined as social sport in which teams and individuals participate in a casual, unstructured way. Examples include a social game of cricket or basketball played by groups of friends. A third of community consultation respondents said they participate in informal sport, including running, cycling, walking, soccer (social), football (social), basketball (social), tennis (social), table tennis, and badminton. Most respondents indicated they were satisfied with the informal sports facilities, however key reasons for dissatisfaction included more facilities needed (such as free tennis courts, goals, half court), poor ground condition or facilities being overcrowded. Further insights from community consultation included the value placed on public exercise / gym equipment, as well as running/cycling routes and linear corridors for outdoor activity. BMX, skate tracks and mountain bike tracks were also identified as valued by the community through consultation. These activities are considered informal sports.

Nature Conservation

Nature conservation function includes significant open spaces areas that provides vegetation and landscape that contributes primarily to the retention and strengthening of local ecological and biodiversity values. The intent to support nature conservation is supported by environmental overlays within the Planning Scheme including the LSIO, ESO and SBO, as well as Council strategic documents such as the Merri-bek Nature Plan and the Merri-bek Urban Forest Strategy 2017.

The Merri-bek Nature Plan is the first dedicated plan towards the protection and enhancement of biodiversity in Merri-bek. It sets a vision for Merri-bek to "have a more diverse, connected and resilient natural environment where indigenous plant and animals thrive in a challenging and changing environment...". The document recognises the importance of providing habitat linkages (biolinks) through the Merri-bek landscape to sites with large trees to support safe fauna movement and breeding between populations. The Implantation Plan for the Nature Plan is based on four themes:

+ Protecting and enhancing biodiversity on Council managed land
+ Seeking opportunities for the private realm to

contribute positively to biodiversity

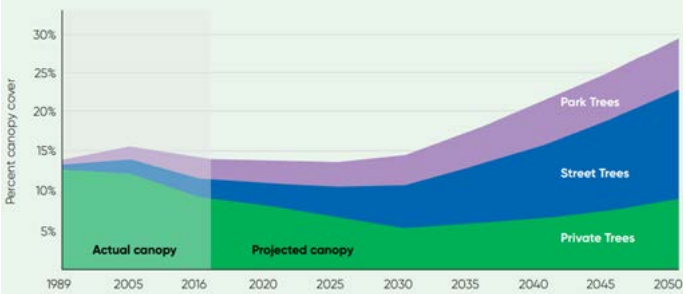
+ Connecting people to nature
+ Improving governance and collaboration in natural resource management

The Nature plan outlines a number of performance indicators, through enacting the actions listed in the document, including the development of a Connectivity Plan (Action 1.1) which identifies key corridors and habitat requirements for select representative species will help to prioritise locations and design of revegetation programs for most effect. Council's existing Open Space Strategy 2012-22 and Urban Forest Strategy 2017-27 both influence the Nature Plan and recognise the importance of biodiversity as a significant element in Council's open space network and in creating a greener, more liveable city.

The Urban Forest Strategy 2017 has identified an increasing reliance on Council parks and road reserves for canopy cover and green space as dwelling construction removes existing trees and limits future tree planting opportunities. Of the 9.6km² of public space in Merri-bek, 14% is covered by tree canopy (2016 data) which is the same percentage of tree canopy cover across the Municipality. This canopy percentage is lower than both Darebin (17.3%) and Yarra (18.5%) in 2016.

Generally, the contribution of park trees to the overall canopy cover is lower than the contribution of street trees and trees within the private realm. The Urban Forest Strategy contemplates the benefits for increasing tree canopy coverage including, climate resilience, decreasing the urban heat island effect, supporting community wellbeing, neighbourhood character and amenity and environmental and biodiversity values. The Urban Forest Strategy sets an ambitious target for canopy cover including to double Merri-bek's public realm urban forest canopy cover from 5% to 10% by 2030.

Through community engagement many ideas were made around protecting and enhancing the environment, including to plant more trees, native and indigenous plants to encourage biodiversity, create and protect wildlife corridors, more nature play in playgrounds (including water play). Through the engagement activities there were concerns raised about maintaining habitat value (tree/shrub maintenance, weeds and poor water quality), conflicting uses resulting in threats to wildlife and lack of tree canopy cover (ASDF Report).



	1989	2005	2016	2020	2030	2040	2050
Street trees	0.7%	1.9%	2.4%	3.0%	5.5%	9.3%	14.7%
Park trees	0.6%	1.6%	2.6%	2.8%	3.8%	5.6%	6.6%
Private trees	12.7%	12.1%	9.2%	8.0%	5.2%	6.5%	9.0%
Moreland canopy cover	14.0%	15.6%	14.2%	13.8%	14.5%	21.4%	30.3%

Actual and Projected Tree Canopy Cover under the implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy

Figure 31.Actual and Projected Tree Canopy Cover under the implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy (Merri-bek Urban Forest Strategy 2017, page 5)

The Urban Forest Strategy commits to a sustainable goal of adopting an annual tree planting of 750 park trees. Table 17 below outlines the park tree plantings required to meet the 2050 canopy cover projections and goal to deliver 750 park tree plantings annually as set by the Urban Forest Strategy (2017). The below table assumes each tree planted will deliver a tree canopy coverage of 30sqm and 100% survival rate within the first 3 years of being planted.

The Urban Forest Strategy Report 2022 summarises the performance of the Urban Forest Strategy 2017-2027 against the three Key Performance Indicators, as follows:

+ **KPI 1** - Canopy Cover on Council Land – progress from 4.31% in 2016 to 5.77% in 2021 with a target of 8.62% by 2030, suggests Council is at risk of not achieving a doubling of Council Land canopy cover by 2030.
+ **KPI 2** – Health of the Forest and diversity – while survival rates of new trees planted by Council are at 91.7%, there is a lack of data available to confidently assess tree age and health, however data on urban forest species diversity is up to date.
+ **KPI 3** - Community Satisfaction – Council scored well when its urban forest maintenance practices were compared with other Victorian local governments, achieving a satisfaction score of 76%.

The strategic justification for open space projects to support biodiversity function as a part of nature conservation is discussed further at Objective 4. Further, refer to the function Design Guidelines and Standards at **Section 8**.

Suburb	Open space Area (sqm)	Suburb Open Space Area of Merri-bek area (%)	Park tree plantings per year to achieve 6.6% park tree canopy coverage by 2050 (i.e. 2000 park trees/ year)	Park tree plantings per suburb based on UFS goal of 750 tree planting/ year corelated to Suburb Open Space %
Brunswick	252,294.59	3.0%	60	22.5
Brunswick East	331,228.34	4.0%	80	30
Brunswick West	183,312.17	2.5%	50	19.25
Coburg	519,877.59	6.3%	126	47.5
Coburg North	981,626.32	12.1%	242	91
Fawkner	882,477.10	10.6%	213	79.5
Glenroy	1,053,571.44	32.5%	650	243.75
Gowanbrae	294,345.47	3.5%	70	26.25
Hadfield	80,860.17	14.5%	290	109
Oak Park	276,089.57	3.3%	67	25
Pascoe Vale	357,296.05	4.3%	87	32.25
Pascoe Vale South	238,708.54	3.2%	65	24
TOTAL	**5,451,687.36**	**100%**	**2000**	**750**

Table 17. Park tree plantings per suburb required annually to meet the projections and strategy goal of the Urban Forest Strategy.

Civic Space

Civic spaces are directly linked with open space areas around civic buildings and/or civic areas, they are urban in nature and typically located in and around activity centres. These spaces are central in strengthening vibrant economic activity in the commercial centres of Merri-bek and supporting the Merri-bek worker population.

The Structure Plans (SP) for each of Merri-bek's three Major Activity Centres (MAC) lists objectives and/or strategies that support the provision and design of civic urban open spaces. Brunswick SP considers *"the provision of civic urban open space (such as Sparta Place) in lieu of traditional parkland" (Strategy 1.1, page 38). The Coburg Central Structure Plan 2020 outlines objectives "to create public spaces that are accessible and well linked, comfortable and with a good image, have uses and activities and provide an environment that is sociable."* and *"to develop a range of public spaces throughout the area to support the activities of the centre" (page 25). Finally, the Glenroy Structure Plan supports objectives to "create a greener Glenroy by providing green spaces within and around the activity centre in both the public and private realm" and "create a sense of identity and civic pride through improving the quality of urban and open spaces as place to meet and relax".*

The Merri-bek Neighbourhood Centres Strategy 2017 sets the detailed planning directions for land use and built form outcomes in Neighbourhood Centres. Objective 10 of the document aims to "develop a local sense of place unique to each of the Neighbourhood Centres" through implementation of place making and community development activities related to public realm improvements, business development and community infrastructure planning, undertaken in partnership with local resident and business community.

The Shopping Street Renewal Policy 2015-2025 is a policy is to outline how Merri-bek City Council will deliver local economic development and urban design improvements for the renewal of neighbourhood shopping strips across the City. A key objective of the policy includes to "improve the physical condition of the strip' including advancing matters relating to the public realm of the strip, improving disability access and achieving compliance on other risk related matters and exploring opportunities for environmentally sustainable development initiatives.

During community consultation the business community reference group, which includes workers, identified using open space at least once a week for a break from work, to exercise and for the natural elements, as well as for work functions/classes. Things stopping use of spaces included the weather, whereby suggestions were made to provide more sheltered areas and tables in open spaces. While

open space in this context is not specific to civic space, there is an assumption that civic spaces are more likely to support the business community and worker population given the typical location in activity centres.

Creek Corridor

The Merri-bek creek corridors provide substantial open spaces in Merri-bek to enjoy as passive recreation spaces, as well key biodiversity links providing for nature conservation. A key objective of the Meri-bek Planning Scheme is protecting the value provided by the creek corridors in Merri-bek including to:

+ Ensure development does not compromise the ecological integrity of the Merri, Moonee Ponds, Edgars, Westbreen and Merlynston Creek corridors, and
+ Create a continuous public open space corridor with a minimum of 50 metres on each side along the Moonee Ponds, Merri and Edgars Creeks. A minimum of 30 metres from the edge of the embankment on each side should be a vegetated buffer.

In the written submission by Friends of Merri Creek, there were concerns raised about a range of environmental aspects of open spaces around the creeks, specifically weed infestations, low habitat value, poor water quality, and stretches not meeting the Merri-bek Planning Scheme (minimum 50m corridor on each side of the creek, with a 30m vegetation buffer).

The strategic justification for open space projects to support the creek corridor function are discussed further at **Objective 4**. Further, refer to the function Design Guidelines and Standards at **Section 8**.

Heritage

Under the Victoria Planning Provisions, a Heritage Place can be a: building (e.g. house, shop, factory etc.), structure (e.g. memorial, bridge or tram poles), features (e.g. mine shafts and mullock heaps, street gutters and paving), private garden or public park, single tree or group of trees such as an avenue, group of buildings or sites, landscape, geological formation, fossil site, or habitat or other place of natural or cultural heritage significance and its associated land. Therefore, places of heritage significance can include open space.

There are different contexts where an open space can perform a heritage function. Most obviously is when an open space in its entirety is identified as an individual place of heritage significance, as identified by a heritage study, has a heritage grading and affected by a Heritage Overlay. Similarly, there are open spaces that are partially affected by a heritage element of significance, for example a memorial statue, built form structure or a singular tree of heritage significance located within a park. Less obvious are open spaces that are not affected by a heritage overlay but perform the function of protecting a place of heritage significance. An example of this is Leury Link protecting sightlines to the chimney of the Former Hoffman Brick Works at 72-106 Dawson Street, Brunswick.

The identification of a heritage place is through a Heritage Study, those include:

+ Merri-bek City Council Heritage Review, Allom Lovell and Associates, Volumes 1 to 5, January 1999
+ Merri-bek North of Bell Street Heritage Study, Context Pty Ltd for Merri-bek City Council, Volumes 1 and 2, 2013
+ Merri-bek Heritage Gap Study, Context Pty Ltd for Moreland City Council, Volumes 1-3, 2019
+ Merri-bek Heritage Nominations Study, Extent Heritage Pty Ltd for Merri-bek City Council, Volumes 1-2, 2022 Pre and Post Contact studies
+ Northern Suburbs Factory Study, Gary Vines and Matthew Churchward, 1992
+ Merrri-bek Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study
+ Merri-bek Post-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study

A toolbox for Victorian Government Asset Management Conducting a Heritage Audit, prepared by Heritage Victoria guides the protection and maintenance of heritage assets.

27-28% of respondent during community consultation included cultural heritage as elements that they liked about open space in Merri-bek, notably more culture and heritage elements were more commonly selected by LGBTIQA+ respondents (44%) than non-LGBTIQA+ respondents (27%).

Memorial Park

The function of a memorial park while quite specific, occupies large expanses of open space. Accordingly, there is a conflict at the intersect where the demand for recreational open meets the demand for open space required for memorial parks, driving a need for spaces that perform both functions. Merri-bek has a large amount of open space dedicated to memorial parks, principally Fawner Memorial Park which is currently being expanded.

The Metro Open Space for Everyone Strategy identifies the role of memorial parks both as places that serve a function as a memorial park but also as areas of passive recreation and natural amenity value. The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust likewise is recognising a

landmark opportunity to reimagine the public cemetery and what it can offer to diverse communities through its collaboration project with Melbourne University through the Future Cemetery project. The project investigates the potential for new technologies to enhance the public's experience of the cemetery. The Future Cemetery is a three-year project funded by the Australian Research Council along with the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust.

The strategic justification for including projects that support accessibility to larger open spaces is discussed further at **Objective 6**.

Passive Recreation

Open spaces with a passive recreation are designed to allow for purposeful access and enjoyment of open space. Not all open spaces have a passive recreation function, in that an open space may not be purposefully designed to support a passive recreation function.

An open space performing a passive recreation function requires a baseline of open space infrastructure such as accessible footpaths, seating, shading, planting of vegetation and maintenance of the open space. Passive recreation is the inherent function that an open space can provide through minimal design intervention of the space. Open Space for Everyone (DTP, 2021) sets a directive for ***"open space that enables an immersive experience open space that creates a city in nature and that enhances the enjoyment of nature, connections with others, appreciation of quality design and amenity of a cooler greener city as part of everyday life: in our laneways, streets, local and regional parks, bays and waterways"*** (page 40).

Purposeful open space design for passive recreation includes the provision of a path, seating, planting, shade or shelter to support the enjoyment of the space, to encourage contemplation or meaningful connection to the space. Open space that is idle, such as an open space of grassed area is not providing passive recreation by way of encouraging enjoyment of nature, inviting passive recreation activity such as, social gatherings (picnics), observing nature (birdwatching) or providing visual amenity.

Refer to the function Design Guidelines and Standards at **Section 8**.

Utility

Open spaces used for a utility or services function is typically considered encumbered open space. Encumbered public land and waters, as defined by Open Space for Everyone (DTP, 2021) for which the primary purpose is not open space for outdoor recreation, leisure, environmental and cultural benefits, visual amenity and off-road active transport but primary purpose includes services for transport, health, education and/or utilities. Examples of open spaces in Merri-bek that principally support a utility function include powerlines and drainage easements.

Utility function may come with restrictions on the ability to use land or waters for open space functions. That said, many strategic documents relating to open spaces acknowledge the capacity to better utilise these types of spaces. Open Space for Everyone (DTP, 2021) seeks "*to complement and improve access to open space across Melbourne by working more collaboratively and creatively to utilise encumbered or restricted public lands and waterways for open space and recreation purposes, as far as is possible*" (page 9).

Similarly, the current Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines New Communities in Victoria (October 2021) recognises that "*Public land set aside for utility or service infrastructure should be optimised and designed to be multifunctional where possible; providing land for infrastructure, amenity, environmental systems and for passive recreation (where safety risks can be managed)*" (page 76). It is acknowledged that consultation must be undertaken with utility and service agencies to identify opportunities for innovative approaches to multifunctional use of space and colocation opportunities. In most cases this looks like undertaking the necessary research and investigation for transitioning land from a principally utility-based function to an open space function, to cater for a secondary open space function or multiple open space functions.

Horticulture

Horticulture describes the broad term for urban agriculture or community gardens. Horticulture is an important open space function across the municipality in supporting the communal growing of food. The Merri-bek Food System Strategy (2017-2021) recognises that community gardens can fulfil a number of Council's environmental and social objectives and provide many community benefits including: a source of healthy fresh food, exercise, improved mental health, social interaction and connectivity, mentoring and skill building.

The Food System Strategy (2017-2021) supports the food-sensitive planning and urban design framework which provides principles, tools and case studies to help incorporate local food provision into planning and urban design. Key actions of the Food System Strategy Extension (2020-2024) that relate to open space opportunities include to:

+ Investigate the establishment of an indigenous growing space / garden,
+ Identify development sites to support larger scale

food growing sites,

+ Work with government landowners to make underutilised land available for food growing,
+ Support the community to establish food trees in Open Space

CERES Community Environment Park is a not-for-profit sustainability centre in Merri-bek that runs urban agriculture projects, a key feature of the park being the community food system. The park, is Council owned and highly valued by the Merri-bek community as well as by visitors and populations outside of the municipality. Some community consultation respondents identified disability access issues to CERES due to the topography of the area.

More broadly, community consultation respondents identified a need to create more specific types of open spaces including community gardens, and that there is a perceived lack of appropriate sites for community gardens.

Dog Park

The need for specifically designed dog parks is emerging as a result of increased dog ownership in Merri-bek as well as a result of conflicts arising from multiple open space users at the intersect of multi-functional open spaces. At present there are two types of dog-specific open spaces, being off-leash dog areas and fenced dog parks. Generally, off-leash dog areas are less designed, but require specific conditions for dog owners to abide by when letting their dog roam off-leash. Council issued a Council Order (March 2006 Council Meeting) relating to the conditions that apply to dog owners in dogs off-leash areas.

Fenced dog-parks are enclosed off-leash areas, typically gated, that allow for more segregated off-leash dog roaming. The recent planning, design, and community consultation of a fenced dog park in Kingsford Smith Ulm, Glenroy gives some guidance on the expectations of the community of Council in the design requirements for a fenced dog park, as outlined in the Fenced Dog Parks in the North Consultation Summary Report (prepared by Phil Smith Landscape Architect Open Space Design & Development Unit, March 2023).

Community consultation respondents outlined a number of challenges relating dog ownership in open space. The main issues can be summarised as dog owners not following the rules, too many dogs in the parks, uncollected dog poo, dogs in children's playgrounds, conflict between sport users and dog uses, certain people being fearful of dogs and maintenance of landscape (condition of soccer pitch (drainage / muddy) and condition of grass areas). Relating to facilities missing in Merri-bek open space, a number of community consultation responses identified a desire for more dog parks (both off-leash and fenced) to reduce the reliance on sports fields (page 20, ASDF Report), as well as more lighting so people can walk after work in winter, more dog poo bag dispensers, better signage for dog on-lead areas and better communication when sports events are on (page 30, ASDF Report).

Undeveloped

The 'Undeveloped' function serves to identify open spaces that have no practical open space functions. 'Undeveloped' open spaces help to identify an open space where no existing open space function is clearly defined and where functions could be delivered in future. Undeveloped function is different from passive recreation function which is supported by a clear design intent, infrastructure or elements that support its use for passive recreation (-such as seating, sealed pathway and planted canopy trees).

Key considerations

Providing multi-functional open spaces works to address specific open space needs as well as better utilised land dedicated to open space. The delivery and success of a specific open space function to meet an open space need is reliant on the quality of the function and the efficiency of that function. An open space need gap is identified though:

Assessing an upgrade project against the design guidelines of a function. The principles, objectives, criteria and/or standards for a particular function have been identified at **Section 9.39**. They either outline the overarching principles that apply to a function or refer to the relevant document prepared by Council or State government that identify the expectations for the design, delivery and management of an open space function.

Specific Functions Gaps Analysis spatial distribution mapping identifying the spatial location of each function and the broad gaps in the distribution of that function. The function categorisation of a particular open space has been identified through applying the definitions listed at **Section 6.2**, noting that an open space may have multiple functions existing in that space, each function with potentially varied levels of efficiency.

Community-identified need for a specific function, including those highlighted during the community consultation of this Open Space Strategy as well as in previous community consultations for other recent Council strategies that identify an expected open space outcome. Community-identified needs are not

Figure 32. Park with Play Space Function

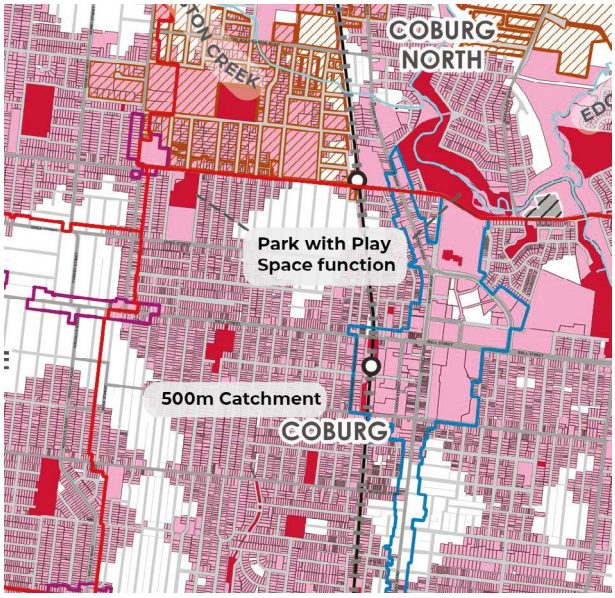


Figure 33. Park with Formal Sport Function

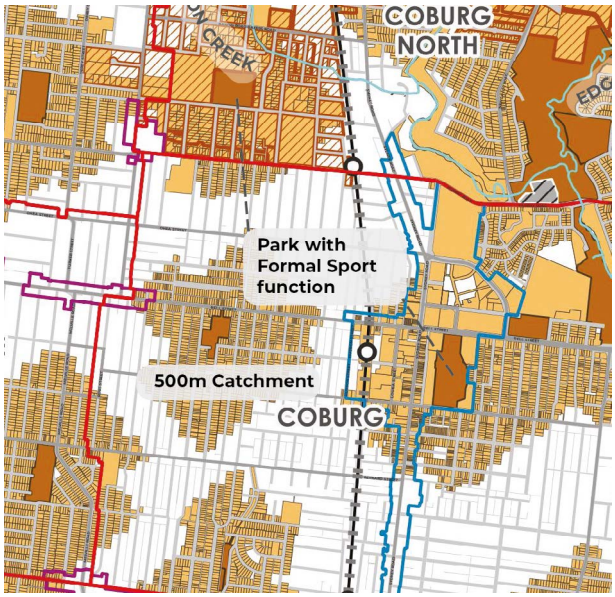
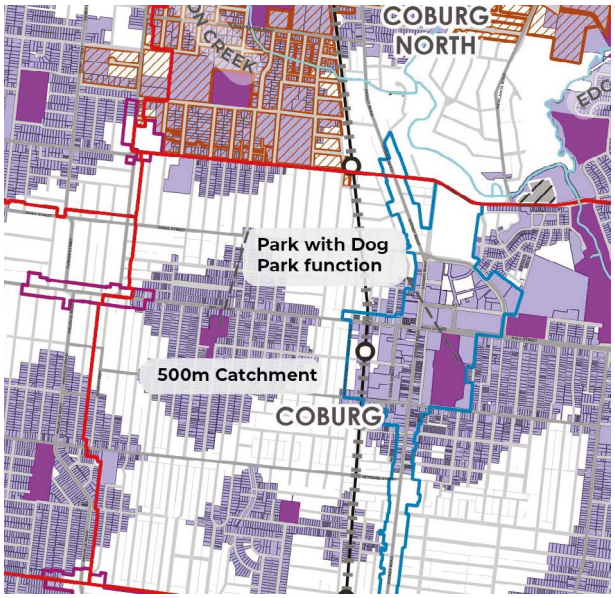


Figure 34. Park with Dog Park Function



considered in isolation, but alongside other factors, including identified needs that:

+ align with a spatial distribution mapping gap for a particular function,
+ have been raised by the community in multiple consultation forums,
+ have been raised by community reference groups,
+ are supported by multiple people and specific to a particular open space, or
+ addresses or works towards achieving a principle, objective, criteria or standard for a particular function.

Key considerations for particular functions are outlined in below **Table 18**.

FUNCTION	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
Linking Space	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Linking Space at Section 9. + Missing links in the broader network that illustrate a spatial distribution gap. Refer to Objective 5 for further consideration. + Community identified need, including challenges relating to missing links, potential connections, functionality or accessibility etc.
Play Space	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Play Space at Section 9, including maintenance service timeframes. + All properties should have an open space with a play space within a 500m walking catchment of their property. A spatial distribution gap is illustrated by applying a 500m catchment to all open space with play spaces to identify properties that do not have access. + Community identified need, including a play space, a play space upgrade, or a type of space.
Formal Sport	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Formal Sport at Section 9. + A spatial distribution gap of Formal Sport and associated facilities. + Community identified need, including associated facilities and infrastructure, or upgrades
Informal Sport	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Informal Sport at Section 9. + A spatial distribution gap of Informal Sport and associated facilities. + Community identified need, including associated facilities and infrastructure, or upgrades.
Civic Space	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Civic Space at Section 9. + A spatial distribution gap of Civic Space, where there is an open space hierarchy catchment gap located within an activity centre. + Community identified need, including associated facilities and infrastructure, or upgrades.
Nature Conservation	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Nature Conservation at Section 9. + Park tree plantings based on Urban Forest Strategy projections or strategic goals. + Community identified need, including strengthening biodiversity links, revegetation opportunities and canopy cover to deliver shade.

FUNCTION	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
Creek Corridor	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Creek Corridor at Section 9. + Land parcels that are located within 50m either side of a creek corridor or missing pedestrian access points, whereby a pedestrian access point to a creek corridor should be provided every 400m. Refer to Objective 4. + Community identified need, including providing connection to a creek corridor, potential land parcel opportunity to support the creek corridor, strengthen the health of the creek corridor, or improve safety of a creek corridor.
Heritage	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Heritage at Section 9. + Community identified need, including to better protect or enhance a place or site of heritage significance.
Memorial Park	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Memorial Park at Section 9. + Refer to Objective 6 for further consideration. + Community identified need, including improving the accessibility, better through connections, safety or multi-function upgrades.
Passive Recreation	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Passive Recreation at Section 9. + Community identified need, including provision of a path, seating, planting, shade or shelter.
Utility	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Utility at Section 9. + Community identified need, including better utilisation of an open space with a utility function, or further investigation of open space opportunities for spaces with a utility function.
Horticulture	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Horticulture at Section 9. + Community identified need, including horticulture identified for a section of open space, or improvement of an existing horticulture function including better accessibility of a horticulture space.
Dog Park	+ Open space Design Guidelines and Standards for Dog Park at Section 9. + A spatial distribution gap is identified by applying a 500m walking catchment to all open spaces with dog parks to identify properties that do not have access. + Community identified need, including existing dog parks (off-leash and fenced) that are not functioning efficiently such as dog parks that are conflicting with other functions, or opportunities for a dog park.
Undeveloped	This category identifies the lack of function of an open space, or where there is capacity for a space to cater for further function implementation. A key consideration is assessing an Undeveloped space against: + Design Guidelines and Standards of each function to determine suitability at **Section 9**. + Specific aps Analysis. + Community need identified

Table 18. Function Key Considerations

6.4.4. OBJECTIVE 4

STRENGTHEN CREEK CORRIDORS AND BIODIVERSITY LINKS TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABILITY AND BIODIVERSITY ACROSS MERRI-BEK.

Summary and Purpose

Creek corridors provide large biodiversity links to Merri-bek as foundational open space corridors within the Municipality. As development densifies and the amount of vegetation in privately open space is reduced, the need to strengthen biodiversity links throughout Merri-Bek's open spaces becomes increasingly important. Objective 4 is to capture both opportunities for strengthening the creek corridors of Merri-bek as well as biodiversity links such as native vegetation planting, regeneration and management, establishment of biodiverse wetlands and WSUD to support natural features in open spaces across the Municipality.

There are five key creek corridors within Merri-bek. Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek border the eastern and western boundaries of the municipality respectively. Edgars and Merlynston Creeks are tributaries of Merri Creek and Westbreen Creek is a tributary of Moonee Ponds Creek.

The Merri-bek creek corridors principally function as waterways that flow into the major tributaries of the Yarra River. The secondary functions of the creek corridors are that of biodiversity links for nature conservation and as well as open space areas used for passive recreation. A key objective of the Meri-bek Planning Scheme is protecting the value provided by the creek corridors.

In particular, the Merri-bek Planning Scheme seeks to improve and protect the creek corridors by:

+ Protecting the ecological integrity of the Merri, Moonee Ponds, Edgars, Westbreen and Merlynston Creek corridors and remaining areas of remnant vegetation areas (Clause 02.03-2), and
+ Create a continuous public open space corridor along the Moonee Ponds, Merri and Edgars Creek. (Clause 19.02-6L)
+ A key policy guideline of the Planning Scheme is "that the public open space corridor along the creeks be a minimum of 50 metres on each side of the creek. A minimum of 30 metres from the edge of the embankment on each side should be a vegetated buffer." (Clause 19.02-6L Open Space in Merri-bek)
+ The Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO) Schedule 1 relates to the Merri-Creek and Environs (Edgars, Merlynston and Campbellfield Creeks) and includes environmental objectives to be achieved.

Strategic Justification

Each creek corridor is supported by strategic objectives to protect and enhance the environmental, cultural heritage and community open space values along the waterways and guided by key strategic documents, as discussed below:

Merri Creek Corridor begins at the Great Dividing Range and terminates at the Yarra River. The creek corridor travels through a number of Councils including Merri-bek. The Merri Creek and Environs Strategy, prepared by the Merri Creek Management Committee was incorporated in the Planning Scheme in August 1999, further revised as the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy 2009-2014 and most recently supported by the Merri Creek 2020-2024 Strategic Plan. The Merri Creek and Environs Strategy is the key document that supports the creek corridor and sets out a number of targets for the corridor.

Two of the key Merri Creek corridor measures considered by this Technical Report include:

+ access to the creek parklands being no further than 400m apart, and
+ retention of a vegetation buffer of at least 30m wide along waterways to maintain the natural drainage function, stream habitat and wildlife corridors and landscape values, to minimise erosion of stream banks and verges and to reduce polluted surface runoff from adjacent land uses.

Moonee Ponds Creek Corridor starts in the northern suburbs near Greenvale and ends in the south at Docklands and flows into the Yarra River, the section of the creek within Merri-bek exists as a heavily modified urban waterway. The Chain of Ponds Moonee Ponds Creek Plan outlines the strategic directives for the creek corridor. The document sets out a plan and implementation at Area 02, 03, 04 and 05 for the development of the Moonee Ponds Creek within the Merri-Bek municipality boundary. The Chain of Ponds Moonee Ponds Creek Plan reinforces intent of the Planning Scheme policy guideline to support public open space corridor of 50m either side of the creek corridor through the acquisition of land.

The Westbreen Creek corridor begins at the Northern Golf course, travels through a number of open spaces and terminates at Moonee Ponds Creek. The creek corridor is supported by the Merri-bek Westbreen Creek Conservation and Development Plan 2019 that provides a number of recommendations relating to heritage, geology and geomorphology, drainage and water quality, and vegetation management of the corridor, as well as detailed plans relating to open space corridor opportunities.

Edgars Creek corridor runs between Edwardes Lake and

Merri Creek. The creek corridor is supported by Merri-bek Edgars Creek Conservation and Development Plan 2013 provides a number of recommendations relating to geology and geomorphology, drainage and water quality, infrastructure, flora and fauna, recreation and community use, cultural heritage and land use of the corridor, as well as detailed plans relating to open space corridor opportunities.

Merlynston Creek corridor starts in Campbellfield in the City of Hume and terminates at its confluence with Merri Creek. **Campbellfield Creek corridor** also starts in Campbellfield in the City of Hume, is supported by the **Campbellfield** retarding basin and terminates at its confluence with Merlynston Creek. The Merlynston Park Linear Development Plan draft development plan was prepared by Council to support the Merlynston Creek corridor.

During community consultation, discussions with environmentally focussed organisations such as the Friends of Merri Creek, Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek and the Merri Creek Management Committee, reinforced the importance of our open spaces and waterways as special and crucial places for nature, habitat and biodiversity.

In the written submission by Friends of Merri Creek, there were concerns raised about a range of environmental aspects of open spaces around the creeks, specifically weed infestations, low habitat value, poor water quality, and stretches not meeting the Merri-bek Planning Scheme (minimum 50m corridor on each side of the creek, with a 30m vegetation buffer). Further, CALD community raised concerns for the safety of creek corridors.

Biodiversity is imbedded in many strategic documents within Council. In particular, the Merri-bek Nature Plan supports the intent to protect and enhance biodiversity in Merri-bek. The implementation of the Nature Plan is based on four themes:

1. Protecting and enhancing biodiversity on Council managed land
2. Seeking opportunities for the private realm to contribute positively to biodiversity
3. Connecting people to nature
4. Improving governance and collaboration in natural resource management

The Merri-bek Urban Forest Strategy 2017 recognises the role that urban environments can plan in the conservation of biodiversity and resilience. The document recognises the loss of biodiversity as a real threat in a changing climate (see page 57). While the Urban Forest Strategy emphasises canopy species for street trees, the establishment of native under storey and mid storey vegetation is critical in our private gardens, parks and waterways for strengthening biodiversity. Council encourages the planting of indigenous vegetation to promote biodiversity but also acknowledges the role of exotic vegetation in providing habitat, nectar and seeds. A key measure of the document includes to "Develop, maintain and resource a comprehensive network of biodiversity corridors across Merri-bek.

Key considerations

Objective 4 recognises the increasing importance of protecting the creek corridors of Merri-bek and considers three measures stated within the Planning Scheme and relevant background documents. The following measures

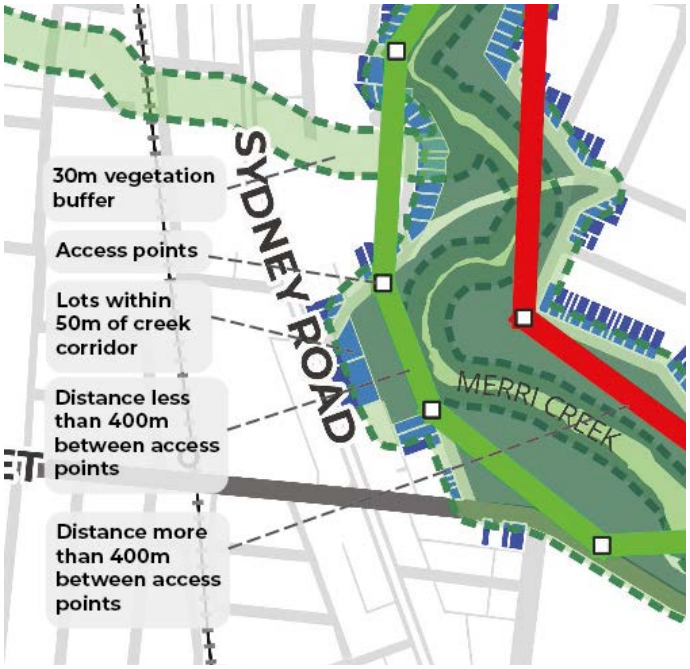


Figure 35. Creek Corridor Protection

strengthen the qualitative targets outlined in the relevant strategic documents for each creek corridor, and work to protect and enhance the environmental, cultural heritage and community open space values along the waterways. The three central measures considered by Objective 4, that apply to each creek corridor, Merri, Moonee Ponds, Westbreen, Edgars and Merlynston Creek are as follows:

+ **Access to the creek parklands being no further than 400m apart,**

This measure is taken from the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy 1999 and reiterated in the existing Merri-bek Open Space Strategy 2012-2022, and the Planning Scheme. It ensures accessibility to creek corridors, to connect the community to the waterways, including addressing safety concerns around the creek corridors

as identified within key targets of the relevant strategic documents.

+ **Retention of a vegetation buffer of at least 30m wide along waterways,**

This measure is taken from the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy 1999, and reiterated in both the Chain of Ponds Moonee Ponds Creek Plan and the existing Merri-bek Open Space Strategy 2012-2022, and the Planning Scheme. It ensures the retention and strengthening of vegetation along the creek corridors to enhance the environmental and ecological value of the waterways as identified within key targets of the relevant strategic documents.

+ **Support public open space corridor of 50m either side of the creek through the acquisition of land,**

This measure is taken from the Planning Scheme, reiterated in the Chain of Ponds Moonee Ponds Creek Plan and the existing Merri-bek Open Space Strategy 2012-2022. It supports the broad ambition to strengthen the corridor as an open space asset as well as a waterway. The measure looks at land opportunities within 50m of the creek, taken from the creek centreline, that may be able to support the community, environment, and cultural heritage values of the creek corridor, as well as address the issues raised about accessibility and safety of the creek corridors, as identified within key targets of the relevant strategic documents.

The Specific Function Gaps Analysis informs the assessment of projects that achieve **Objective 4**. The Design Guidelines and Standards at Section 9 refers to the relevant strategic documents (also noted above) that support Objective 4. Finally, the Land Acquisition Assessment at **Section 6.5** outlines the criteria for the assessment of a site considered for land acquisition.

6.4.5. OBJECTIVE 5

IDENTIFY AND COMPLETE 'MISSING LINKS' IN LINEAR OPEN SPACE NETWORKS.

Summary and Purpose

Establishing an open space network is a greater ambition than just the provision and distribution of open spaces. While this ambition forms a large part of creating a network, creating linkages and functional connections to open space is equally as important in establishing a network. Linear open spaces are generally formed through creek corridors, utility easements, rail corridors or former road links and parcels. These linear open spaces when properly designed and fitted with the appropriate infrastructure, function as key links to the broader open space network. Accordingly, these linear open spaces require appropriate design and implementation to function both as a linking space as well as a passive open space.

Objective 5 aims at delivering open spaces and in locations that will address the 'missing links' or gaps in the existing open space network. In part, **Objective 5** intersects with the transport network, but reinforces the requirement for linear open spaces to be strengthened to function independently from the streets in delivering an open space network for passive recreation including to walking, cycling, experiencing nature and so on.

Strategic Justification

The demand and cost of land for open space purposes is an ongoing challenge for metropolitan Councils. The ability to acquire land for the purposes improving open space distribution is a challenge both from a monetary perspective but more significantly due to the time associated with waiting for the appropriate site (scale, physical constraints, etc.) and with the land acquisition process itself.

Community consultation indicated that of all respondents on average 89% walked to open space and 26% cycled to open space, some do both. While the utilisation of the street network versus the open space network to access open space was not captured, 53% of respondents identified that they used and valued open space in Merri-bek for the informal (or passive) recreation areas such as running routes and linear corridors.

The Metropolitan Open Space Strategy: Open Space For Everyone supports the directive to "Identifying parks, trails and waterway corridors that improve radial and cross-radial connectivity" of the open space network. The Open Space For Everyone document references both the Living Links collaboration between councils, government agencies and community groups that was developed for the south-east regions. The vision of this collaborative is to "create an urban 'web of green' where people and nature connect".

The Planning Scheme also sets strategies to support the open space network, to:

+ Incorporate, where possible, links between major parks and activity areas, along waterways and natural drainage corridors, connecting places of natural and cultural interest (Clause 19.02-6S)
+ Ensure land identified as critical to the completion of open space links is transferred for open space purposes (Clause 19.02-6S).

While linking gaps in the open space networks broadly improves accessibility it also works to address biodiversity gaps and create continuous habitat linkages (biolinks),

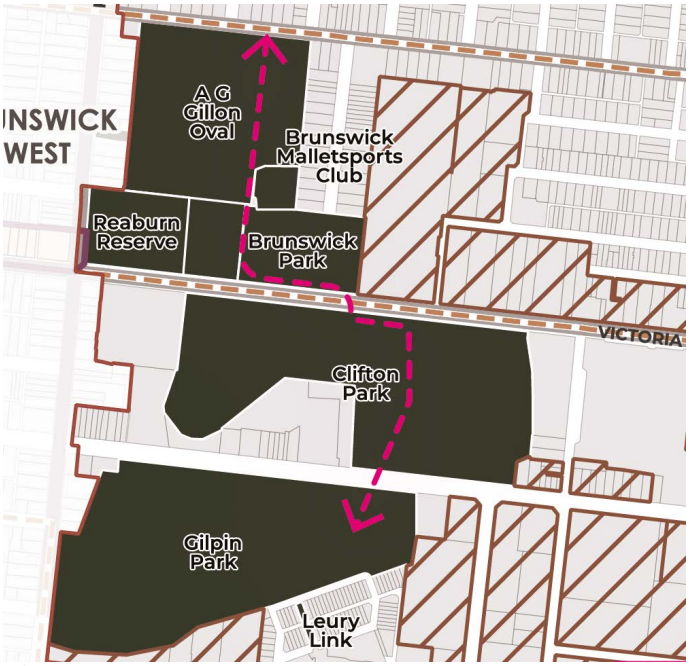


Figure 36. Shared User Path Improvements

critical for the safe fauna movement and breeding between populations, as discussed in the Merri-bek Nature Plan 2020

Key considerations

There are two key considerations in assessing an open space opportunity in achieving Objective 5, as follows:

+ **Identifying gaps in the network to address opportunities to fill missing gaps.**

This includes identifying open space that is identified as 'linear' in form and of a 'linking' function. A linear form includes creek corridors that are organic in shape as well as railway corridors and drainage easements that are more typically linear. The 'linking' function, is applied to open spaces which clearly facilitate through movement between two public streets or other public spaces. They include infrastructure such as a path or walking trail that clearly indicate and facilitate a public link. By mapping these

+ **Designing an open space to be of 'linking' function and 'passive recreation' function**

in line with the Design Guidelines and Standards at **Section 9**. Ensuring the open space identified to fill a missing link in the open space network considers the design guidelines and standards of both 'linking' and 'passive recreation' function, and considers the Other Design Guidelines and Standards of **Section 9**, such as Urban Design Guidelines, Universal Design and Public Lighting.

The Specific Needs Gaps Analysis informs the assessment of projects that achieve Objective 5. The Design Guidelines and Standards at **Section 9** provide relevant design standards and references to the relevant strategic documents that support **Objective 5**. Finally, the Land Acquisition Assessment at **Section 6.5** outlines the criteria for the assessment of a site considered for land acquisition.

6.4.6. OBJECTIVE 6

ENHANCE AVAILABILITY OF LARGER OPEN SPACE ASSETS WITHIN AND BEYOND MERRI-BEK INCLUDING TO RESTRICTED OR PRIVATELY OWNED OPEN SPACE.

Summary and Purpose

The broad categorisation of open space is based on its definition as either public open space, privately owned open space or restricted open space as set out in **Section 6.2** of this report. Some of the larger open space assets of Merri-bek are not public open space, they are privately owned or restricted by membership, encumbered, or gated at certain hours of the day. Other larger open space assets are located just outside Merri-bek's municipal boundary.

Re-creating large open space assets, such as those existing in Merri-bek, is a difficult undertaking. The availability of large areas of land is cumbersome to acquire with large amounts of existing land under public ownership used for drainage easements and roads, otherwise the land is privately owned. Equally, the cost of purchasing the land required to create a regional-sized open space is extremely high, including the cost required for private land acquisition.

Accordingly, there is a reliance on the existing open space network to be better optimised and improved to extend its reach, particularly of existing larger open space assets within and beyond Merri-bek.

The purpose of **Objective 6** is to enhance the availability of these larger open space assets. This can be done in a number of ways, including by not limited to:

+ increasing the availability of a restricted open space through opening hours, including more open space functions,
+ better designing public spaces adjoining privately owned open space to capitalise on their amenity,
+ creating better connections to larger open space assets including those adjoining the municipality,
+ shared-user agreements between Council and owners of privately owned open space or spaces not traditionally considered as open space (i.e. school sports fields),

+ investigating large areas of publicly owned land that may be suitable for future open space.
+ purchasing land adjoining existing public open spaces (to make the existing space larger).

The broad intent of **Objective 6** is to 'unlock' existing larger open spaces, so that open space amenity and value is better captured and utilised by the Merri-bek community.

Strategic Context

In Merri-bek, approximately 10% of the area dedicated to open space is either privately owned or restricted open space. A large proportion of the areas in Merri-bek include the Northern Golf Course (privately owned open space), Fawkner Memorial Park and Northern Memorial Park (restricted open space) and retarding basins (restricted open space).

A key directive of Open Space for Everyone is to *"Enhance the role, function and overall community value of currently underutilised public land assets (e.g. utility easements, school grounds) in contributing to the open space network"*. The document calls for more innovative use of open spaces including to *"revive past practices such as using cemeteries as open space and more-innovative use of public rooftops, the airspace above and spaces below transport infrastructure, streetscapes designed for people, government school grounds, roads, transport corridors/precincts and linear links"*. Further the Metropolitan Open Space Network Provision and Distribution Report (VPA).

During community consultation, multiple respondents mentioned to partner with others (schools, cemeteries, churches, State Government train lines etc.) to open up privately owned open spaces for use. Recommendations for improvement to open spaces in Merri-bek included the provision of more spaces generally including Council investigating purchasing private land to convert to open space.

Key Considerations

Identifying all the larger open space assets within and adjacent to Merri-bek is the first consideration of **Objective 6**. Appropriate open space assets for consideration include:

+ Local, District or Regional category open space within or immediately adjacent to Merri-bek boundary
+ School grounds sports fields, utility open space (i.e. retarding basin)
+ Neighbourhood or District restricted open space with restricted public access.
+ Public land not accessible to the public that has potential as a future public open space.
+ Sizable public land and not serving an open space function.

Projects considered achieving Priority 6 are opportunities where an open space function can be better utilised, more accessible, better connected to the open space network, better shared in the function and amenity it provides, repurposed for an open space function or an existing smaller open space expanded to become a larger open space. The Land Acquisition Assessment at **Section 6.5** outlines the criteria for the assessment of a site considered for land acquisition.

6.5. ASSESSMENT OF OPEN SPACE PROJECTS AGAINST OPEN SPACE OBJECTIVES

PROJECT OBJECTIVES	CONSIDERATION	ACHIEVES (Y/N)
Objective 1 – Support a baseline service of open space by providing open space within 500m of all residential properties, and within 300m to all activity centres.	A potential project located in a Baseline Services Gap Area or within 100m from a gap area achieves **Objective 1**. The future population growth of the suburb contributes to the priority set for the project (high, medium, low).	**Example logic for project inclusion:** The project supports filling the existing open space gap. **Inclusion: Y**
Objective 2 – Improve the provision, scope, and quality of open space in Merri-bek through the open space hierarchy and associated catchment.	A potential project located in a Catchment Gap Area or within a 100m distance of a gap area achieves **Objective 2**. The future population growth of the suburb contributes to the priority set for the project (high, medium, low).	**Example logic for project inclusion:** + The project supports partially filling an existing open space gap and is located within 100m of a gap area. 40% of its catchment will address filling a gap area. **Inclusion: Y**
Objective 3 – Create open spaces that address gaps for specific open space needs	A potential project that: + When assessed against the design Guidelines and Standards illustrates the need for an upgrade achieves **Objective 3**. + Is located in a Specific Function Gap Area when assessed against the specific spatial distribution mapping for that function achieves **Objective 3**. + Addresses a community-identified need for a specific function and aligns with the above points achieves **Objective 3**.	**Example logic for project inclusion:** Community consultation identified the need for a play space (playground) upgrade, for a park that was upgraded 3 years ago. **Inclusion: N** Community consultation identified the need for a play space (playground) upgrade, for a park that was not meeting the Play Space Design Guidelines and Standards. **Inclusion: Y**
Objective 4 – Strengthen creek corridors and biodiversity links to support sustainability and biodiversity across Merri-bek.	A potential project that: + Provides an additional access point to creek corridors that closes an access gap greater than 400m achieves **Objective 4**. + Contributes to supporting a vegetation buffer of 30m along a creek corridor **Objective 4**. + supports public open space corridor of 50m either side of the creek through the acquisition of land **Objective 4**. + When assessed against the Design Guidelines and Standards of Nature Conservation illustrates the need for a biodiversity contribution achieves **Objective 4**.	**Example logic for project inclusion:** A site is located within 50m adjacent to the existing creek corridor. Use of the land will provide opportunities for extension of the biodiversity corridor and creation of core habitat in the heart of the creek. **Inclusion: Y**

PROJECT OBJECTIVES	CONSIDERATION	ACHIEVES (Y/N)
Objective 5 – Identify and complete 'missing links' in linear open space networks.	A potential project that: + Project provides a link between existing open spaces. + Project provides a shared path that will form a link to a future open space.	**Example logic for project inclusion:** Upgrade of a park to include a loop footpath contained within the park. **Inclusion: N** Upgrade of a park to include a footpath that links two adjoining streets and provides connectivity to another open space. **Inclusion: Y**
Objective 6 – Enhance availability of larger open space assets within and beyond Merri-bek including to restricted or privately owned open space.	A potential project that: + improves or provides connectivity to larger (i.e., district) open space within or immediately outside the municipality. + better utilizes restricted or privately owned but publicly accessible open space	**Example logic for project inclusion:** Improved access and open space offerings at Fawkner Cemetery will unlock access to a district scale restricted open space. **Inclusion: Y**

Table 19. Assessmet Matrix

6.5.1. MERRI-BEK OPEN SPACE STRATEGY DIRECTIONS ALIGNMENT

1. Providing parks close to home
2. Having a mix of open spaces and open space experiences
3. Ensuring our open space network is adaptive, biodiverse, cooling, healthy and resilient
4. Open space for everyone
5. Improving access to our open space network through better links, corridors and collaborations.

OBJECTIVES	MERRI-BEK OPEN SPACE STRATEGY DIRECTIONS ALIGNMENT
Objective 1 – Support a baseline service of open space by providing open space within 500m of all residential properties, and within 300m to all activity centres.	**1,2,3,4 and 5**
Objective 2 – Improve the provision, scope, and quality of open space in Merri-bek through the open space hierarchy and associated catchment.	**1,2,3, and 5**
Objective 3 – Create open spaces that address gaps for specific open space needs	**3 and 4**
Objective 4 – Strengthen creek corridors and biodiversity links to support sustainability and biodiversity across Merri-bek.	**3**
Objective 5 – Identify and complete 'missing links' in linear open space networks.	**1, 3 and 5**
Objective 6 – Enhance availability of larger open space assets within and beyond Merri-bek including to restricted or privately owned open space.	**1**

Table 20. Objectives and Key Strategy Directions Alignment

6.6. OPEN SPACE DESIGN GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS

Below is a detailed list of relevant Design Guidelines and Standards for the design and maintenance of open space. The categorisation of open spaces outlined in the previous sections of this report (Section 6.1 to 6.5) identified if an open space or open space upgraded was needed. The Open Space Design Guidelines and Standards provide guidance on what open space might contain, how open space upgrades or new project might be designed and implemented, and to what standard.

The process of designing, delivering and managing an open space is guided by key standards that determine the expectation or of open space outcomes depending on the open space hierarchy and functions planned within an open space. These Design Guidelines and Standards assist to determine the appropriate design of a space and guide associated costing of new open space projects

Open space design guidelines and standards are contained within Council strategic plans, strategies and policies, as well as industry resource material produced by State Government and key authorities. These documents provide principles, strategies, guidelines, criteria, standards and protocols for the delivery of open space design outcomes.

The Open Space Design Guidelines and Standards are set out as follows:

Open Space Hierarchy Element Matrix contains an embellishment table for the specific elements (open space asst) that form the baseline provision of open space infrastructure in an open space of a particular hierarchy. The table identifies the element (open space asset) and where it should be located. An element may be identified as:

+ **Required** within that open space category,
+ **Preferred** but not required within that open space category,
+ **Design Guidelines and Standards to be considered** for elements that may be impactful in sensitive open space areas,
+ **Not required** within that open space category, as the element may not be function in that open space.

Function Design Guidelines and Standards are specific to an open space function (see Section 7.1 and 7.4), they refer to Council or industry objectives, principles, guidelines, standards and protocols within strategic guidance documents. Some of these document references provide specific criteria for maintenance and review of assets relevant to a function. Where a relevant document has not been referenced, baseline guidelines are provided.

Other Design Guidelines and Standards are applied to open spaces more broadly, and less particular to a specific function. These guidelines and standards consider design and implementation of an open space outcome, or how the open space is used.

LEGEND	
Required	■
Preferred	□
Design Guidelines and Standards to be considered	+
Inclusion not required	–

Element/ Embellishment	Pocket	Neighborhood	Local	District	Regional
Adventure Play – informal sport, obstacle, table tennis, climbing	+	+	+	□	+
Areas used for Festivals and Events	–	–	+	+	+
BBQ	–	□	□	■	■
Bike racks	–	□	■	■	■
Bike rack repair station	–	–	–	□	■
Car parking	–	–	–	□	■
Dog waste bin	–	–	□	■	■
Drinking Fountain	□	□	■	■	■
Exercise / fitness equipment	+	+	□	■	■
Habitat / shade trees	□	■	■	■	■
Half court	–	□	■	■	■
Horticulture – community garden	+	□	□	□	–
Fencing – perimeter	+	□	–	–	–
Fencing - lockable and removable bollard	–	–	□	■	■
Garden beds	□	■	■	■	■
Lighting	□	■	■	■ +	■ +
Open grassed area	□	□	■	□	□
Passive Irrigation	□	■	■	■	■ +
Path Shared – concrete	–	–	□	■	■ +
Path Standard – concrete	□	□	■	■	■ +
Path Standard – gravel	■	□	■	■	■
Playground – District	–	–	–	□	□
Playground – Local	–	□	□	–	–
Playground – Small	□	□	–	–	–
Playground – Adventure Play	–	□	□	□	□
Playground – Nature Play	□	□	■	■	■ +
Public Toilet	–	□	■	■	■ +
Pump Track	–	–	□	□	–
Rubbish Bin	■	■	■	■	■
Shade Sail	–	–	□	■ +	■ +

Element/ Embellishment	Pocket	Neighborhood	Local	District	Regional
Seating	■	■	■	■	■
Shelter – large	–	–	□	□	□
Shelter – small	□	□	□	■	■
Signs – interpretive	□	□	■	■	■
Signs – wayfinding	□	■	■	■	■
Skate BMX	–	–	□	□	–
Tables	□	■	■	■	■
Tree planting	■	■	■	■	■
Water feature	–	–	–	■	■
Water Play	–	–	□	□	–
WSUD	■	■	■	■	■
WIFI Access	–	–	–	□	□

Table 21. Open space Element Guidelines

FUNCTION	DESIGN GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS OR REFERENCES
Linking Space	Linking Spaces should: + comprise a clear footpath, including shared user path that provides for accessible movement for all users between streets or open spaces to strengthen the open space network, + appropriately delineate various users (pedestrian, wheelchair-user or cyclist), in particular for shared paths to minimise conflict, through clear signage or separate infrastructure, + be designed to align with universal design standards, including lighting, wayfinding, footpath markings, tactiles etc. (refer to Inclusivity, Access, Diversity and Universal Design Guidelines and Standards), + provide for intermittent rest or pause points to support a variety of users by way of appropriate seating, hard standings, drinking fountains, + be partially shaded through tree canopy coverage, where adjacent planting is possible.
	References: + **Merri-bek Integrated Transport Strategy 2019** + **Merri-bek Footpath Trading Guidelines 2020** + **Linking People and Spaces: A Strategy for Melbourne's Open Space Network (2002, Parks Victoria)**
Play Space	Refer to the objectives and actions of the **Merri-bek Play Strategy 2016-2020**. Refer to the Maintenance Service Timeframes table within this document, contained at page 25 of the Merri-bek Play Strategy. Nature Play spaces should: + be a purpose-built outdoor space that includes natural materials including some that are able to be manipulated, moved around and that may change with the weather and over the seasons, + include natural elements such as durable timber, logs, rocks/ stone, grass, water, trees and other plant materials, unsealed areas that may include dirt, sand, leaf litter and grass, as well as terrain and paths, + deliberately provide some loose natural materials which children can engage (pebbles, dirt, flowers, gum nuts, etc., twigs and small branches, water, etc.) + create opportunities for children to engage with natural features and stimulate imagination, exploration and active play, + ensure the location of nature play elements support safety and amenity, such as located in areas with clear lines of site, adjacent to activity to ensure appropriate supervision and support safe play practices, + position nature play elements where children would play naturally, + be designed to respect the natural elements of an open space, + be respectful to and align with the values of enhancing and protecting the natural environment, + respect natural habitats, and support nature play activities that are sensitive to natural habitats i.e., not moving large logs or rocks, or interfering with natural habitats. + provide for engaging, accessible active recreation and play equipment. References: **Merri-bek Play Strategy 2016-2020**
Formal Sport	Refer to the objectives and actions of the Merri-bek Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020. Council supports the Recreation Access Program (RAP) that provides opportunities for young adults over 16 years with intellectual disabilities to take part in sport, recreation and leisure activities. References **Merri-bek Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020**

FUNCTION	DESIGN GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS OR REFERENCES
Informal Sport	Refer to the objectives and actions of the Merri-bek Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020. Council supports the Recreation Access Program (RAP) that provides opportunities for young adults over 16 years with intellectual disabilities to take part in sport, recreation and leisure activities. References **Merri-bek Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020**
Civic Space	Civic spaces should: + provide better pedestrian amenity and connectivity, + be designed for both structured and unstructured community activities to occur, + be provided with active interfaces by private development, where appropriate, + implement wayfinding signage to provide information for orientation, general information, interpretation and education, + create a sense of identity and civic pride through improving the quality of urban and open spaces as places to meet and relax, + be of high-quality design that incorporates environmentally sustainable design requirements and safer design principles for new buildings and public realm enhancements, + be coordinated and present a cohesive and attractive environment + be designed to accommodate the amenity needs of people of all ages and abilities, and are places where people feel safe to meet, play and relax, + encourage the incorporation of public art within public and private development to enrich public spaces and celebrate the cultural diversity of the community.
	References: **Brunswick Structure Plan 2012** **Coburg Central Structure Plan 2020** **Glenroy Structure Plan 2008** **Shopping Street Renewal Policy 2015** **Merri-bek Neighbourhood Centres Strategy 2017**
Nature Conservation	Nature Conservation spaces should: + provide healthy environments critical to the health and wellbeing of the community, + be integrated with other uses of open space, + protect the biodiversity value of the nature ecosystem, + provide quality habitat that involves more than just vegetation cover, + provide positive opportunities for people to experience, learn about and connect with nature, + consider a site's existing biodiversity and/or cultural significance, current condition, connectivity in the landscape, potential for improvement and community commitment and/or expectation, + be supported through the collaboration of community, advocacy groups and relevant stakeholders, + be supported by urban conservation programs that consider the impacts of land use change, + ensure design, location and level of illumination of new public lighting in parks should be chosen to minimise impacts on trees and wildlife.
	References: **Merri-bek Urban Forest Strategy 2017** **Merri-bek Nature Plan 2020** **Gardening with Indigenous Plants in Merri bek 2005** **Sustainable Gardening Merri-bek 2012**

FUNCTION	DESIGN GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS OR REFERENCES
Creek Corridor	Creek corridor spaces should: + Create a continuous public open space corridor along the Moonee Ponds, Merri and Edgars Creeks. + Consider a public open space corridor along the creeks be a minimum of 50 metres on each side of the creek. + Consider a minimum of 30 metres from the edge of the embankment on each side should be a vegetated buffer. + Demonstrate a level of positive contribution to the ecological value of the creek corridor, whether through the provision of tree canopy, or retention in some form of creek corridor environments. + Access points to creek parklands in residential areas are no further apart than 400m. References: **Merri Creek and Environs Strategy (Merri Creek and Environs Strategy Steering Committee, 1999), including the Merri Creek Development Guidelines 1999** **Moonee Ponds Creek Chain of Ponds** **Moonee Ponds Creek Naturalisation Plan** **Westbreen Creek Conservation and Development Plan 2019** **Edgars Creek Conservation and Development Plan 2013**
Heritage	Refer to the Toolkit for Victorian Government Asset Management Conducting a Heritage Audit (DELWP, 2015). This toolkit has been developed to assist Victorian Government departments and agencies in identifying and assessing the condition of heritage assets they own, occupy or manage to identify their future maintenance needs. Refer to the objectives, standards and techniques of the Heritage Gardens guidelines (Heritage Victoria, December 2001) References: **Victorian Government Asset Management Conducting a Heritage Audit (DELWP, 2015)** **Heritage Gardens (Heritage Victoria, December 2001)** **Watering Heritage Gardens and Trees (Heritage Victoria, 2008)**
Memorial Park	Refer to the Toolkit for Victorian Government Asset Management Conducting a Heritage Audit (DELWP, 2015). This toolkit has been developed to assist Victorian Government departments and agencies in identifying and assessing the condition of heritage assets they own, occupy or manage to identify their future maintenance needs. Refer to the objectives, standards and techniques of the Heritage Gardens guidelines (Heritage Victoria, December 2001) References: **Victorian Government Asset Management Conducting a Heritage Audit (DELWP, 2015)** **Heritage Gardens (Heritage Victoria, December 2001)** **Watering Heritage Gardens and Trees (Heritage Victoria, 2008)**

FUNCTION	DESIGN GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS OR REFERENCES
Passive Recreation	Passive recreation spaces should: + provide for a meaningful place to sit and enjoy the open space, such as a bench, seat, picnic table etc. + be designed to capture the natural features of, or surrounding the open space, such as a path through existing mature trees, a viewing platform to a surrounding, + provide for clear accessibility through footpath access, wayfinding or clear sightlines, + contain natural features, such as creek lines, native vegetation, mature trees and planting, or provide for meaningful landscaped areas intentionally designed to contribute to the natural features of the open space, + provide for shade or shelter to encourage lingering in the open space, such as tree canopy coverage or a designed shelter.
Utility	Refer to the guidelines provided by the relevant asset management authority as it relates to a particular utility, such as retarding basins, stormwater drainage, electrical powerlines, rail corridor. References: Powerlines and vegetation management, Energy Safe Victoria Land Development Manual, Yarra Valley Water, January 2023
Horticulture	For objectives and standards for horticulture function refer to Merri-bek Food System Strategy 2017-2020 and Merri-bek Food System Strategy 2020-2024 Extension, as well as the Community Food Growing Assessment Guidelines in particular the Community Garden Site Criteria (page 15).
Dog Park	A dedicated dog park (off-leash or fenced) should: + be set-back from sensitive interfaces, + be prioritised for sites exhibiting physical characteristics that minimise exposure and impact on existing residential development (ie topography, vegetation buffers, existing view lines etc.) + be prioritised for sites providing a 500m walkable catchment where properties cannot otherwise access a dedicated dog park. + Fenced dog parks should: + provide for a segregated area by a chain-wire fence, that is visually permeable and gated with a double gate entry system to prevent dogs escaping, + provide drinking fountains with dog bowls. + provide tree planting to provide visual interest and shade for people and dogs, + provide sufficient seating, dog bags and bins, + include signage showing dog park etiquette + consider a segregated area for small dogs and a larger space for bigger dogs to run around in + consider agility equipment or land-forms to provide interest + keep grass cut low to reduce allergies for dogs and people References: **Council Order (March 2006 Council Meeting): Dogs off-leash areas**
Undeveloped	Open spaces which have no other identifiable function. This 'function' is only attributed to open spaces where no other single function applies (including utility).

Table 22. Function Design Guidelines and Standards

	DESIGN GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS OR REFERENCES
Urban Design Guidelines	Refer to the principles, objectives, and standards based on the Victorian Urban Design Guidelines (DTP), in particular: **Part 3 Public Realm** + 3.1 Public Space Principles + 3.2 Street Spaces and Plazas + 3.3 Local Parks + 3.4 Communal Open Spaces **Part 6. Objects in the public realm** + 6.1 Principles for objects in the public realm + 6.2 Street and park furniture + 6.3 Trees and planting + 6.4 Barriers and Fencing + 6.5 Lighting + 6.6 Signs and Wayfinding + 6.7 Small public buildings and structures References: **Victorian Urban Design Guidelines (DTP)** **Merri-bek Technical Notes**
Inclusivity, Access, Diversity and Universal Design	Refer to the objectives and strategies of the **Merri-bek Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2016-2022**. **Universal Design Principles (Victorian Government Universal Design Policy)**
Universal Design	**Equitable use** - The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities. **Flexibility in use** - The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities. **Simple and intuitive use** - Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the person's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level. **Perceptible information** - The design communicates necessary information effectively to the person, regardless of ambient conditions or the person's sensory abilities. **Tolerance for error** - The design minimises hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions. **Low physical effor**t – The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue. **Size and space for approach and use** - Appropriate size and space are provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of the person's body size, posture, or mobility. Refer to the objectives and strategies of the Merri-bek Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2016-2022. Merri-bek Good Access is Good Business Guide 2013 is a guide for small businesses and retailers containing basic information to help understand what good access is, why it is important. While this guide is dedicated to accessing businesses the principles and design standards can be applied to open space elements, particularly in civic and activity centre contexts. In particular, HOW to provide Good Physical Access – Outside. References: **State-wide design, service and infrastructure plan 2017-2037** **Designing for Diversity (Department of Health)** **Inclusivity Victoria State disability plan 2022–2026**

	DESIGN GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS OR REFERENCES
Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)	The Safer Design Guidelines for Victoria is based on the following set of principles: Surveillance - 1. Maximise visibility and surveillance of the public environment. Provide 'natural surveillance' from passers-by to public places from adjoining buildings, so people feel safer and potential offenders feel exposed. Access, movement and sightlines - 2. Provide safe movement, good connections and access. Provide well defined routes and clear sightlines (day and night) so people can see and be seen. Entrances to buildings should be safe and accessible without compromising security. Activity - 3. Maximise activity in public places. Encouraging walking increases activity, social interaction and surveillance in public places and reduces the risk of crime. Ownership 4. Clearly define private and public space responsibilities. Clarifying 'ownership' of private and public space is important for improving public safety. It is important to encourage residents to take responsibility and pride in places they use and inhabit. Management and maintenance 5. Manage public space to ensure that it is attractive and well used. Ensure well maintained public places to improve people's perception of how safe a place is and support desire to occupy and use those places. References: **Safer Design Guidelines for Victoria 2005**
Arts and Culture	Public art should: – Interpret, define and enhance the character and cultural identity of a city. – Acknowledge cultural heritage and traditions. – Provide a sense of public ownership of public art objects and spaces. – Encourage positive and practical interaction between people and public spaces. – Challenge perceptions and prejudices. – Express the principles of sustainability. – Promote a sense of wellbeing by enhancing enjoyment of public spaces. Key principles of the Public Arts Guidelines are as follows: – Promotes local identity and sense of place, – Stimulates creativity, expression, and innovation by artists and communities, – Stimulates healthy debate, – Has artistic integrity, – Provides access and opportunities for diverse communities across Moreland to participate in arts activities and experiences, – Increases community awareness and appreciation of art. References: **Merri-bek Public Art Guidelines** **Merri-bek Arts and Culture Strategy 2011 – 2016** **Brunswick Structure Plan 2012** **Coburg Central Structure Plan 2020**

	DESIGN GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS OR REFERENCES
Off-leash Dog Areas	Conditions for using off-leash dog areas: You must meet the following conditions to use a designated off-leash area where you can take off a dog's chain, cord or leash: – As the owner, you must carry a chain, cord or leash which you can use to control your dog. **You must use this to control your dog if your dog's behaviour threatens any animal or person.** – As the owner, you must be able to control your dog by voice or hand so you can put on their chain, cord or leash if needed. – As the owner, you must not allow your dog to attack, rush at or threaten any person or animal. – You must carry bags for removing dog waste when you take your dog to any public place. **You must dispose of these bags into a rubbish bin. We do not supply plastic bags for the removal of dog waste in Merri-bek off-leash areas.** If you can't control your dog in these situations, then you cannot take your dog off it's lead, even in an off-leash area. **You can teach your dog to obey your voice or hand control by practicing in a private enclosed area.**
Water	References: **Integrated Water Management (IWM) 2040 Strategy – Towards a Water Sensitive City** **Merri-bek City Council WSUD streetscape raingarden and tree pit design package** **Merri-bek City Council Passively Irrigated Street Trees Best practice guidelines / tech notes**
Events in Public Spaces	References: **Open Space Temporary Occupation Permit** **Event Permit Guide: A guide to planning outdoor events in Merri-bek.** **Accessible events guidelines and checklist for organisers, chairs, speakers and MCs (VIC State Government)** **Merri-bek Community Use of Council Managed Venues Policy**
Pest and Weed Management	References: **Merri-bek Pest and Weed Management Policy 2016**
Public Lighting	Refer to the objectives and standards of **Public Lighting Policy 2018, to be reviewed November 2023**

Table 23. Other Design Guidelines and Standards

6.7. GAPS ANALYSIS

6.7.1. OVERVIEW

This section outlines the methodology used to develop the gaps analysis for this Technical Report. The gaps analysis mapping and observations at the municipal and suburb scale are provided in **Sections 8** and **9** of this report.

Gaps analysis is undertaken to provide a spatial assessment of the existing open space network to help identify 'gaps' in the existing open space network where open space projects may be required to address these gaps. It analyses the spatial distribution of open spaces as well as defining applicable 'catchments' for each open space, to define the area which the open space is generally considered to service.

This Technical Report uses three different approaches to gaps analysis to develop a suite of maps that analyse the existing open space network through different criteria. The three analysis are:

+ Baseline Service Gaps Analysis
+ Catchment Hierarchy Gaps Analysis and,
+ Specific Gaps Analysis

Why three types of gaps analysis?

By using multiple lens to undertake gaps analysis, a more detailed understanding of the existing open space network is created. The three different approaches to gaps analysis illustrates the relative scale, reach and function of the existing open space network. The three analysis help identify not just a general gap in the distribution of open space, but also the distribution of a certain type of open space, and function-specific gap areas, where an open space project may be required to meet a specific need that is not currently provided.

Further information on each type of gaps analysis is provided below.

ANALYSIS 1 BASELINE SERVICE

Baseline service gaps analysis represents what Merri-bek City Council seeks to achieve as the 'bare minimum' level of access to open space across the municipality.

What does this analysis show?

The baseline service gaps analysis shows all areas that achieve a baseline level of access to any open space in the municipality. An area is considered to have a baseline level of service if is within 300m from an open space inside an activity centre and 500m from an open space outside an activity centre. This is consistent with the existing 'Parks Close to Home' policy.

Why is it an important indicator?

The baseline service gaps analysis sets an important benchmark aligned with the intent of the established Merri-bek Policy of Parks Close to Home. This policy has supported Council to create 7 new public open spaces since 2018 and has greatly improved access to local open space within 300m/500m of residences. It is important to acknowledge that this baseline service relates to an area's accessibility to any open space, regardless of size, function or quality. As a result, an undeveloped pocket park is considered just as important as a regional open space boasting expansive parklands and multiple functions for the purposes of generating a catchment. Consequently, while it is an important benchmark to ensure that all residents and workers are within a reasonable distance of some form of open space it should not be used as the sole indicator for determining whether an open space network is 'fit for purpose'.

What about open spaces outside the municipality?

Parks such as Royal Park and Princes Park immediately abut the municipality and are recognised as having an important role in meeting the needs of local residents and workers. At the same time, it is recognised that the municipality is not in control of the management, function and long-term future of these open spaces. As a result, this Technical Report acknowledges and considers the location of abutting open spaces but is not reliant on them to offset the need for delivering a robust open space network within the municipality. This approach is consistent with the Panel findings in relation to the City of Yarra Open Space Strategy. All nearby open spaces outside the municipality have been identified in Figure 40.

ANALYSIS 2 CATCHMENT HIERARCHY

What does this analysis show?

The catchment hierarchy gaps analysis applies differing catchment sizes dependent on the open space's identified hierarchy. Smaller parks are not intended to service a wide catchment and are designed for local needs. Larger parks which have the capacity to support more functions support larger catchments. Consequently, a range of catchment sizes has been applied from 200m applying to Pocket scale spaces up to 500m for District and Regional scale spaces.

It is noted that many people will travel further than 500m to utilise an open space. Users for significant open

spaces may even come from outside the municipality. An objective of the Open Space Strategy is to ensure that open spaces facilitate easy, convenient and safe access for all residents and workers. Consequently, the catchment analysis undertaken is focussed on establishing to what level any given open space contributes to delivering convenient access to the open space network. Consequently, the catchments have been defined with an upper limit of 500m, just over 5-minutes walk to reflect this. It is noted that people may come from further afield than 500m to utilise the space.

Why is it an important indicator?

Catchment hierarchy gaps analysis represents a more nuanced representation of the existing open space network of Merri-bek that takes into consideration the overall scale and hierarchy of an open space when determining its intended service catchment.

This approach is broadly consistent with the methodology used by numerous other Open Space Strategies in metropolitan Melbourne including Yarra City Council, Maribyrnong City Council, Monash City Council, Greater Dandenong Council, Glen Eira City Council and City of Kingston to name a few.

ANALYSIS 3 SPECIFIC FUNCTIONS

What does this analysis show?

Specific functions gaps analysis analyses the distribution of specific uses across the existing open space network. It shows 500m catchments applied to a range of differing uses to gain an understanding of the areas within the municipality that are within safe, convenient and easy walking distance to these uses.

Why is it an important indicator?

Use of this layer of analysis helps identify gaps for specific needs and supports the provision of open space projects to address this. It also helps corroborate findings from community engagement where the community has identified a gap in the delivery of a specific function.

MAPPING APPROACH AND ASSUMPTIONS

The approach to the gaps analysis undertaken for this Technical Report was prepared by GIS modelling using VicPlan data, existing Council data as well as the data collected through desktop analysis and data validation.

A summary of the approach and assumptions applied to the GIS modelling and mapping for gaps analysis within this Technical Report is as follows:

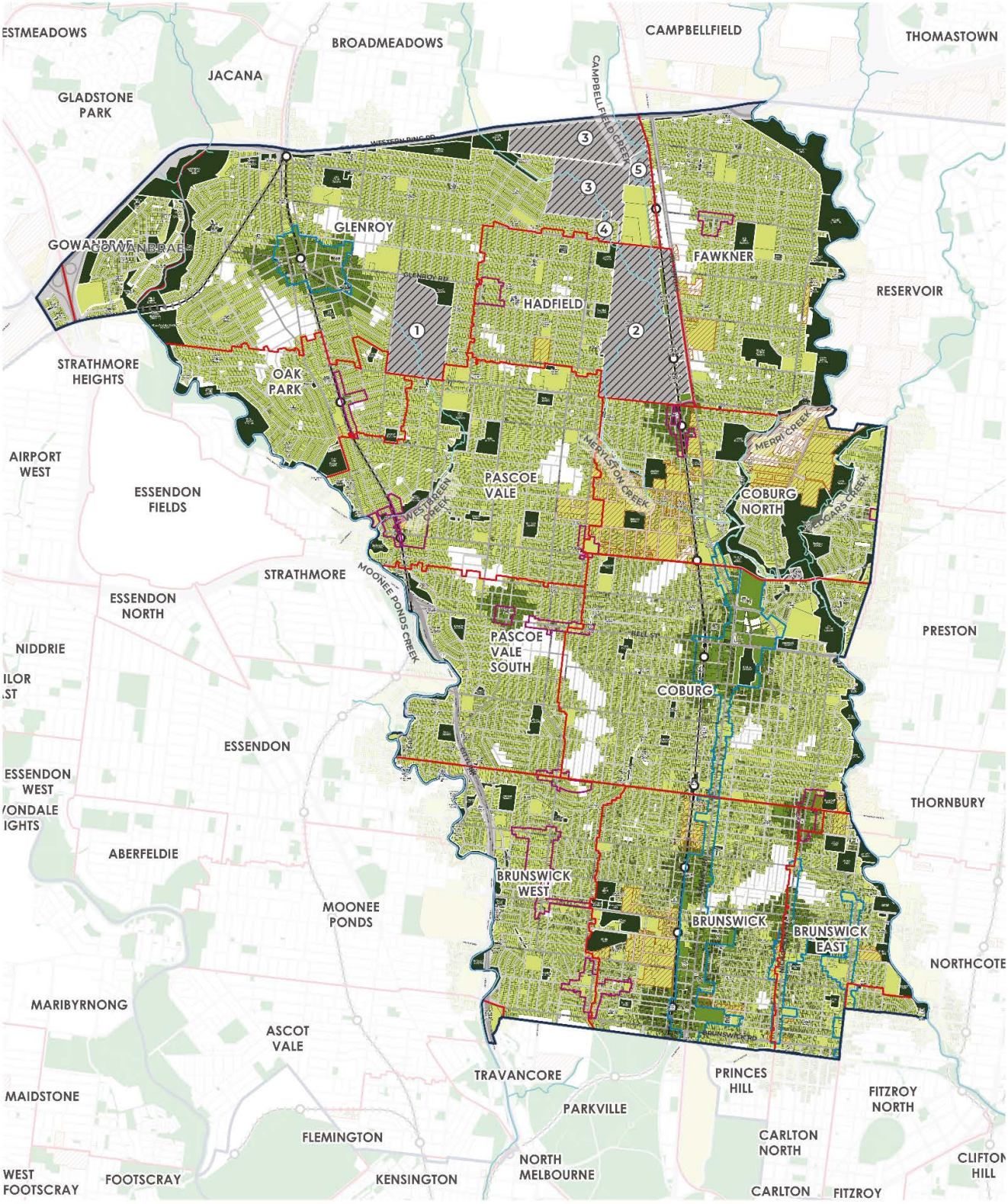
- A 'ped-shed' approach was adopted to determine walkable catchments. 'Pedshed' captures the 'path' taken along Council identified road centreline, or walkable pedestrian paths captured in Council's dataset. Paths that were not accurately captured as a road centreline or Council paths were amended manually however some discrepancies may still occur and result in minor property exclusions.
- Walkable catchments are generated from points along the boundary of an open space that interfaces with a road only. These points are treated as origin points and are generated at a rate of one point with a distance interval of 20 metres along the boundary. The specification of the distance interval is based on the median length in metres of all open spaces across the municipality. As such, this accounts for most open spaces, ensuring a minimum of one point is generated for entrances to open spaces. However, in some instances when an outlier is encountered, such as when a park has a road interface length less than 20 metres, the distance internal is reduced and manually adjusted for regenerating the ped-shed.
- A property is included within a walkable catchment where the property frontage is 20% within the allocated walkable catchment buffer of 25 meters from the centreline of a road. The purpose of this is to increase the spatial accuracy of the analysis and exclude properties that are hardly within the catchment that is typically captured from raw GIS processing. A property that is not within a walkable catchment as described above is therefore located in a gap area. Properties with multiple street frontages or irregular lot design (cul de sacs and battle axe lots) have in some cases been excluded from walkable catchments through the modelling due to the nature of this threshold as well as the resolution of council's street network dataset, resulting in a mapping anomaly.

7. GAPS ANALYSIS

The gaps analysis is an assessment of the spatial distribution of existing open space across Merri-bek. The gaps analysis provides a spatial representation of where open space is within safe and easy walking distance of the population living and working in the city. A series of catchments have been generated for each open space using the gaps analysis methodology outlined in the previous Section.

As discussed, three types of gap analysis have been undertaken; Baseline Service, Catchment Hierarchy and Specific Function. These analyses will be used later in the report make project recommendations for Merri-bek's Open Space Strategy.

7.1. ANALYSIS 1 - BASELINE SERVICE GAPS ANALYSIS



DRAWING KEY

- City Boundary
- Public Open Space
- Restricted Open Space
- Railway
- Connector Road
- Local Road
- Creek
- Suburb Boundary
- Industrial Zone
- 300m Catchment (open space within activity centres)
- 500m Catchment (open space outside activity centres)
- Neighbourhood Activity Centre
- Major Activity Centre

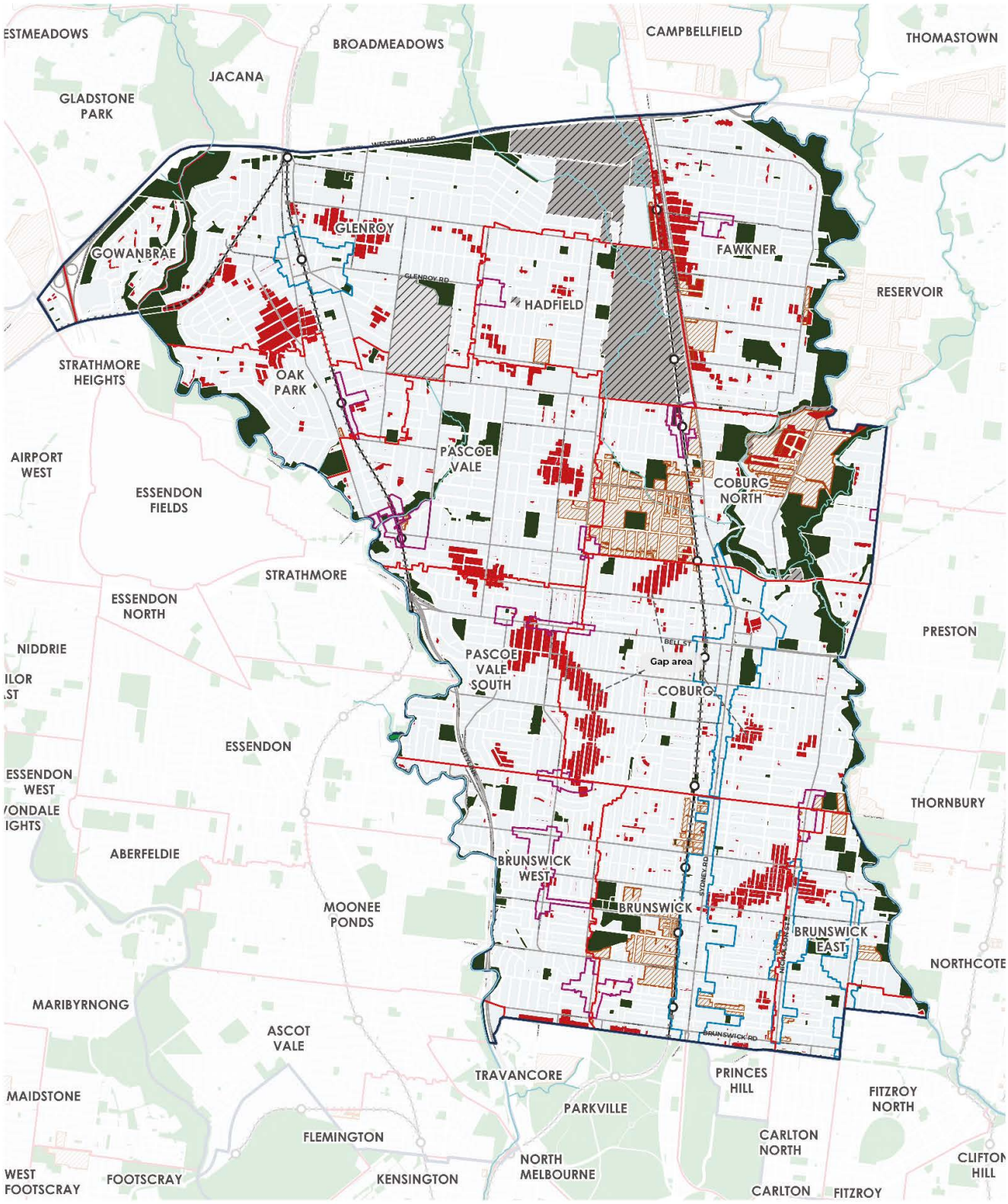
Restricted Open Space

1. Northern Golf Course
2. Fawkner Crematorium and Memorial Park
3. Northern Memorial Park
4. Box Forest Retarding Basin
5. Campbellfield Creek Retarding Basin

N

0 1 2km

Figure 38. Baseline Service Catchment



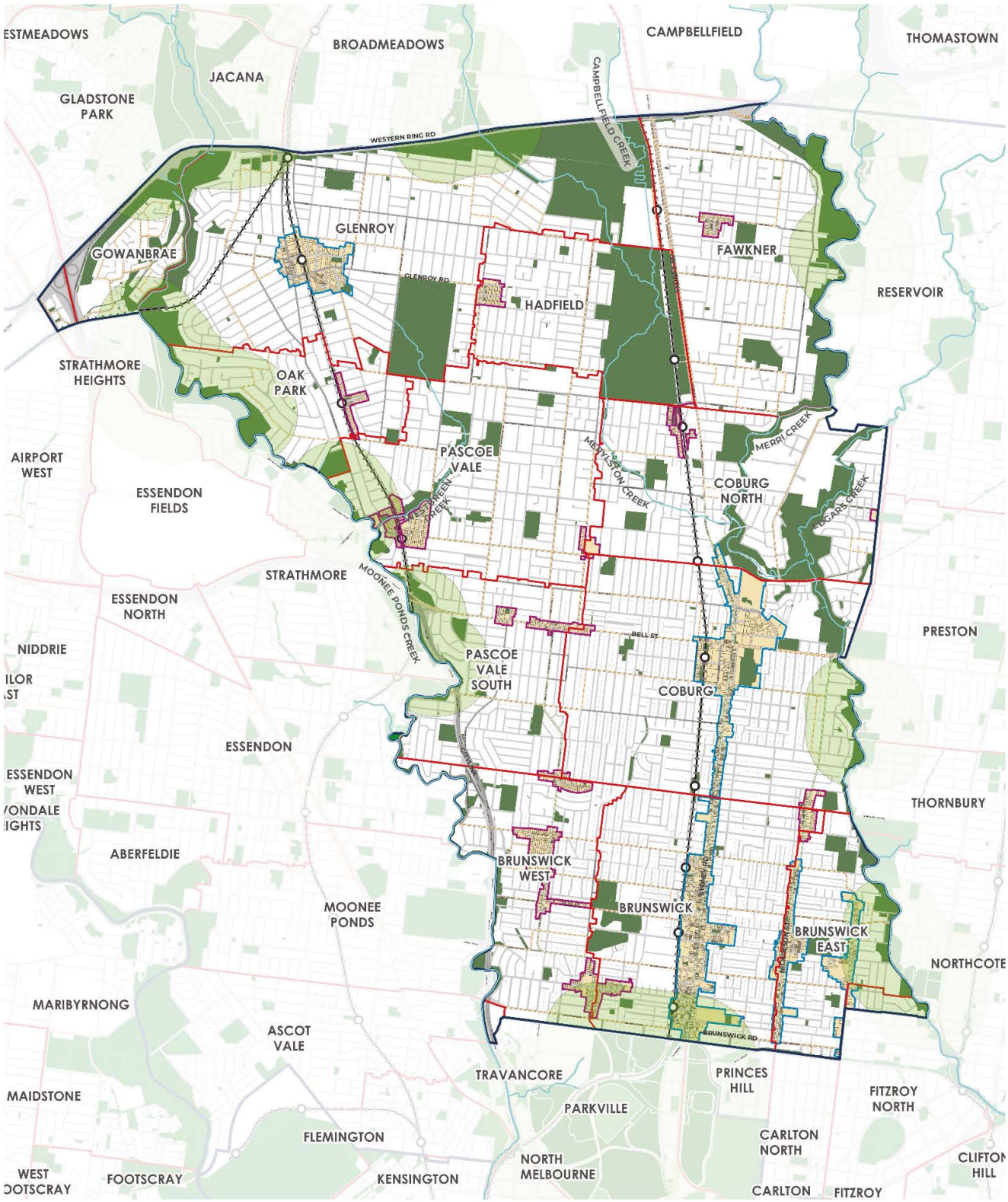
DRAWING KEY

- City Boundary
- Public Open Space
- Restricted Open Space
- Neighbourhood Activity Centre
- Major Activity Centre
- Industrial Zone
- Railway
- Creek
- Suburb Boundary
- Gap Area
- Neighbourhood Activity Centre
- Major Activity Centre

N

0 1 2km

Figure 39. Baseline Catchment Gaps Analysis



DRAWING KEY

- City Boundary
- Open Space
- Neighbourhood Activity Centre
- Major Activity Centre
- Railway
- Connector Road
- Tram Route
- Bus Route
- Creek
- Adjoining Open Space
- 500m Catchment
- Suburb Boundary

N

0 1 2km

Figure 40. Adjoining Open Space

7.1.1. OBSERVATIONS

The Baseline analysis establishes the areas within the municipality that are at least 300m from an open space (if they are within an activity centre) and 500m from an open space if they are outside an activity centre. The overall size of an open space is not taken into consideration meaning there is no distinction between a pocket park and a regional park in terms of the catchment distance. The catchment hierarchy gaps analysis provides a more nuanced gaps analysis which establishes catchments proportional to the scale of the park.

The baseline gaps analysis reveals that significant gap areas still exist throughout the municipality. At the municipality scale these are summarised as:

+ A significant gap aera stretching through the west of Coburg into Pascoe Vale South between Shore Reserve, Pascoe Vale South, Mailer Reserve, Coburg and north to Bell Street.
+ A significant gap area stretching between Brunswick and Brunswick East to the south of Albion Street between Nicholson Street and Sydney Road
+ A significant gap areas to the north and to the south of the Glenroy MAC stretching into Oak Park.
+ A linear gap area in Fawkner running along the east side of Sydney Road near Jukes Road.
+ A gap area in the east of Pascoe Vale and in the south of Pascoe Vale stretching into Pascoe Vale South.
+ A gap area on the border between Glenroy and Hadfield
+ Smaller gap aeras in the south-east of Coburg to the north of Moreland Road and to the south of Bridges Reserve.
+ A gap through the heart of the Glenroy MAC

We note that these observations are made at the municipal scale and represent significant areas. Further gaps analysis is undertaken at the suburb level in the **Section 8** where gaps can be analysed at a more granular level.

7.2. ANALYSIS 2 - CATCHMENT GAPS ANALYSIS

The following maps provide a gaps analysis where the catchment sizes of each open space is dependent on its size (see Table 10 for catchment sizes).

Please note that Figure 41: Catchment Hierarchy overlays all catchments onto a single map. Due to overlapping catchments the full extents of the catchments of each open space are not shown in full for graphic clarity. The primary purpose of the map at Figure 41 is to identify gap areas at the municipal scale.

This remains the same for all other representations of the catchment hierarchy map throughout the Technical Report.

To view the full extents of open space catchments by hierarchy please see pages 96-102.

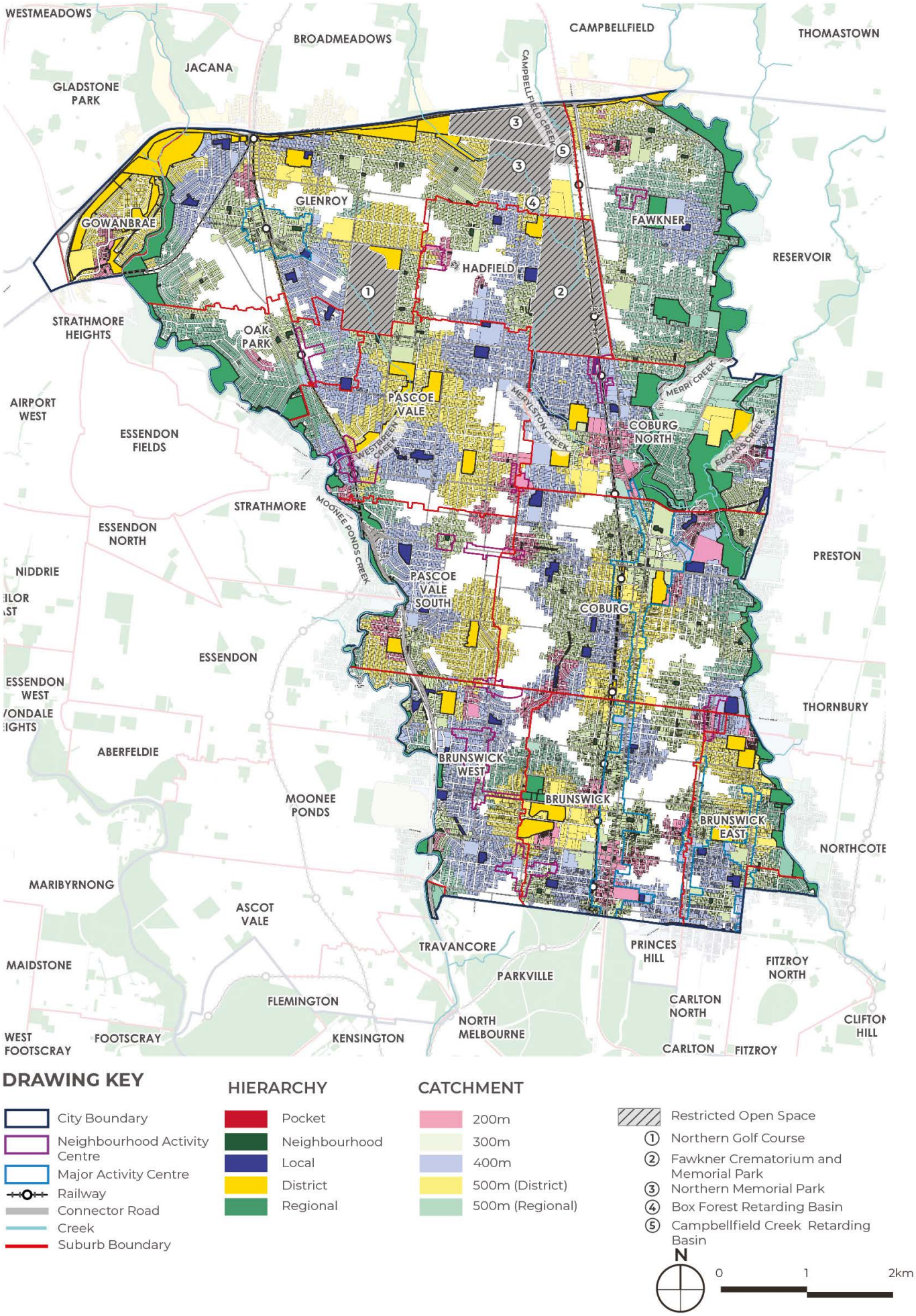


Figure 41. Hierarchy Catchment

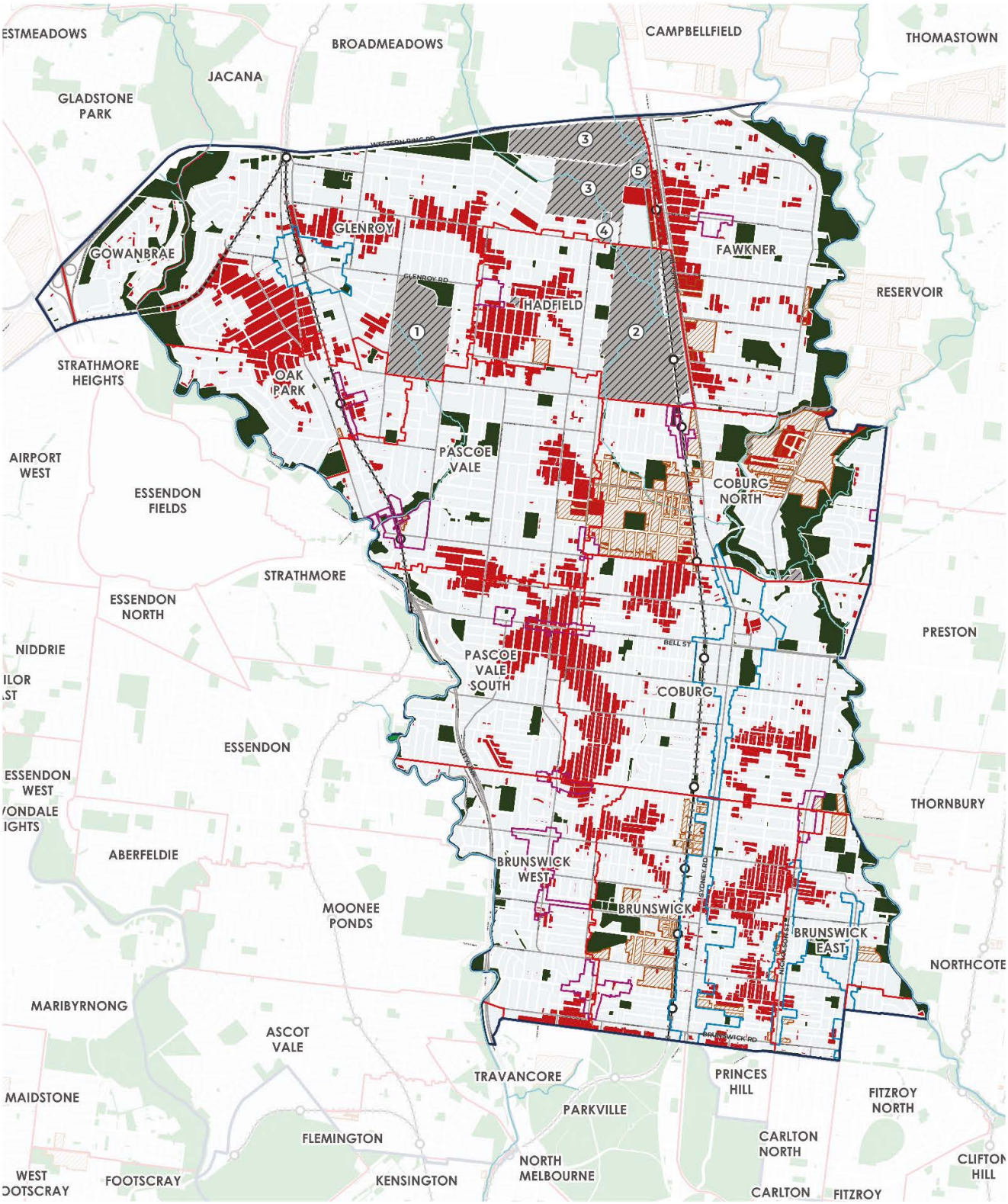


Figure 42. Hierarchy Catchment Gaps Analysis

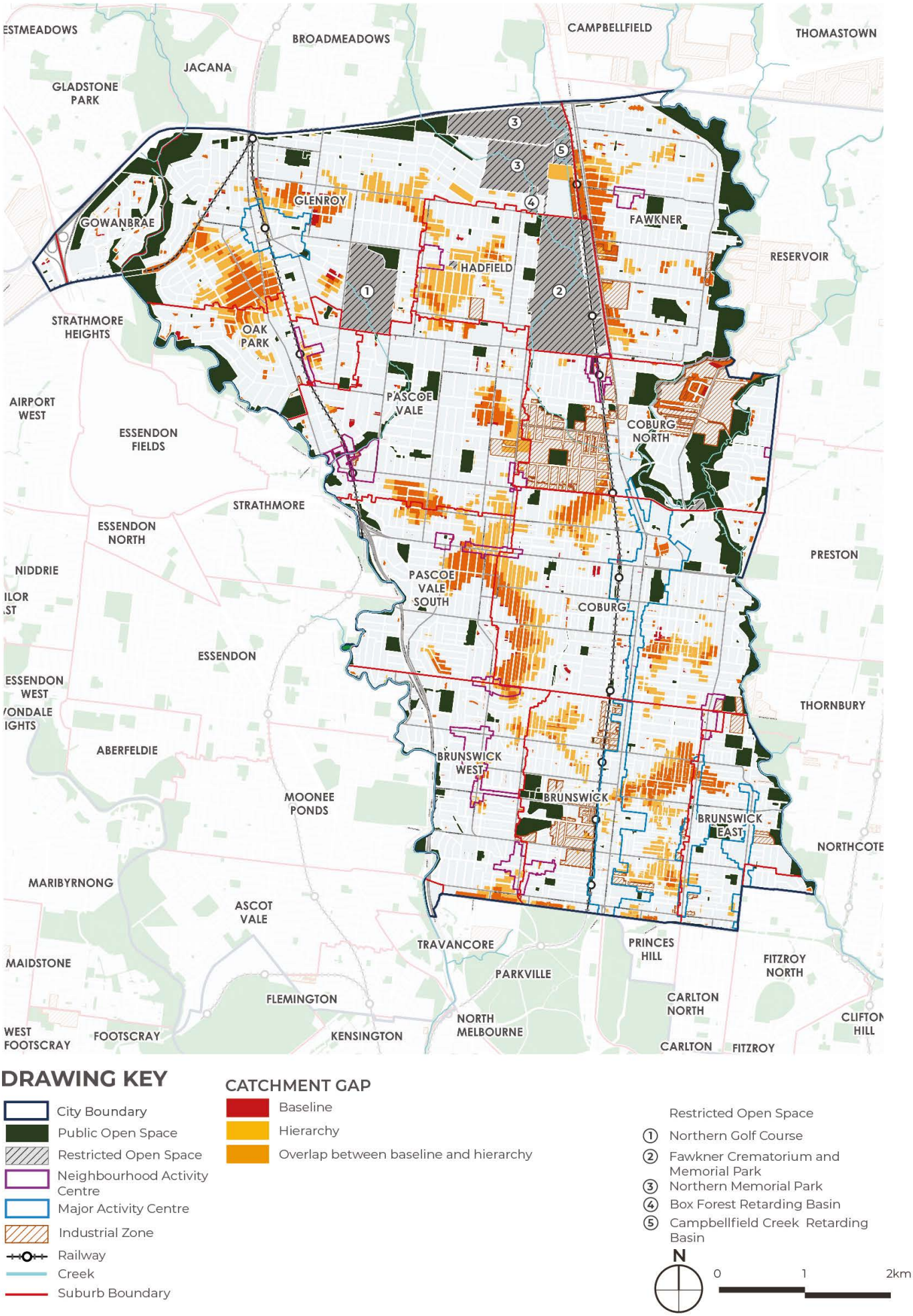
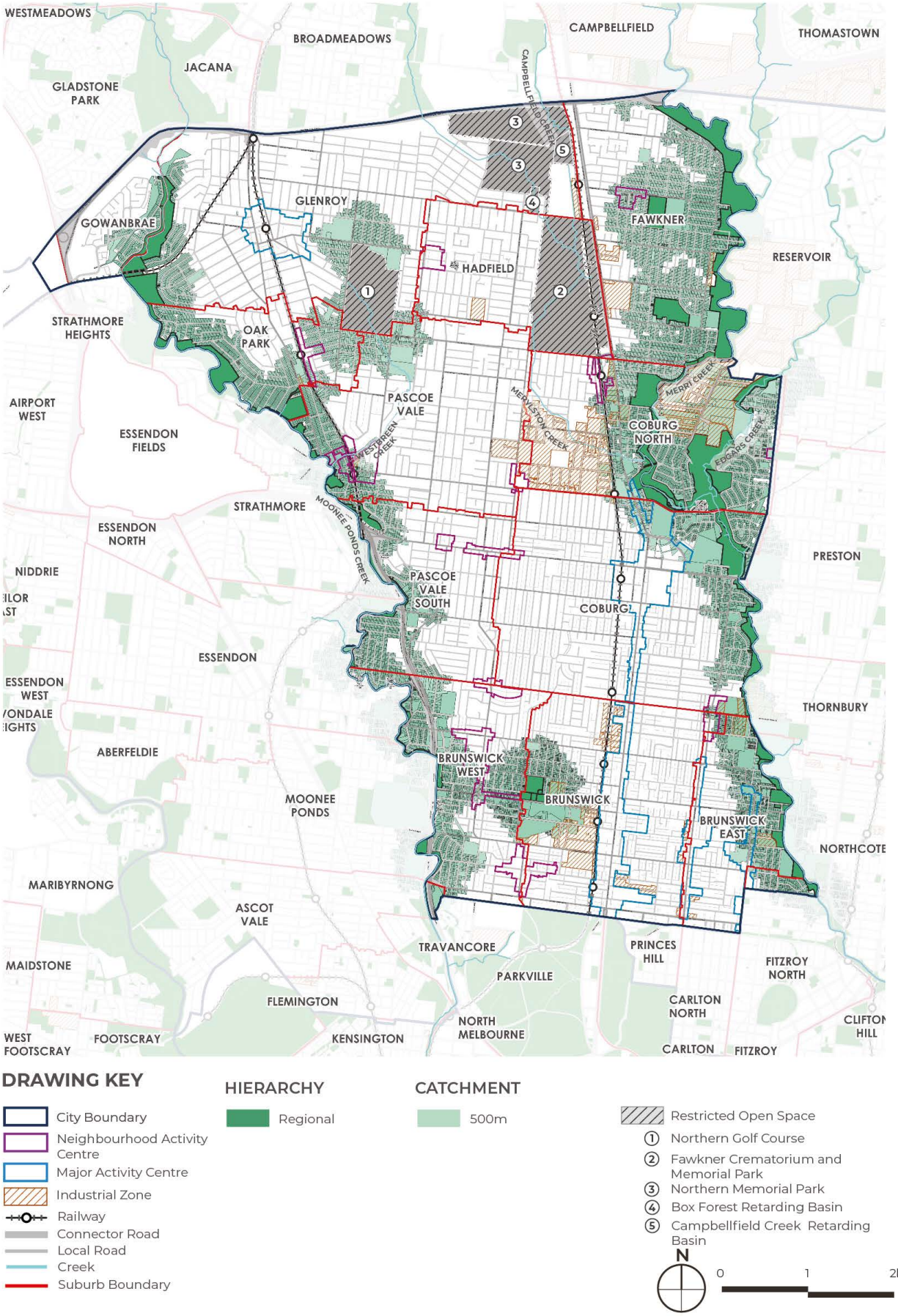
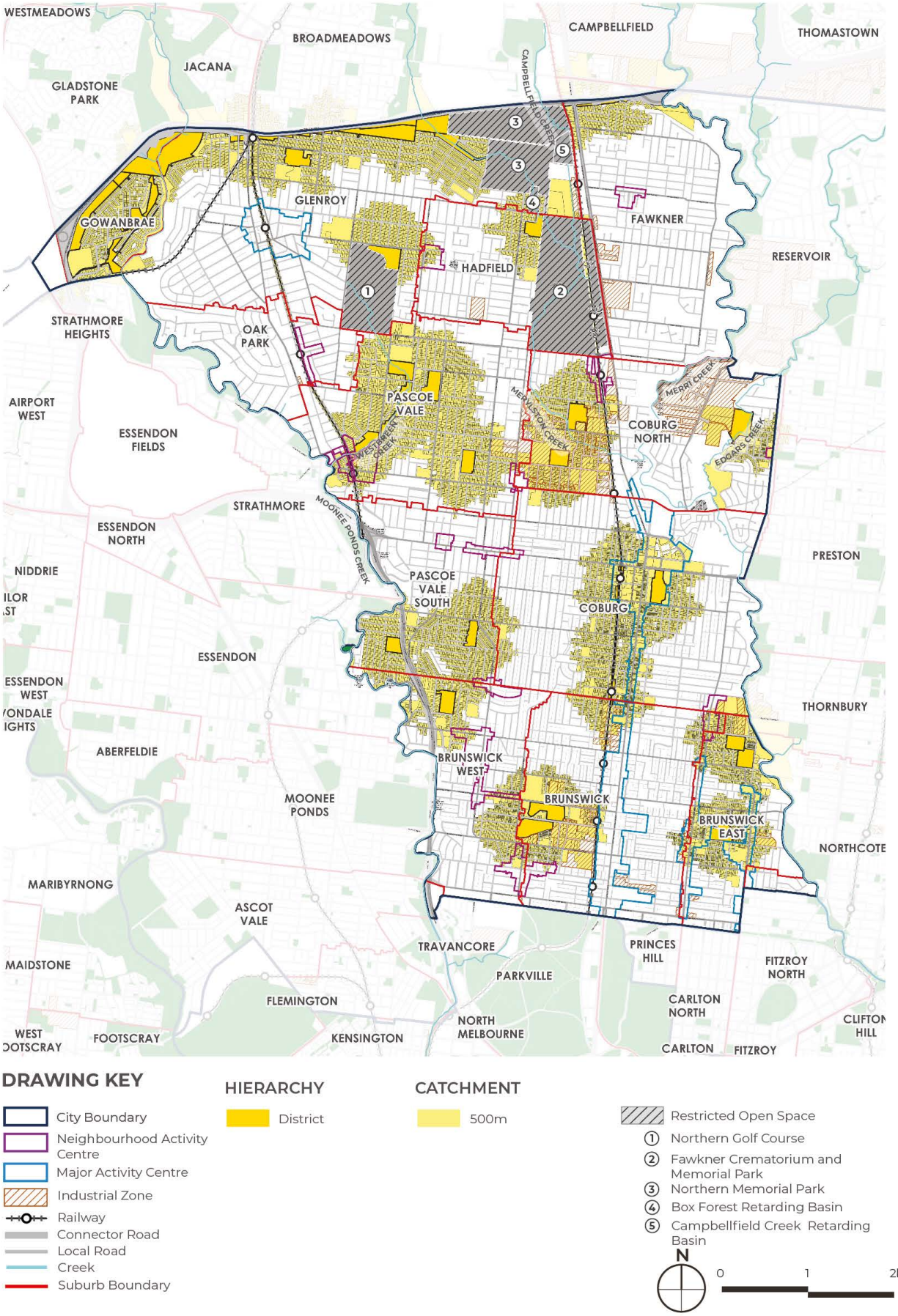


Figure 43. Combined Catchment Gaps Analysis



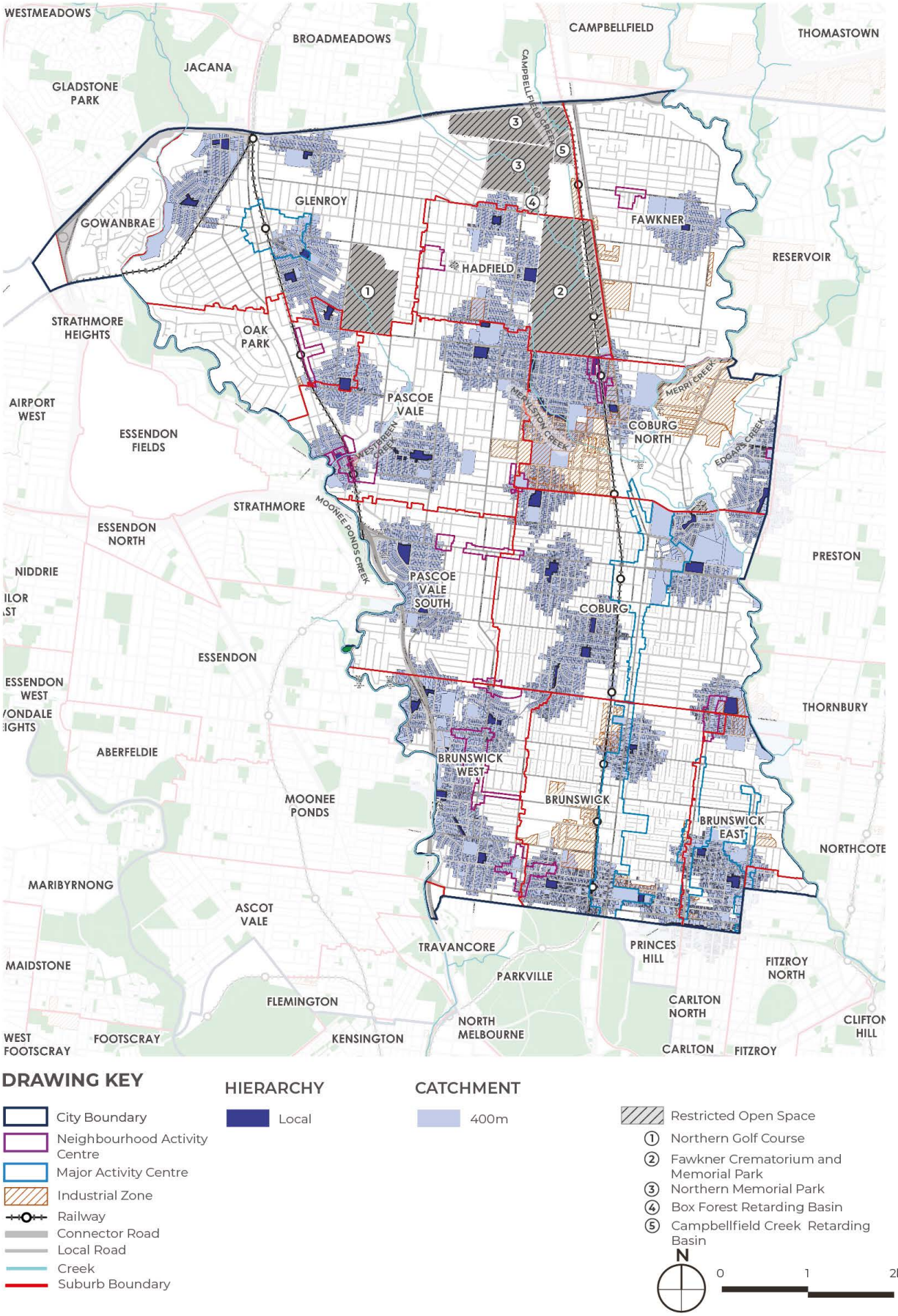
Regional open spaces have an undefined size as they are defined by being regionally significant spaces, and accordingly service a catchment of 500m and greater. Regional open spaces are generally located along the eastern and western boundaries of the municipality, and include restricted and private open spaces such as Fawkner Memorial Park and Northern Golf Course, respectively.

Regional Park Catchment



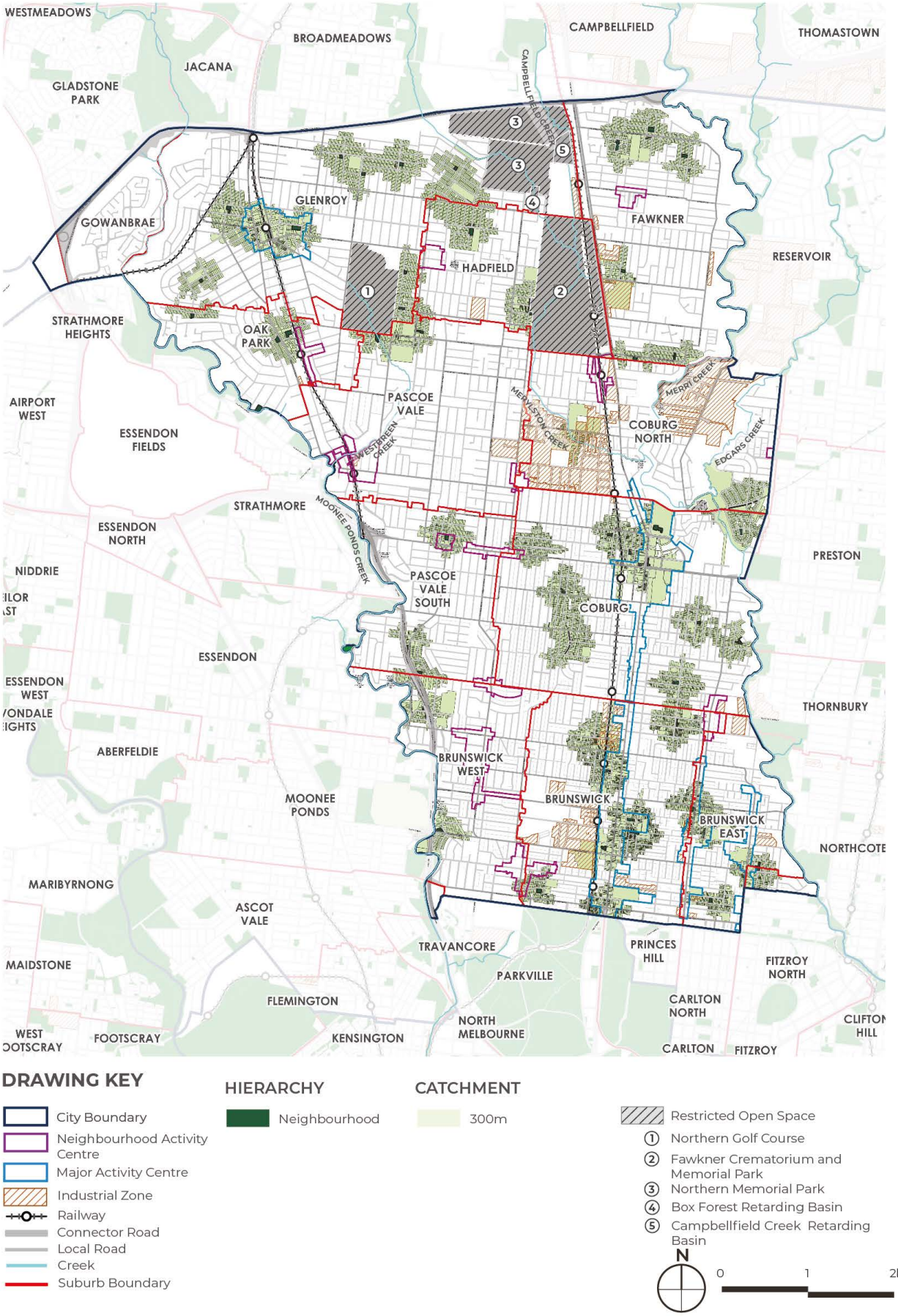
District open spaces are greater than 300,000sqm in size and service a catchment of 500m. District open spaces are located in clusters centrally and along the northern boundary of the municipality.

District Park Catchment



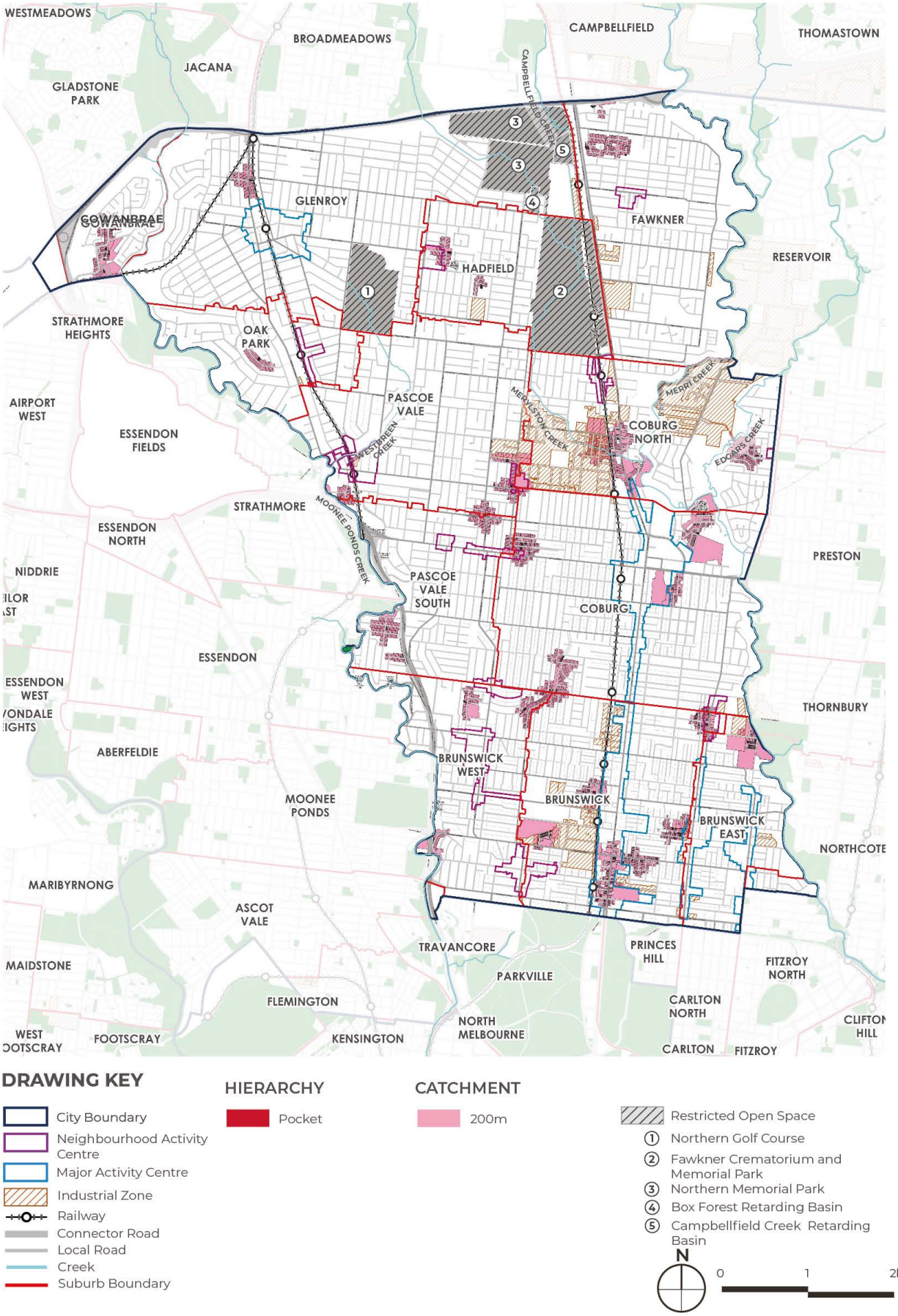
Local open spaces are between 5000-299,000sqm in size and service a catchment of 400m. Local open spaces are located in greater concentrations within the central spine of the municipality and along the western and southern boundaries of Merri-bek.

Local Park Catchment



Neighbourhood open spaces are between 1000-4900sqm in size and service a catchment of 300m. Neighbourhood open spaces are scattered throughout the municipality with greater concentrations of Neighbourhood open spaces located in the southern suburbs. Neighbourhood open spaces occur both adjacent to public transport corridors and commercial centres as well as throughout the residential hinterland.

Neighbourhood Park Catchment



Pocket parks are open spaces of less than 1000sqm in size and service a catchment of 200m. Pocket parks are scattered throughout the municipality with greater concentrations of pocket parks located in the central and southern suburbs. Many pocket parks are located along key public transport corridors and within, or adjacent to commercial centres.

Pocket Park Catchment

7.2.1. OBSERVATIONS

The Catchment Gaps analysis provides a more nuanced gaps analysis which establishes catchments proportional to the scale of the park.

The catchment gaps analysis is considered to be a more meaningful assessment of accessibility as the scale of the open space accessible is taken into consideration. Smaller scale parks are anticipated to service a smaller resident population than larger parks and consequently are attributed a smaller catchment. The catchments utilised are outlined in Section 7.2 of this Report.

The catchment gaps analysis shows gap areas that are more pronounced than the baseline service gaps analysis, suggesting that there are areas within the municipality that have only marginal access to an open space or are serviced by a smaller open space than is considered appropriate for its catchment.

The gaps generally align with those of the baseline services gaps analysis but are more significant. At the municipality scale these are summarised as:

The Coburg, Pascoe Vale South gap area is greater than the baseline and includes an area of Pascoe Vale.

The Glenroy gap area to the south of the Glenroy MAC is more significant and extends into Oak Park.

The Brunswick gap area to the east of Sydney Road is more significant and new gap areas in Brunswick appear to the north-west and south-west.

A new gap area is identified in the west of Hadfield in areas serviced by smaller Pocket and Local open spaces only.

The linear gap in Fawkner along Sydney Road is more significant.

The gap in the east of Pascoe Vale is more significant.

Additional gaps appear to the south of Brunswick, noting the proximity of Royal and Princes Park is not taken into consideration in the gaps analysis.

Fawkner Cemetery is a significant restricted open space asset that is currently discounted from analysis.

We note that these observations are made at the municipal scale and represent significant areas. Further gaps analysis is undertaken at the suburb level in the subsequent Section.

7.3. ANALYSIS 3 - SPECIFIC FUNCTION GAPS ANALYSIS

This series of maps establishes a catchment gaps analysis utilising only parks identified to contain certain uses. This is undertaken to understand the distribution and accessibility to certain uses which may inform future open space projects.

7.3.1. PLAY SPACES

Observations

This analysis looks at the general distribution of open spaces with an identified Play Space across the municipality. This informs whether there is equitable and appropriate accessibility to this function in Merri-bek.

Observations are summarised as follows:

+ Gap areas for play spaces generally align with the gap areas previously identified.
+ Pascoe Vale South, Coburg and Glenroy have significant play space gaps which should be addressed in future open space projects.

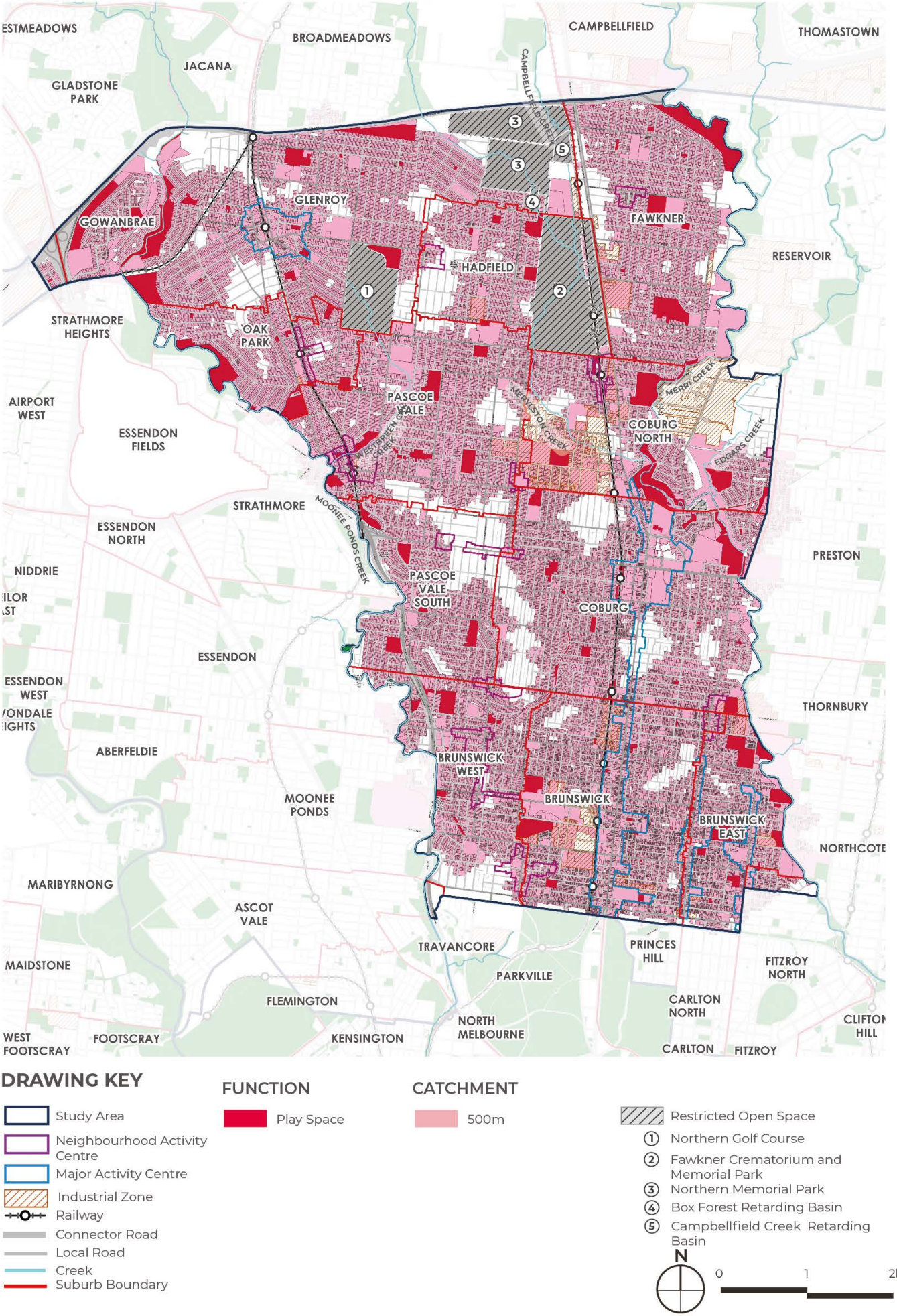


Figure 44. Play Space Catchment

7.3.2. DOGS PARKS

Observations

This analysis looks at the general distribution of open spaces with an identified Dog Park (fenced or off-lead area) across the municipality. This informs whether there is equitable and appropriate accessibility to this function in Merri-bek. Understanding that dog ownership levels vary across the municipality, the provision of dog facilities should be informed through other supporting indicators.

Observations are summarised as follows:

+ Gap areas for dog parks show a distribution of dog park aligned to larger open spaces within the municipality often shared with formal sports functions.
+ There is an association with linear creek corridors and dog park functions with Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek providing many dog park functions.
+ Pascoe Vale and Coburg providing a generally higher level of dog park accessibility than surrounding suburbs. It is noted that the parks occur in the vicinity of Westbreen Creek and Merlynston Creek (but not exclusively).
+ Distribution of dog parks is significantly less in the far north of the municipality which is a significant gap area with much of Glenroy, Hadfield and Fawkner in a gap area.
+ Gowanbrae has no identified dog park within its suburb boundaries.
+ A significant gap area exist in Brunswick towards the east side of Sydney Road and in the suburbs north. Brunswick Parklands provides the principal location for dog park functions nearby.

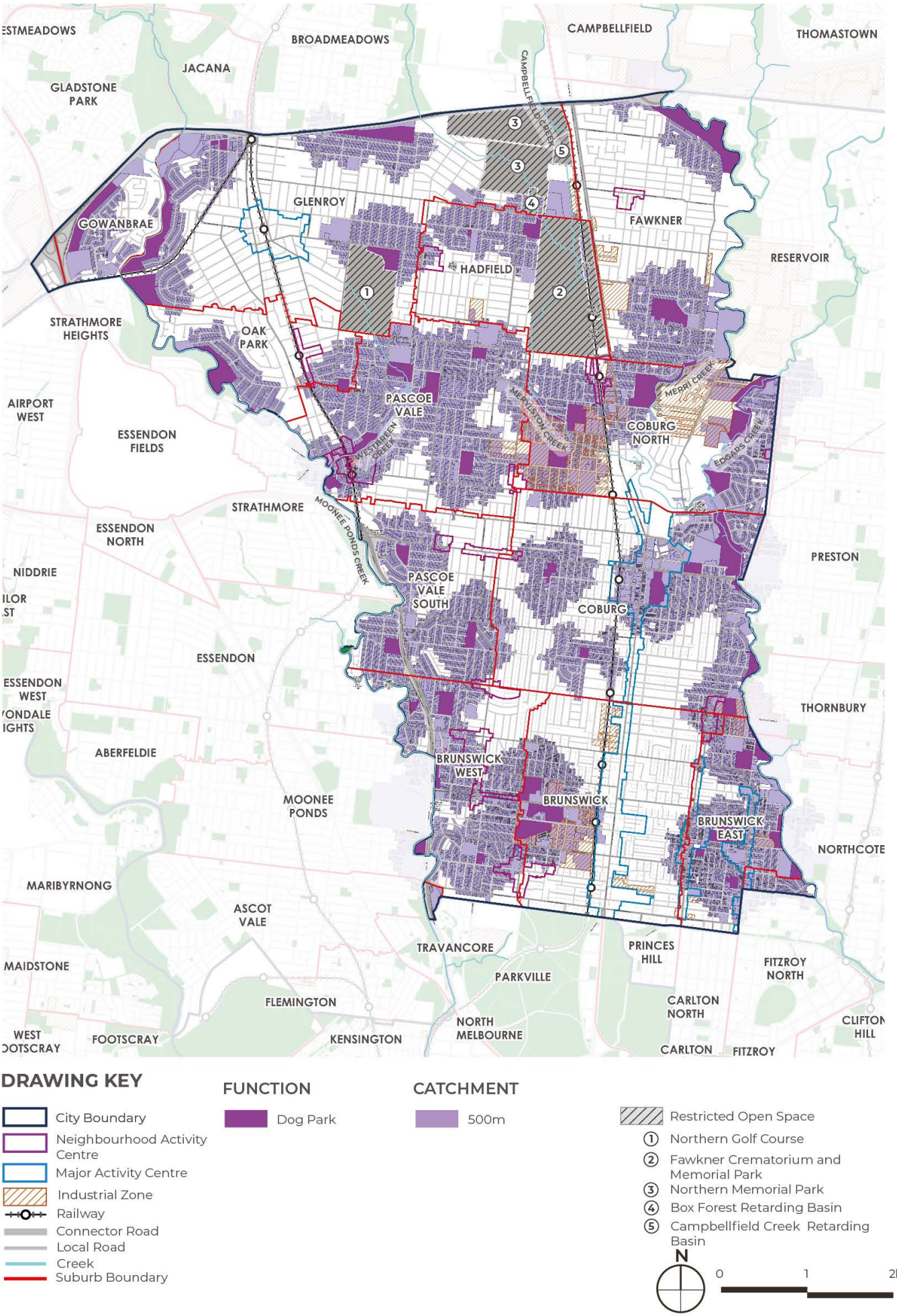


Figure 45. Dog Park Catchment

7.3.3. CREEK CORRIDOR

Observations

This analysis looks at the total area of the municipality within convenient walking distance of an open space identified as contributing to a creek corridor. Creek landscapes are a unique and special part of what makes Merri-bek unique. They are also the location along which the vast majority of open space within the municipality is provided. Merri Creek Trail and Moonee Ponds Creek Trail also provide high quality pedestrian and cycling linkages that facilitate the use of these creek corridors as a regionally significant network of open spaces. Understanding where these spaces occur will help identify projects to maximise accessibility to them helping leverage existing open space assets to support future population growth. Observations are summarised as follows:

- While creek corridors are significant elements of the open space network, the majority of Merri-bek is located a significant distance from them.
- Coburg North and Pascoe Vale enjoy extensive accessibility to creek corridors, but support for nature in open spaces outside of creek corridors should be considered.
- Brunswick, Coburg, Hadfield and Glenroy have limited interface to creek corridor areas.
- It is noted that creek corridors are generally not intersecting with designated activity centres such as the Brunswick, Coburg and Glenroy MAC's where future population is encouraged. Opportunities to better connect these locations through the public realm network to access the broader open space network via creek corridors will help connect the future population to existing open space assets.

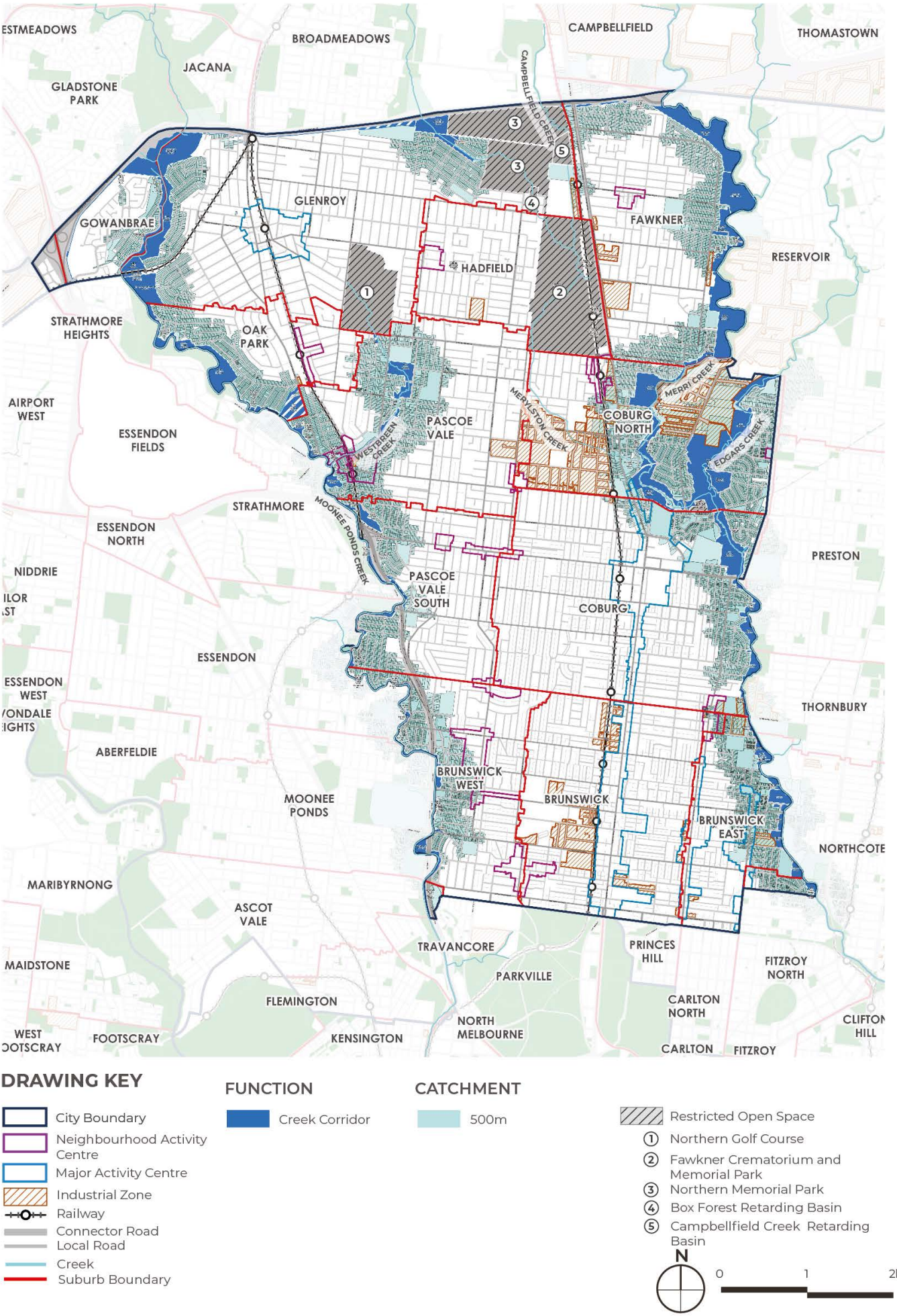


Figure 46. Creek Corridor Catchment

7.3.4. FORMAL SPORTS

Observations

This analysis looks at the general distribution of open spaces with an identified Formal Sports function across the municipality. Observations are summarised as follows:

+ Formal sports are generally occurring on larger open spaces in keeping with the spatial requirements for organised sports and team games. A gap of formal sports is located within the central spine of the municipality, aligning with commercial and public transport corridors, which reflects the areas where land is designated for commercial and residential growth.
+ Formal sports are located along the creek corridor in larger reserves as well as in stand-alone open space precincts within the broader road network.
+ The eastern portion of Brunswick, Gowanbrae and the western parts of Glenroy illustrate large gaps to formal sports.
+ Brunswick East, Coburg North, Pascoe Vale, Pascoe Vale South and Fawkner have high concentrations and even distributions of formal sport facilities.

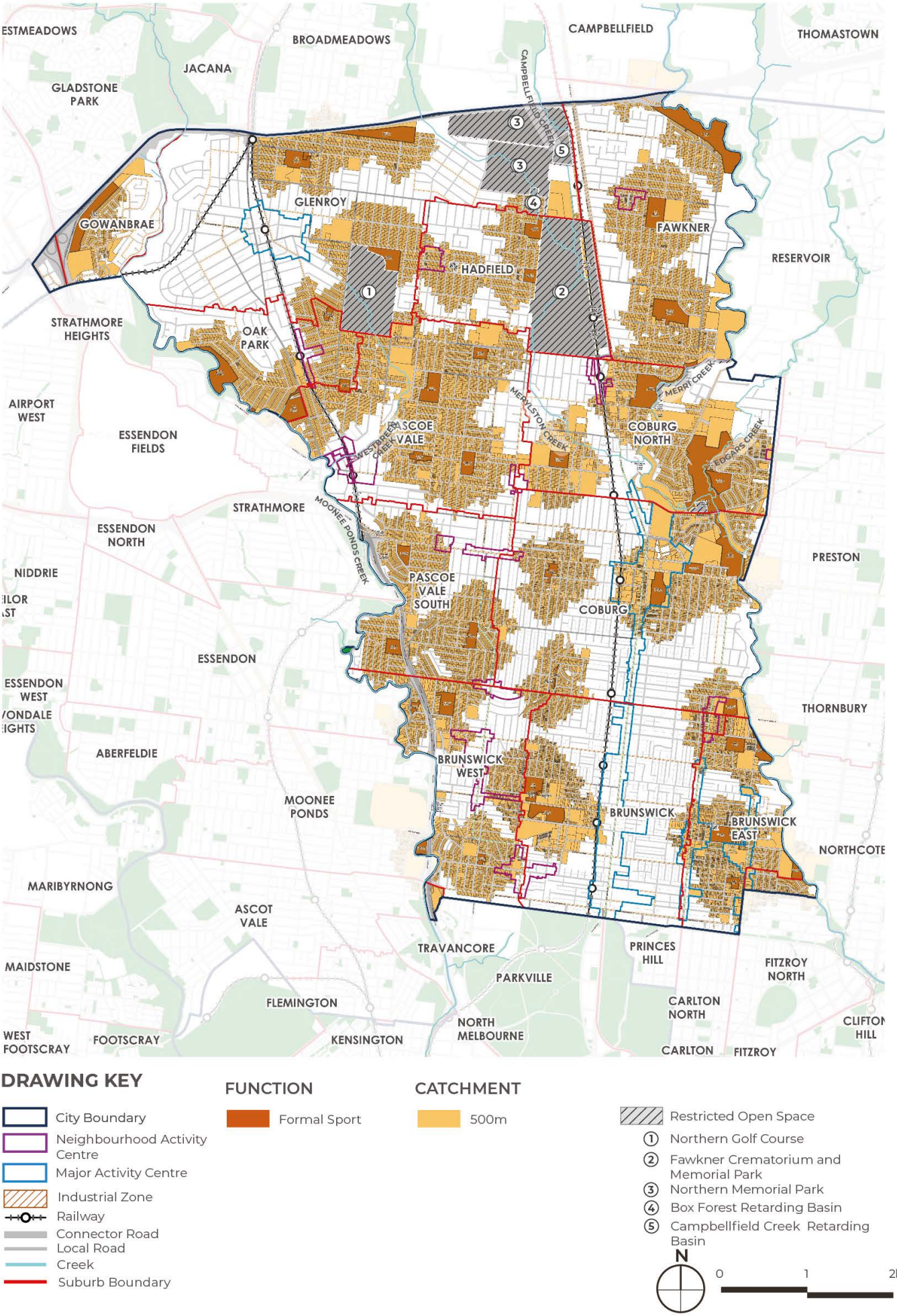


Figure 47. Formal Sport Catchment