

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Open space plays an important role in our society by providing places for exercise, quiet reflection, children's play and organised sport. As our communities grow and change, greater attention needs to be placed on planning our open spaces to ensure that they meet our current and future needs.

The Horsham Rural City Council has developed an integrated Open Space Strategy (OSS) to provide Council with strategic directions to determine priorities for the planning, provision and development of open space across the municipality.

The objectives of this project are to:

- Establish a vision for Council for the provision of open space
- Establish an agreed hierarchy and definition of open space and play spaces to be applied to the municipality
- Establish benchmarks for Horsham



The overarching vision for open space in Horsham is:

“A leading regional community with an open space network that provides positive health and well-being outcomes for everybody.”

The following guiding principles have been developed to implement this vision in practice. It is intended that Horsham's open space network will consider:

- **Equity:** Provide equitable provision of open space across the municipality that accommodates all townships and community groups.
- **Accessibility:** Deliver an amenable open space network including formal and informal linkages to enhance accessibility and meet the needs of the community.
- **Health and wellbeing:** Plan and deliver open space that contributes to the overall physical and mental health of the community.
- **Participation:** Maximise community benefit from open space by providing a range of opportunities to actively use the open space network.
- **Sustainability:** Plan for future growth and changes in population distribution – and contribute positively to our living environment.
- **Safety:** Provide environments that enable safe use of open space by the community.
- **Adaptability:** Ensure our open space offers flexibility in its use over time and provides for multiple community uses and community groups.
- **Efficiency:** Manage an open space network that supports a variety of leisure activities and optimises land use, efficiencies and increases functionality.

Key Trends and Issues

Some of the broader trends and issues that impact this strategy are:

- The ageing nature of Horsham's population. Between 2016 and 2031 the 65+ age bracket is expected to grow by 29% in Horsham.
- Horsham has a great year-round climate, however climate change is upon us and must continue to be addressed moving forward.
- Active recreation is growing at a rapid rate. It contributes more than sport towards Victorians achieving the national guidelines for physical activity each year.
- Traditional or organised sport is declining or stagnant (although women's sport continues to reach new heights).
- Changing lifestyles of regional residents, and many regional towns are undergoing change and transition.
- A focus on community spaces for all ages (multi-generational).
- The growth and desire for multi-purpose facilities for economies of scale and use.

Open Space Audit and Assessment

The audit and assessment of open space in Horsham found that there is 403 hectares (ha) of open space across Horsham. This includes 54.33 ha of open space fronting the river (along Menadue Street, Barnes Boulevard, Major Mitchell Drive and Burnt Creek), 4.33 ha of drainage and stormwater reserves, and 9.88 ha of public halls. If this is excluded from calculations for benchmarking purposes, it equates to approximately 17.05 ha of open space per 1,000 people.

Although this ratio may indicate that there is a relatively high amount of open space provided, the quality and access to a diverse range of open space across the municipality is poor. Key issues identified within the existing open space network are outlined below:

- The quantity of open space in Horsham is considered "high or adequate" - however the quality of open space is poor on a number of fronts.
- Facilities and amenities around public open spaces are in decline or often non-existent.
- Accessibility to open space is inequitable across the municipality. Either physical barriers exist, or there is a perception that some open space is not open to the public.
- There are also some open spaces such as the Horsham Racecourse and the Horsham Showgrounds, where a large portion of the area is encumbered space and not able to be used by the broader community.
- Connectivity and way-finding is poor (cycling, walking, running and way-finding signage). This is consistent across most of the municipality, particularly in the Horsham Township, where there is a lack of linkages both across the city and between open spaces.
- Many open spaces in Horsham are considered ad hoc in a planning context, and distribution is not equitable across the town and localities.
- Horsham's fantastic network of rivers, lakes and water-bodies is underutilised and disconnected from the broader open space network.

As our community grows and changes, long-term thinking and planning of our play spaces and open spaces is required. We must ensure that all of our residents are active and are able to enjoy a variety of high quality open space and natural environments.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Horsham Open Space Strategy considers the open space network for Horsham overall, including the major centres of Horsham and Natimuk, as well as outlying townships and localities. Key strategies include:



Increase connectivity - Improve connectivity to green/open spaces through the development of pedestrian and cycle networks, active transport linkages, traffic planning, and strategic land acquisition and disposal.



Redefine the Wimmera River - Activate the Wimmera River and its environs



Improve open space provision - Ensure equitable access to open space across the municipality



Enhance collaboration - Engage with other agencies (e.g. Barengi Gadjin Land Council, Parks Victoria, Department of Environment Land Water and Planning, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority) so that open space provision and management is a multi-agency initiative that achieves shared objectives



Invest and plan for our future - Develop clear and defensible planning decisions to ensure developers create the environment that Council, other agencies, stakeholders, open space land managers and the community want.



Colour and Green our City - Improve the provision of open space within the CAD and develop a number of multipurpose spaces for wider community use



Recognise and Celebrate our Indigenous Cultural Heritage and Arts - Protect and preserve areas of cultural significance to the Wotjobaluk Peoples' and increase access to a diverse range of arts and cultural experiences across the municipality and open space network.

More detailed recommendations on specific localities are provided throughout this document.

It is proposed that the Horsham Open Space Strategy is monitored on a regular and ongoing basis, with a review/refresh every 4-5 years. Progress and reporting towards the specific actions in this document should be reported to Council on an annual basis.