

Public Exhibition - Draft Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Strategy 2026

File No: S127007.018

Summary

The draft Open space, sport and recreation needs strategy 2026 (the Strategy) provides a strategic framework to guide the planning, provision, management and renewal of the City's open space, sport and recreation network over the next 20 years. The Strategy responds to population growth, increasing urban density, climate change, changing recreation trends and the need to provide equitable and inclusive access to open space and recreation opportunities.

The Strategy updates the Open space and recreation needs study adopted by Council in 2016. It evaluates changes in population, recreation participation, policy settings and community needs since that time, and establishes strategic directions, priorities and actions to inform future planning, investment, advocacy and partnerships.

The Strategy identifies 4 strategic directions:

- Resilience: Healthy, climate-ready parks
- Equity and Inclusion: Open space, sport and recreation for all
- Quality: Better parks and facilities
- Flexibility: Adaptable spaces for broader use.

The Strategy builds on over 2 decades of investment by the City in parks, public spaces and recreation facilities, including the delivery of new parks and recreation infrastructure, upgrades to existing parks and facilities, increased opportunities for walking, cycling and informal recreation, and initiatives that improve environmental sustainability and climate resilience.

It is recommended that Council approve the public exhibition of the draft Open space, sport and recreation needs strategy 2026 for a minimum period of 6 weeks.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve for public exhibition the draft Open space, sport and recreation needs strategy 2026, as shown at Attachments A and B to the subject report
- (B) Council note that the draft Open space, sport and recreation needs strategy 2026 will be place on public exhibition for a minimum period of 6 weeks
- (C) Council note that the draft Open space, sport and recreation needs strategy 2026, including any recommended changes, will be reported to Council for adoption following the exhibition period
- (D) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to make minor editorial amendments for clarity or correction of drafting errors prior to exhibition of the draft Open space, sport and recreation needs strategy 2026.

Attachments

Attachment A. Draft Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Strategy 2026 - Volume 1

Attachment B. Draft Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Strategy 2026 - Volume 2

Background

1. The City's current Open space and recreation needs study was adopted by Council in 2016.
2. Since that time many of the programs and projects have been delivered or are being implemented. In addition, changing demographics and recreation trends, increasing population growth, and density arising from urban renewal has increased demand for the City's open space, sport and recreation facilities.
3. While the City has continued to invest in parks and recreation facilities since 2016, ongoing population growth, urban renewal and increasing densities continue to place pressure on the network. Climate change, changing recreation trends and the need to improve equitable access for diverse communities require a refreshed strategic approach to the planning, provision and management of open space, sport and recreation facilities.
4. The 2026 draft Open space, sport and recreation needs strategy (the Strategy) provides the opportunity to assess these changes to inform decision making about open space, sport and recreation facility provision, use, design, distribution and management.
5. In August 2026, the NSW Government released the Sydney Plan, which establishes a 20-year framework for housing, infrastructure, liveability and environmental sustainability across Greater Sydney.
6. The NSW Governments' Sydney Plan identifies a benchmark that residents should generally be within a 400m walk of a park more than 3,000sqm in size, with residents in medium and high-density areas within 200m of public open space of at least 1,500sqm in size or greater. The draft Strategy assesses existing provision against these accessibility measures and identifies priorities to improve access where gaps exist.
7. The Sydney Plan promotes the delivery of a metropolitan Blue-Green Grid, connecting parks, waterways, biodiversity corridors and active transport routes. The draft Strategy supports this objective through recommendations to strengthen connections between parks, public spaces, walking and cycling networks within the City and beyond local government boundaries. This was a key project idea in Sustainable Sydney 2030 known as the Liveable Green Network.

Strategy scope

8. The draft Strategy focuses on public open space, sport and recreation facilities that are owned, managed or controlled by the City of Sydney, including parks, sports fields, playgrounds, indoor recreation facilities, aquatic facilities, outdoor courts and other recreation infrastructure.
9. The draft Strategy also considers open space and recreation assets managed by other government agencies, institutions and landowners where they contribute to the overall network, community access and recreation opportunities available to City residents, workers and visitors. Any recommendations relating to these assets would require the agreement of the relevant landowner or managing authority.

10. The draft Strategy recognises the important role that streets, walking and cycling networks play in supporting recreation, physical activity and access to parks and facilities and includes recommendations to strengthen these connections as part of a broader open space and recreation network.

Document format

11. The Strategy document structure is as follows:
 - (a) Volume 1: Draft Open space, sport and recreation needs strategy 2026, containing the strategic directions, priorities and recommendations.
 - (b) Volume 2: Technical and research report, containing the evidence base, analysis and supporting research that informs the draft Strategy.

Current status

Open space, sport and recreation facility provision

12. The City owns or manages approximately 207ha of public open space. When combined with parks and open spaces managed by other government agencies and institutions, there is a total of approximately 411ha of public open space across the local government area, representing approximately 15.4% of the City's land area.
13. The open space and recreation network supports residents, workers and visitors through a diverse range of parks, sports fields, playgrounds, aquatic facilities, recreation centres, outdoor courts, fitness stations, skate facilities, walking and cycling infrastructure and public spaces.
14. Population growth, increasing urban density and changing recreation patterns continue to place increasing pressure on the network, particularly in higher-density urban renewal areas. The residential population is projected to exceed 300,000 people by 2046, increasing demand for open space, recreation facilities and opportunities for physical activity, social connection and community wellbeing.
15. The draft Strategy identifies that while the network performs well overall, ongoing investment will be required to respond to growth, improve equitable access, increase recreation capacity, address climate change impacts and meet evolving community expectations.

Improvements to the network

16. Since 2004 the City has undertaken a significant capital works program to expand and improve the open space, sport and recreation network, delivering new parks, recreation facilities and public spaces while upgrading existing assets. This has included:
 - (a) 29.5 ha of new open space and established 54 new parks and public spaces. Major new park provision includes Pirrama Park, Harmony Park, Gunyama Park, Harold Park, The Drying Green, Wimbo Park, and Butterscotch Park. Other government agencies have also contributed to the expansion of open space and the delivery of new parks, providing additional benefits to our community.

- (b) Recreation infrastructure improvements have included Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre, Prince Alfred Park pool renewal, Gunyama Park aquatic centre, 4 additional sports fields, Perry Park Recreation Centre and Huntley Street Recreation Centre (soon to open).
 - (c) In addition, the City has constructed a significant number of new playgrounds, outdoor courts, outdoor fitness facilities, skate facilities and expanded opportunities for walking and cycling.
 - (d) The City has also completed extensive renewal and upgrade programs across the network, with more than 200 park renewal and improvement projects undertaken over the past two decades to improve quality, accessibility, functionality and environmental performance. Key projects include Sydney Park, Victoria Park, Glebe foreshore parklands, Prince Alfred Park and Redfern Park and Oval.
 - (e) Environmental sustainability initiatives have been incorporated into open space and recreation projects, including increased tree canopy, habitat creation, stormwater harvesting, water recycling, energy-efficient lighting and renewable energy initiatives. This includes transitioning to energy efficient heat pump technology powered by 100% renewable electricity at Victoria Park Pool and Andrew Boy Charlton Pool, with Prince Alfred Park Pool to be fully electric by November 2026.
 - (f) Partnerships with schools have expanded access to playing fields, outdoor courts and indoor recreation facilities through shared-use arrangements. These partnerships provide valuable recreation opportunities for the wider community outside school hours, such as access to the court facility at Green Square Primary School. Approximately 35 educational institutions (schools and universities) access City parks and recreational facilities for sport and recreation programs.
17. The success of these investments has provided a strong foundation for future planning and has informed the directions, priorities and actions contained within the Draft Open space, sport and recreation needs strategy 2026.

Key directions and outcomes

18. The draft Open space, sport and recreation needs strategy 2026 establishes a framework to guide the future planning, provision, management and renewal of the City's open space, sport and recreation network. The Strategy responds to the challenges of population growth, increasing urban density, climate change, changing recreation trends and the need to provide equitable access to open space and recreation opportunities.
19. The Strategy identifies 4 strategic directions:
- (a) Resilience: Healthy, climate-ready parks that support urban cooling, biodiversity, environmental sustainability and community resilience.
 - (b) Equity and inclusion: Open space, sport and recreation opportunities that are welcoming, accessible and inclusive and support equitable participation for all members of the community.

- (c) Quality: A high-performing network of parks, public spaces and recreation facilities that meets the needs of a growing city through new provision, upgrades and improved connectivity.
 - (d) Flexibility: Adaptable and multi-functional spaces that respond to changing recreation trends, community needs and patterns of use.
20. Key outcomes include:
- (a) Approximately 22ha of additional open space is planned for delivery comprising of 14.5ha managed by the City and 8.32ha managed by other agencies.
 - (b) Key new open space priorities include the progression of the square at Town Hall, transformation of Wentworth Park into a unified 14ha public recreation destination, delivery of the Mandible Street Sports Precinct, O'Riordan Street Park, Waterloo South parks, and advocacy for major projects by other agencies including Barangaroo Central Park, Blackwattle Bay urban renewal public spaces and Central Square.
 - (c) A further 20ha has recently been delivered with the Moore Park south park conversion by Greater Sydney Parklands.
 - (d) Continue the City's park renewal program to improve the quality, accessibility, resilience and amenity of the open space network, including major upgrades to Belmore Park, Alexandria Park, Waterloo Park and Oval, and Fitzroy Gardens.
 - (e) Increase the recreation capacity across the network through the delivery of new and upgraded sport and recreation facilities including additional sports fields, indoor courts, outdoor courts, playgrounds and outdoor fitness stations.
21. Key recreation initiatives include:
- (a) Delivery of the Mandible Street Sports Precinct, including a sports field, multi-purpose courts, recreation facilities, playground and supporting amenities.
 - (b) Transformation of Wentworth Park to provide sports fields, playgrounds, courts, fitness facilities and expanded passive recreation opportunities.
 - (c) Establishment of an inclusive playground network across the City.
 - (d) Investigation of a mountain bike facility at the St Peters Interchange open space.
 - (e) Expansion and renewal of indoor recreation facilities.
 - (f) Continued improvement of existing aquatic, sports field and outdoor court infrastructure.
22. The Strategy also identifies priorities to improve access and connectivity through expanded walking and cycling networks and by supporting the delivery of the Sydney Plan Blue-Green Grid, linking parks, recreation facilities, waterways and neighbourhoods.

23. Implementation of the Strategy will occur through targeted capital investment, planning and development processes, developer contributions, partnerships with government and community stakeholders, ongoing asset management, and advocacy to secure additional open space and recreation opportunities for the City's growing communities.
24. The draft Strategy establishes service level targets and accessibility standards to identify gaps in the provision of open space and recreation facilities, inform future investment and planning priorities, and improve the equitable distribution of open space and recreation opportunities across the local government area.

Key implications

Strategic alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

25. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This report is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 2 - A leading environmental performer - the Strategy supports climate resilience, urban greening, biodiversity and environmental sustainability through the planning, design and management of parks and recreation facilities, including actions to increase tree canopy, urban cooling and environmental performance.
 - (b) Direction 3 - Public places for all:
 - (i) The Strategy provides a framework to expand and improve the City's open space and recreation network and identifies priorities to improve equitable access to parks, sport and recreation opportunities. It recognises the needs of a diverse community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, women and girls, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, children, young people and older persons
 - (ii) The Strategy identifies several priority groups whose needs must be addressed in open space and recreation planning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, women and girls, LGBTQIA+ communities, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, children and families, young adults and students, older adults, low-income and social housing residents. It guides the provision and management of open space and recreation facilities to ensure that equitable access is maintained in the face of growing demand.
 - (c) Direction 4 - Design excellence and sustainable development:
 - (i) The Strategy promotes a high-quality network of parks, public spaces and recreation facilities that support liveability, health, wellbeing and sustainability. It establishes service level targets to improve access to open space and recreation opportunities and guides the delivery of new and upgraded public spaces.

- (d) Direction 5 - A city for walking, cycling and public transport - the Strategy recognises walking, running and cycling as important recreation activities and supports improved connectivity between parks, public spaces, recreation facilities and the City's walking and cycling networks.
- (e) Direction 6 - An equitable and inclusive city - A core focus of the Strategy is improving equity, inclusion and accessibility through the provision of welcoming, affordable and inclusive open space, sport and recreation opportunities for all members of the community.
- (f) Direction 7 - Resilient and diverse communities - The Strategy supports the City to deliver climate-ready parks that provide cooling, biodiversity and environmental sustainability, as well as enabling opportunities for social connections and cohesion. The Strategy supports community health, wellbeing and social cohesion through the delivery of climate-ready parks, recreation facilities and public spaces that encourage participation, community connection and active lifestyles.
- (g) Direction 10 - Housing for all - The Strategy supports growing and higher-density communities by planning for additional open space and recreation opportunities and establishing service-level targets to improve access to parks and recreation facilities across the local government area.

Risks

- 26. The draft Open space, sport and recreation needs strategy 2026 fits within the City's risk appetite.
- 27. The strategy provides an evidence-based framework to guide future planning, investment and decision-making for the City's open space, sport and recreation network. Public exhibition will provide an opportunity for the community, stakeholders and government agencies to review the draft Strategy and inform its finalisation prior to consideration by Council.
- 28. The City's risk appetite seeks to manage public spaces and recreation infrastructure for the benefit of the community, while embracing innovation and responding to changing circumstances. The strategy supports this approach through recommendations that improve access to parks, recreation facilities and public spaces, increase climate resilience, and promote more equitable and inclusive outcomes.
- 29. Future projects identified in the strategy will be subject to detailed planning, design, funding and approval processes that will consider specific project risks.
- 30. The strategy also recognises the ongoing risks associated with maintaining and renewing an expanded network of open space and recreation assets, including the need for adequate operational funding and lifecycle asset management to ensure long term sustainability.

Social / cultural / community

31. Open space, sport and recreation facilities are important community infrastructure that support physical and mental health, social connection, community cohesion and overall wellbeing. The draft Strategy seeks to improve access to these opportunities across the local government area and support the needs of current and future communities.

Environmental

32. The draft Strategy includes actions to improve climate resilience, urban greening, biodiversity, urban cooling and environmental sustainability across the City's open space and recreation network. While future recreation and facility provision may increase resource consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, impacts will be managed through environmentally sustainable design, renewable energy initiatives, water-sensitive urban design, urban canopy expansion and implementation of the City's environmental strategies and targets.

Economic

33. Investment in open space, sport and recreation infrastructure supports community health and wellbeing and contributes to broader economic benefits through improved population health outcomes, reduced health costs and enhanced liveability.
34. The City's network of parks, public spaces and recreation facilities provides affordable and accessible opportunities for recreation, physical activity and social connection, including a range of facilities and spaces that are available to the community free of charge.
35. The provision of sports facilities also provides local economic benefit through sports and leisure jobs, and expenditure related to supporting sports training, competition, participation and maintenance of facilities.

Financial implications

36. The draft Strategy includes projects and initiatives that are currently funded and programmed within the City's approved capital works program.
37. The Strategy also identifies additional long-term opportunities and priorities for consideration through future strategic planning, asset management, budgeting and capital works processes. Inclusion in the draft Strategy does not constitute a funding commitment for any projects which are not currently included in the long-term financial plan.
38. Any future projects arising from the Strategy that are not currently funded will be subject to further investigation, prioritisation, business case assessment and consideration through future budget and works program processes. Where appropriate, the City will also pursue alternative funding opportunities, including State and Commonwealth grants and partnerships with other organisations and government agencies.

39. Ongoing management, renewal and maintenance of the City's open space, sport and recreation network including any future assets transferred to City ownership or management, will continue to be considered through the City's operational and long-term financial planning processes. Any future asset transfers may result in additional operational, maintenance, renewal and lifecycle costs, which will be assessed through future business cases and budget processes to ensure long term sustainability.

Relevant legislation

40. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.
41. Local Government Act 1993.

Public consultation

42. This report seeks to publicly exhibit the draft Open space, sport and recreation needs strategy 2026 for 6 weeks commencing in October 2026.
43. The public exhibition will include:
- a Sydney Your Say page
 - stakeholder briefings
 - an online survey and other activities to gather feedback from individuals and groups who use our open spaces and facilities
 - promotion through City of Sydney channels
 - letters to key sporting and recreation bodies and relevant State agencies advising them of the Strategy and offering a briefing.

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