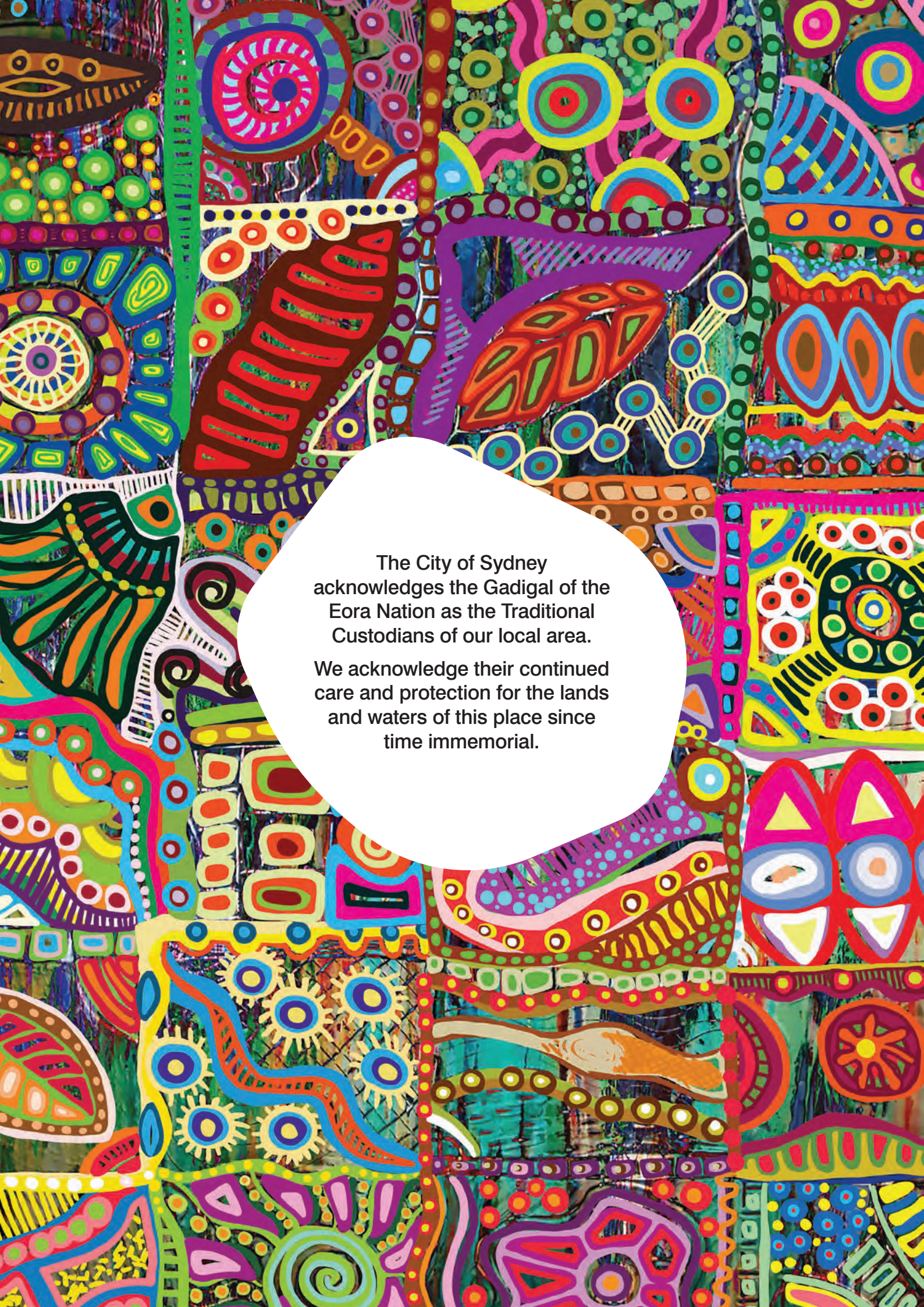


Attachment B1

**Draft Open Space, Sport and Recreation
Needs Strategy 2026 – Volume 2, p1-73**

Open Space, Sports and Recreation Needs Technical and Research Study 2026

DRAFT



The City of Sydney
acknowledges the Gadigal of the
Eora Nation as the Traditional
Custodians of our local area.
We acknowledge their continued
care and protection for the lands
and waters of this place since
time immemorial.

We acknowledge the Gadigal of the Eora Nation
as the Traditional Custodians of our local area.

Images on the front cover:

DRAFT

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Executive summary

Purpose of the study

This Study provides the strategic evidence base to guide future planning, investment and decision-making for open space, sport and recreation infrastructure across the local government area.

The study provides the technical evidence base and assessment that informs the strategic recommendations presented in Volume 1.

It has been undertaken in response to significant population growth, increasing residential density, evolving recreation trends and growing community expectations for high-quality public spaces. It examines current provision, assesses future demand and identifies opportunities to ensure the City's open space and recreation network continues to support a healthy, liveable, inclusive and resilient city.

The study considers the full spectrum of open space and recreation infrastructure, including parks, civic spaces, sports fields, aquatic facilities, recreation centres, courts, playgrounds, active transport networks and informal recreation opportunities. It also examines the broader social, environmental, demographic and urban development factors that will influence future needs.



Victoria Park
Photo: Katherine Griffiths / City of Sydney

Key findings

The City's population will continue to grow

The City of Sydney is expected to accommodate substantial population growth and increased density over the next two decades. There will be greater reliance on public open space and recreation facilities as private open space becomes more limited.

Open space is essential city infrastructure

Open space plays a vital role in supporting recreation, health and wellbeing, social interaction, environmental sustainability, urban cooling, biodiversity and climate resilience.

The open space network is performing well but is under increasing pressure

Population growth is increasing demand across the network, and opportunities to acquire large new parks are becoming increasingly constrained. Existing spaces will need to accommodate more users and perform a wider range of functions in the future.

Recreation demand is increasing and changing. Participation patterns continue to evolve. Walking, running, cycling, swimming and fitness activities are among the most popular recreation pursuits, while demand for informal, flexible and self-directed recreation continues to grow.

Traditional organised sport remains important, but future recreation planning must support a broader and more diverse range of activities, users and participation models.

Recreation facilities are highly utilised

Sports fields, aquatic facilities, indoor courts and outdoor courts are generally well used and in many cases experiencing increasing levels of demand. Meeting future needs will require a combination of facility upgrades, increased capacity, improved utilisation, shared-use agreements and targeted expansion where opportunities arise.

Climate resilience is becoming increasingly important

Open space will play an increasingly important role in responding to climate change through urban cooling, biodiversity protection, stormwater management and provision of shaded recreation opportunities. Recreation facilities and public spaces will need to be designed and managed to respond to increasing temperatures, extreme weather events and changing patterns of use.

Partnerships will be critical

Future demand cannot be met through City-owned assets alone. Schools, universities, state agencies, sporting organisations and private providers all play an important role in delivering recreation opportunities. Partnerships and shared-use arrangements will become increasingly important in maximising access to recreation infrastructure and meeting future community needs.

Strategic challenges

The study identifies seven key challenges that will shape future open space and recreation planning:

- 1 Growing population, employment and visitor demand
- 2 Declining open space provision per resident.
- 3 Limited opportunities to acquire new land.
- 4 Increasing pressure on existing recreation facilities.
- 5 Changing participation trends and recreation preferences.
- 6 The need to improve climate resilience and environmental outcomes.
- 7 The need to ensure equitable and inclusive access across a growing and increasingly diverse community.

Strategic response

To address these challenges, the study proposes a multi-faceted approach focused on both increasing open space provision and optimising existing assets.

Key directions include:

- Acquiring and dedicating additional open space where opportunities arise.
- Protecting existing public open space from incremental loss.
- Expanding and enhancing larger parks to support recreation demand.
- Improving open space accessibility, connectivity and active transport links.
- Reimagining streets as part of the City's recreation and open space network.
- Increasing the capacity and utilisation of recreation facilities through upgrades, shared-use arrangements and improved management.
- Supporting both organised sport and informal recreation opportunities.
- Delivering inclusive, accessible and welcoming public spaces for people of all ages and abilities.
- Strengthening partnerships with State agencies, schools, universities and private providers.
- Embedding climate resilience, biodiversity and sustainability outcomes across all open space and recreation planning.

Image (opposite page): **Gunyama Park stage 2**
Photo: Chris Southwood / City of Sydney





Introduction

Open space, sport and recreation play an important role in supporting the health, wellbeing and quality of life of people and communities.

Parks, public spaces, sporting facilities and recreation opportunities provide places for exercise, relaxation, social interaction, community events and connection with nature. They also contribute to climate adaptation, biodiversity, urban cooling and the overall character and identity of the city.

Since the City's previous *Open Space, Sports and Recreation Needs Study* was endorsed in 2016, Sydney has continued to grow and change. Additional residents, workers and visitors have increased demand on parks, sporting facilities and public spaces, while changing recreation patterns, increasing urban density and emerging environmental challenges have altered how these spaces are used and valued. At the same time, opportunities to acquire new open space have become increasingly constrained, requiring a more strategic approach to planning and managing the City's open space and recreation network.

This study provides the evidence base to guide future planning, investment and decision-making for open space, sport and recreation infrastructure across the City of Sydney. It assesses current provision, examines emerging trends and future demand, identifies gaps and opportunities, and establishes priorities for future acquisition, improvement and management of public open space and recreation facilities.

This Study is organised into sections covering the strategic context, key drivers of change, analysis of the open space network, assessment of recreation and sport facilities, current trends, future open space provision planning, district-level planning, park management service levels, and supporting appendices.

The study recognises that open space and recreation infrastructure are essential community assets. In a highly urbanised and increasingly dense environment, public open space functions as shared community infrastructure that supports physical activity, mental health, social connection, environmental sustainability and economic prosperity.

This role will become increasingly important as the city continues to grow.

Relationship to Volume 1

This report forms the technical and research foundation for the open space, sport and recreation needs strategy.

Volume 1 presents the strategic directions, recommendations and actions that will guide future decision-making.

Volume 2 provides the supporting evidence, analysis and assessment that underpin those directions.

Together, the two documents establish a framework for protecting, improving and expanding the City's open space and recreation network to meet the needs of current and future communities.

Image (previous page): **description**
Photo: Jamie Williams / City of Sydney

Our area

Covering approximately 26 square kilometres, the City of Sydney is one of Australia’s most significant urban centres and includes the Sydney CBD, the state’s primary commercial and employment hub.

The City of Sydney is also the most densely populated local government area in Australia.

Our area is organised into ten distinct villages (Figure XX), each with its own character and sense of place. These villages are anchored by neighbourhood hubs and activity centres that weave together residential life, commerce, and culture.

This study draws on data from the entire local government area while also examining village-level insights.

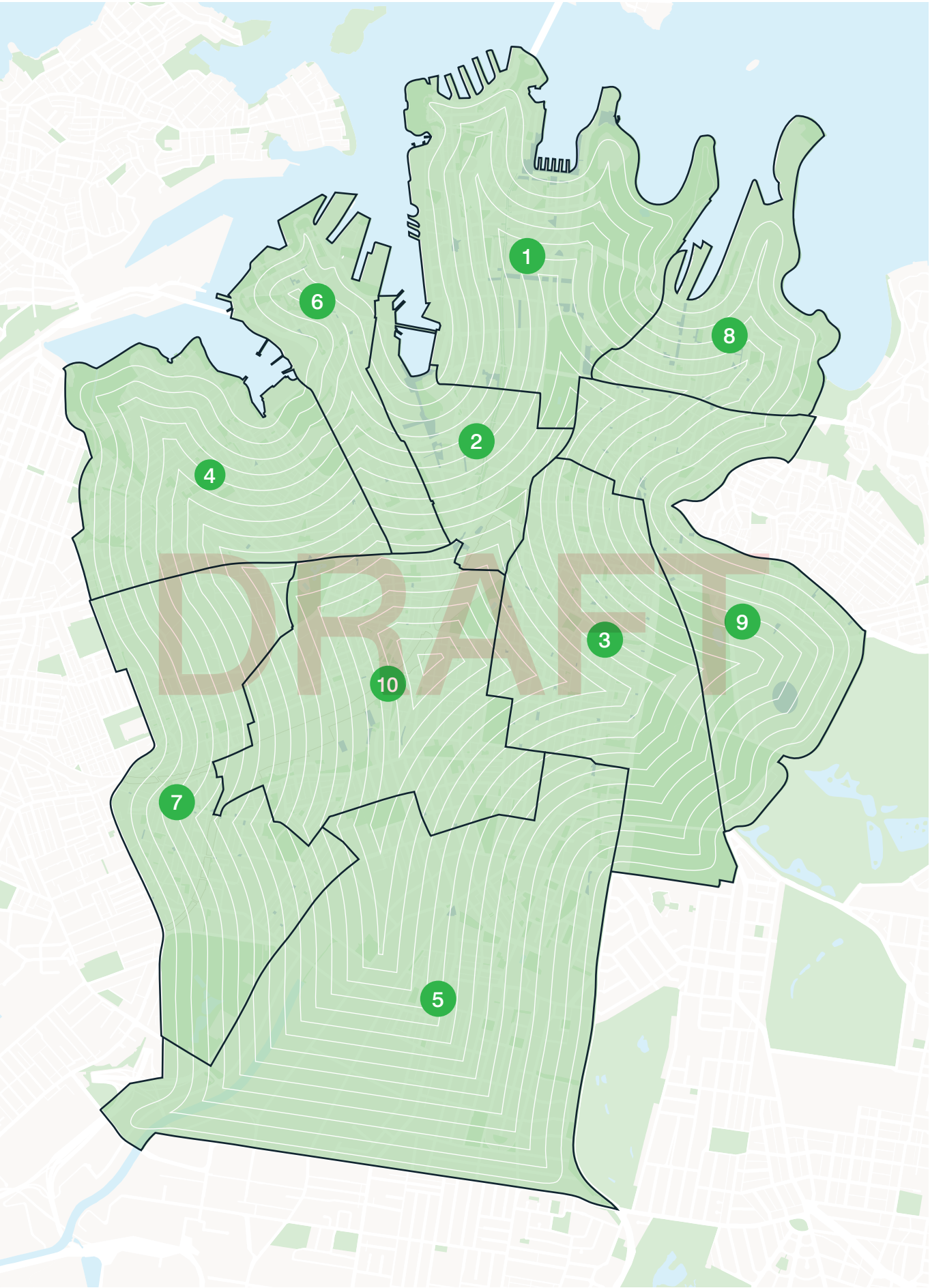
Footnotes

- 1. eiu.com/n/campaigns/global-liveability-index-2025/
- 2. profile.id.com.au/sydney/about

Our villages

- 1 CBD and Harbour**
Sydney (part), The Rocks, Millers Point, Barangaroo
- 2 Chinatown and CBD South**
Sydney (part), Haymarket
- 3 Crown and Baptist Streets**
Surry Hills (part), Redfern (part), Moore Park (part)
- 4 Glebe Point Road**
Glebe, Forest Lodge, Annandale (part), Camperdown (part), Ultimo (part)
- 5 Green Square and City South**
Zetland, Beaconsfield, Waterloo (part), Rosebery, Alexandria (part), St Peters (part)
- 6 Harris Street**
Pyrmont, Ultimo (part)
- 7 King Street**
Camperdown (part), Newtown, Erskineville, Alexandria (part)
- 8 Macleay Street and Woolloomooloo**
Woolloomooloo, Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay, Rushcutters Bay
- 9 Oxford Street**
Darlinghurst, Paddington, Centennial Park (part), Moore Park (part), Surry Hills (part)
- 10 Redfern Street**
Redfern (part), Chippendale, Darlington, Eveleigh, Alexandria (part), Waterloo (part)

Figure 1: The City of Sydney villages



City of Sydney villages

1 CBD and Harbour



2 Chinatown and CBD South



3 Crown and Baptist Streets



4 Glebe Point Road



6 Harris Street



7 King Street



8 Macleay Street and Woolloomooloo



5 Green Square and City South



9 Oxford Street



10 Redfern Street





Aerial view of Woolloomooloo
Photo: Lucinda Varney / City of Sydney

Part 1

Drivers of change

- Strategic context
- Population growth
- Our community
- Community aspirations
- Recreation participation
- Infrastructure
- Social
- Environmental

Strategic context

The broader strategic and policy framework at both the City of Sydney and NSW State Government levels guide the planning, design and management of open space to support higher urban density, encourage healthy lifestyles, and address the impacts of climate change.

The City's *Sustainable Sydney 2050 – Continuing the Vision*, supported by initiatives such as *Environmental Strategy*, *Greening Sydney* and *A City for All*, provides overarching direction to ensure open spaces contribute to a resilient, inclusive, and liveable city. These strategies and their associated targets reinforce our commitment to environmental sustainability, climate resilience, and social equity.

They also highlight the importance of delivering high-quality, well-designed public spaces that can support and enrich the lives of a growing population.

At a State level, the *Sydney Plan* is the NSW Government's new 20-year regional land-use strategy guiding housing, jobs, infrastructure, sustainability and liveability across 33 LGAs. It replaces the former Greater Sydney Region Plan and introduces a more flexible, dynamic planning framework with strong alignment to statewide priorities, including liveability, resilience and connected communities.

The *Sydney Plan* shifts the focus of open space planning from traditional land-area provision measures toward access and liveability outcomes. The Plan introduces Sydney-wide benchmarks aimed at improving equitable access to parks and recreation spaces, including a target that residents should be within a 400-metre walk of a local park and, in medium and high-density areas, within 200 metres of an open space. For large rezoning sites (greater than 2 hectares), the Plan also introduces an interim benchmark that 15% of the effective development area should be provided as public open space. The Plan also signals the future development of local government area-specific open space provision benchmarks.

The Plan also introduces the concept of a Blue-Green Grid, a connected network of parks, waterways, recreation corridors and active transport links intended to improve access to nature, support climate resilience and enhance recreational opportunities across Sydney.

The *Public Open Space Strategy for NSW* provides a coordinated long-term approach to planning and delivering open space as essential community infrastructure, while the *Greener Places Framework* sets design principles for integrated, connected and multifunctional green infrastructure. Together with the Sydney Blue-Green Grid, which links waterways, green corridors and public spaces into a unified network, these frameworks support a more connected, sustainable and liveable urban environment.

The establishment of Greater Sydney Parklands also provides a strategic approach to managing and enhancing key regional parklands, including Centennial Parklands, Western Sydney Parklands, and Parramatta Park.

The strategic context calls for open space networks that respond to climate change, provide high-quality, accessible spaces to support growing density and population, promote health and social well-being, and enhance local ecologies through connected biodiversity corridors.

Strategic planning frameworks

NSW Government plans and frameworks



City of Sydney plans and frameworks



Population growth and density

Population growth and increasing residential density are the primary drivers of future demand for open space and recreation infrastructure.

The City’s population is expected to grow from 237,241 in 2026 to 304,049 by 2046, placing increasing pressure on housing, infrastructure, and public space.

Population growth is a metropolitan Sydney-wide trend rather than one unique to the City of Sydney. The NSW Government’s Draft Sydney Plan projects Sydney’s population will reach 6.5 million by 2045.

Within the City of Sydney growth is focussed in Green Square, which is projected to accommodate up to 70,000 residents in approximately 32,000 dwellings by 2036, alongside continued growth in Central Sydney, Redfern–Waterloo, Pyrmont and Blackwattle Bay.

+14,524 residents since 2016

+66,808 residents by 2046

As the City’s population continues to grow, demand on the open space and recreation network will intensify, placing greater capacity pressures across all facilities—especially larger parks that provide greater opportunities for active recreation.

Figure 2: Residential population (%) by village (ERP)

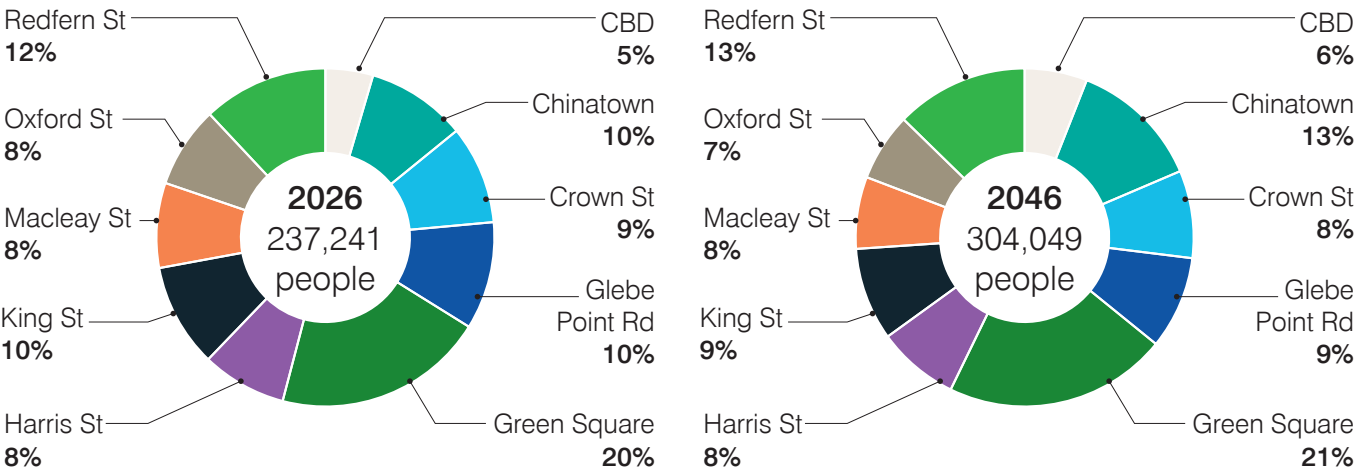


Figure 3: City of Sydney residential population over time (Estimated residential population)

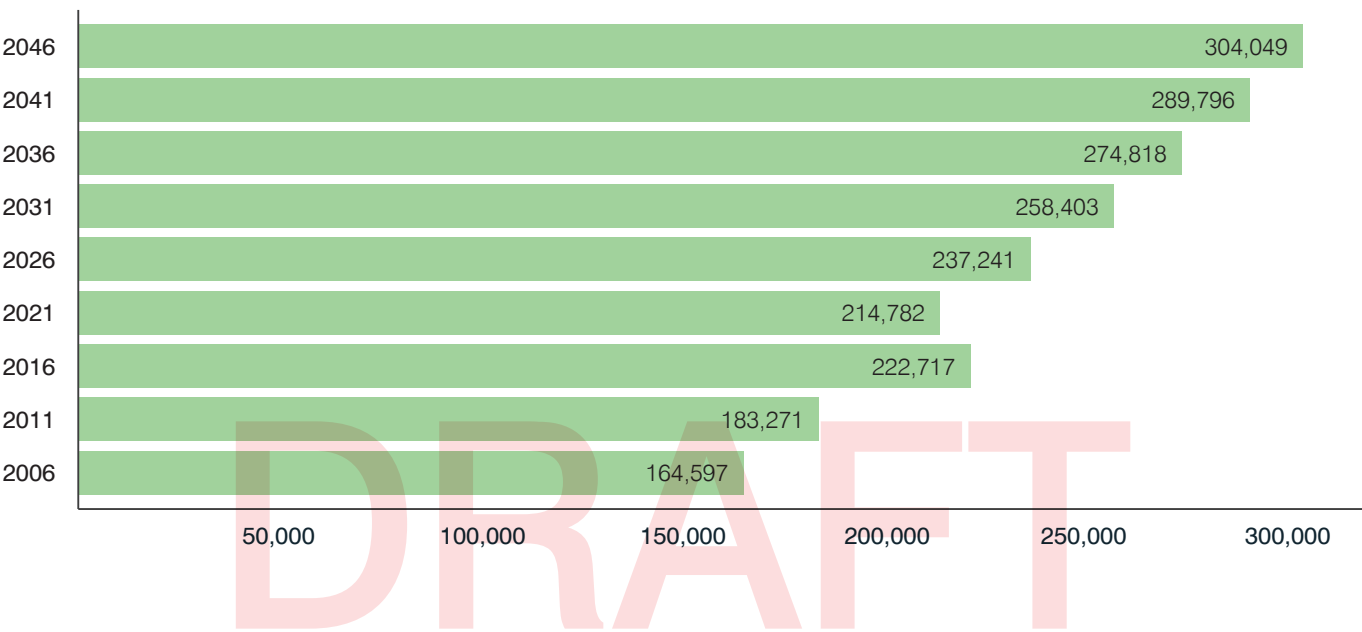
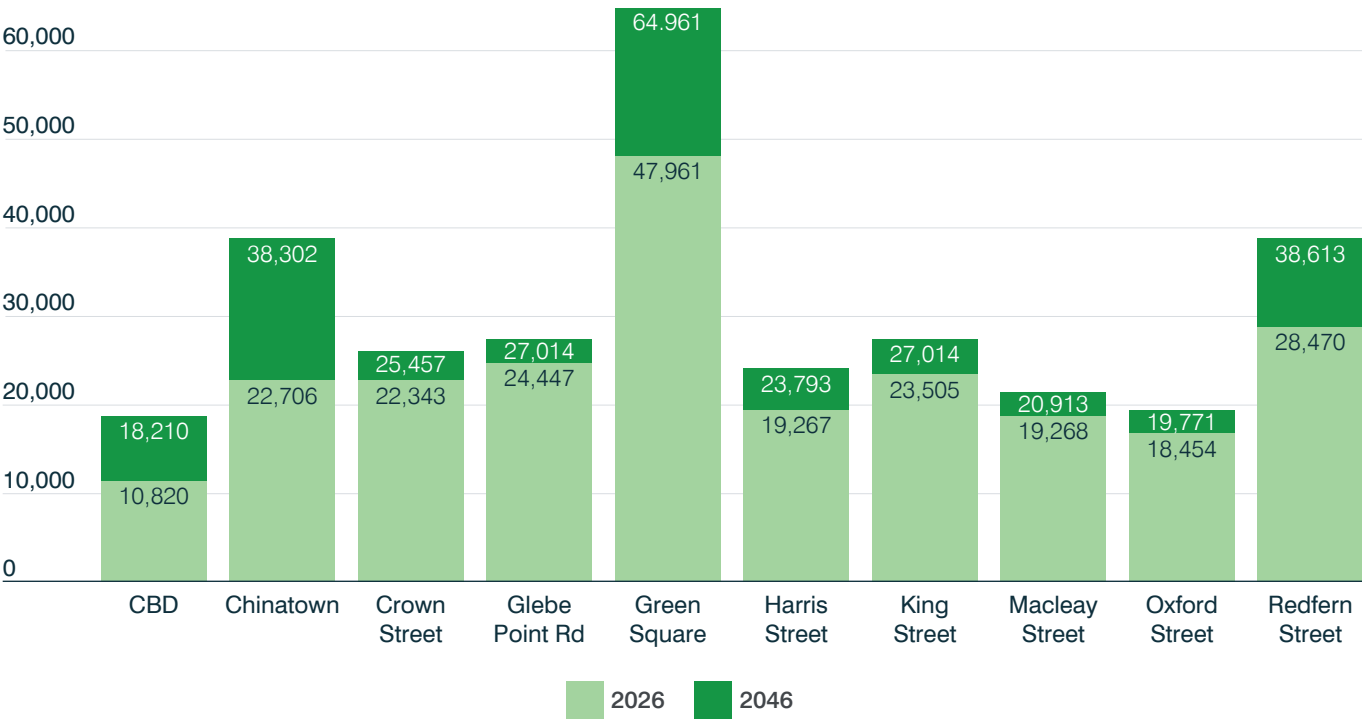


Figure 4: Residential population (No.) by village



Increased density

Currently the City of Sydney has a residential population density of 8,892 people per km²—the highest of any local government area in Australia. This continues a steady upward trend from 8,348 people per km² in 2016 and 6,169 people per km² in 2006. By 2046 it will rise to over 11,000 people per square km.

Population distribution across the City’s villages is relatively balanced: eight of ten villages each contain between 8–12% of residents. The exceptions are the CBD (5%) and Green Square (20%), which sit outside this range.

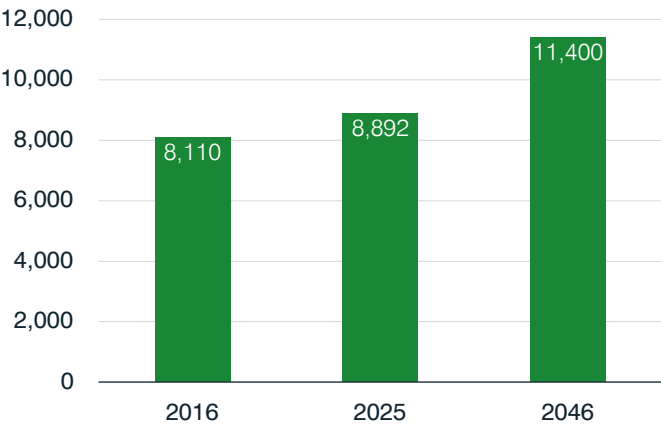
The most densely populated village is Chinatown & CBD South, recording 22,000 people per km² in 2023–24. Within it lies Haymarket, Australia’s third most densely populated suburb and the most densely populated in New South Wales. Chippendale follows closely with 20,400 people per km².

The Green Square urban renewal precinct, located within the Green Square and City South village, currently has a density of 13,297 people per km². By 2036, it is expected to accommodate around 63,000 residents and up to 22,000 workers, driving density to approximately 22,000 people per km².

The City already has a highly dense urban form, with over 97 per cent of dwellings medium or high density, compared to 46 per cent across Greater Sydney.

By 2036, around 80 per cent of residents are expected to live in apartments.

Figure 5: Residential density (people per km²) in City of Sydney from 2016 to 2046



Green Square urban renewal area
22,000 people/km2

The City has prepared a Housing Discussion Paper to support a place-based approach to housing delivery, emphasising the need to align density growth with timely investment in open space and park upgrades to support population growth.

Implications for open space and recreation

As private open space decreases, a growing residential and worker population will increasingly rely on public open space, sport and recreation networks for daily activity, wellbeing and social connection. Workers—particularly in central and traditional employment precincts—also depend on these spaces for lunchtime use and informal exercise.

Increasing density also means that the quality, accessibility and capacity of existing open space will become just as important as the provision of new parks. Future planning will therefore need to focus on both expanding the network where opportunities arise and improving the performance of existing assets.



Aerial of Green Square and Waterloo
Photo: Lucinda Varney / City of Sydney

Several major urban renewal projects will continue to reshape the City and accommodate a significant proportion of future population growth. These include:

- Green Square Urban Renewal
- Redfern-Waterloo Renewal (Central to Eveleigh)
- Central Sydney and Central Station Precinct
- Pymont and Blackwattle Bay
- Bays Precinct
- Ashmore Estate

Figure 7: Major urban renewal areas of increased population density

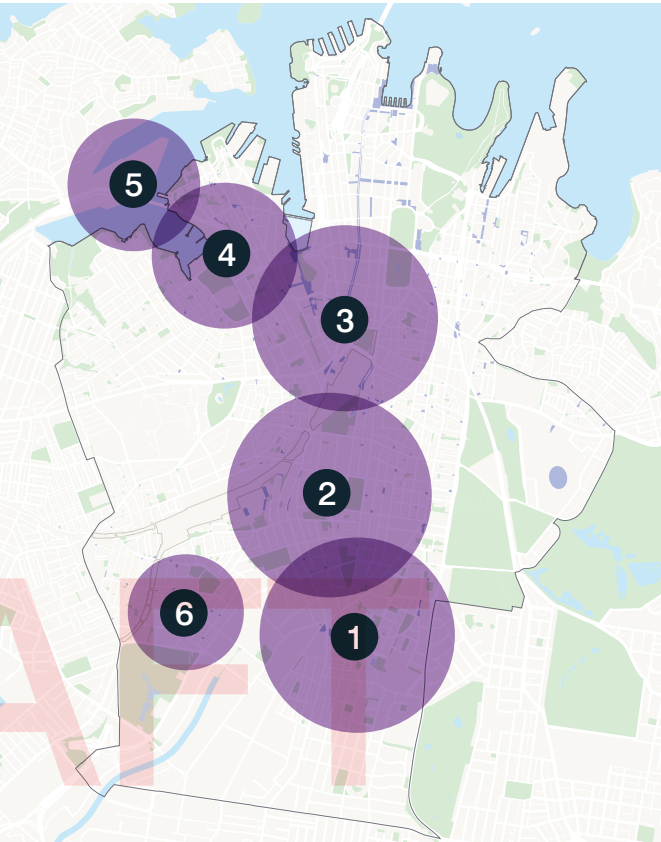
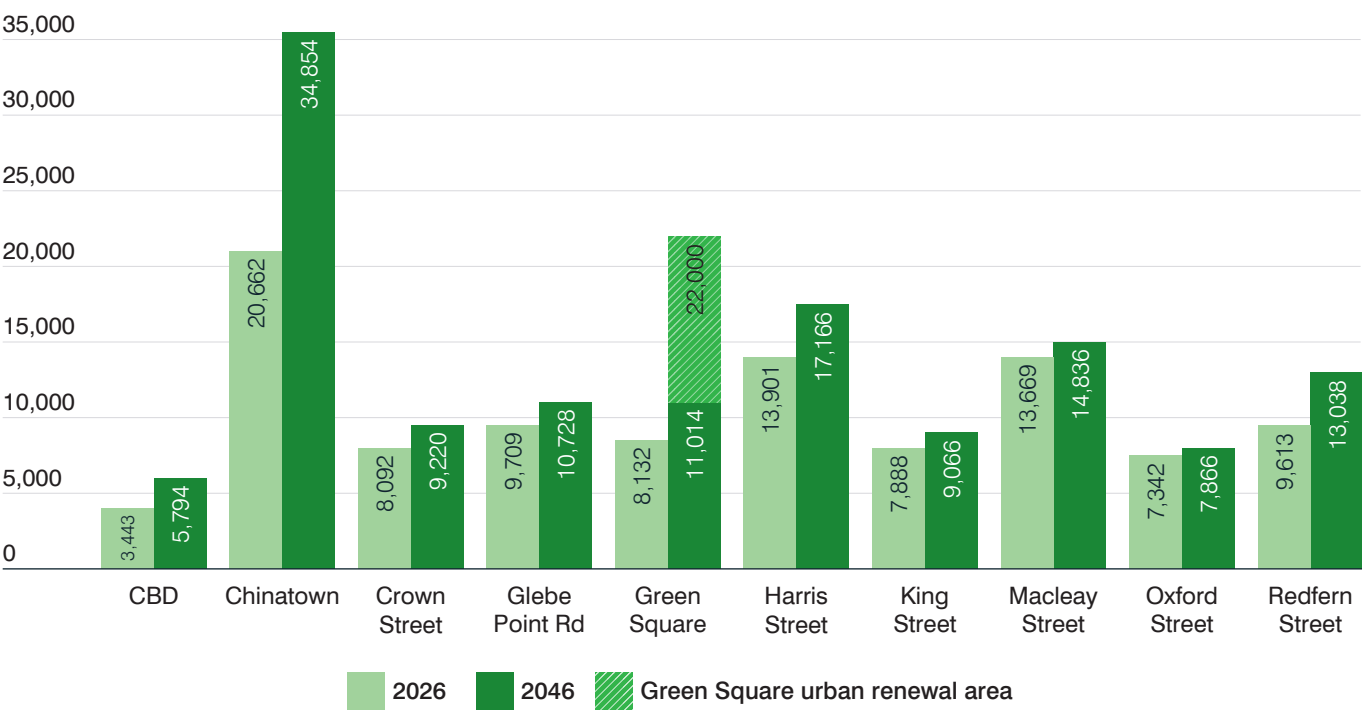


Figure 6: Residential density (people per km²) per village from 2026 to 2046



Our community

The City’s demographics point towards more diverse, more intensive and more varied use of open space and recreation facilities in the future.

Overview

Understanding the demographic characteristics of the community is essential for planning open space, sport and recreation infrastructure.

The City of Sydney has a distinctive demographic profile compared with Greater Sydney and New South Wales. The population is younger, more culturally diverse, highly educated and more likely to live in medium and high-density housing. At the same time, the community is becoming increasingly diverse, with growth projected across almost all age groups over the next two decades. These trends have important implications for the future planning and provision of open space and recreation infrastructure.

A young active population

The City is characterised by a large working-age population. In 2021, approximately 56.5% of residents were aged between 25 and 49 years, significantly higher than metropolitan and state averages. This reflects the City’s role as a major employment, education and lifestyle destination that attracts young professionals, students and working adults. Young adults and working-age residents are generally among the most active recreation participants. As a result, demand for active recreation infrastructure, indoor and outdoor courts, sports fields, aquatic facilities and active transport networks is expected to remain strong.

Growth across all age groups

While young adults will remain the dominant age cohort, future population growth is forecast across all age groups, creating demand for a broader range of recreation opportunities and facilities.

The number of children aged 0–17 years is projected to increase significantly over the next two decades, particularly within growth areas such as Green Square and Redfern-Waterloo. At the same time, the number of residents aged 60 years and over is projected to increase by more than one-third by 2046. This trend will increase demand for recreation opportunities that support healthy ageing.

The diversity of age groups reinforces the importance of providing a recreation network that supports participation across all life stages.

Cultural diversity

The City of Sydney is one of Australia’s most culturally diverse communities. Almost half of all residents were born overseas and more than one-third speak a language other than English at home.

The largest overseas-born communities include people from China, the United Kingdom, Thailand, Indonesia and New Zealand. The City is also home to one of Sydney’s largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Cultural diversity influences how recreation is undertaken and how public spaces are used. Different cultural groups may participate in different sports, social activities and forms of recreation. In many cases, informal recreation, social gatherings and family-based activities are preferred over organised club sport.

Workers, students and visitors

While residential population growth is an important consideration, demand on the City’s open space and recreation network extends well beyond resident populations.

The City is Australia’s largest employment centre, accommodating approximately 683,472 jobs in 2024. Millions of visitors also travel to the City each year for work, education, tourism and entertainment. These users contribute significantly to demand for parks, public spaces, recreation facilities and active transport networks throughout the day. In 2023–24 the City received:

- 2.07 million international visitors
- 4.59 million domestic overnight visitors
- 5.20 million domestic day visitors

Students attending universities and educational institutions also generate demand for sports fields, courts, open space and active transport facilities.

The resulting daytime population significantly increases demand on the public domain, particularly within Central Sydney, Pyrmont and other employment precincts.

Many workers and visitors rely on parks and public spaces for lunchtime recreation, exercise, relaxation and social interaction. Consequently, planning for open space and recreation infrastructure must consider both residential populations and the broader population that uses the city on a daily basis.

Living in high density

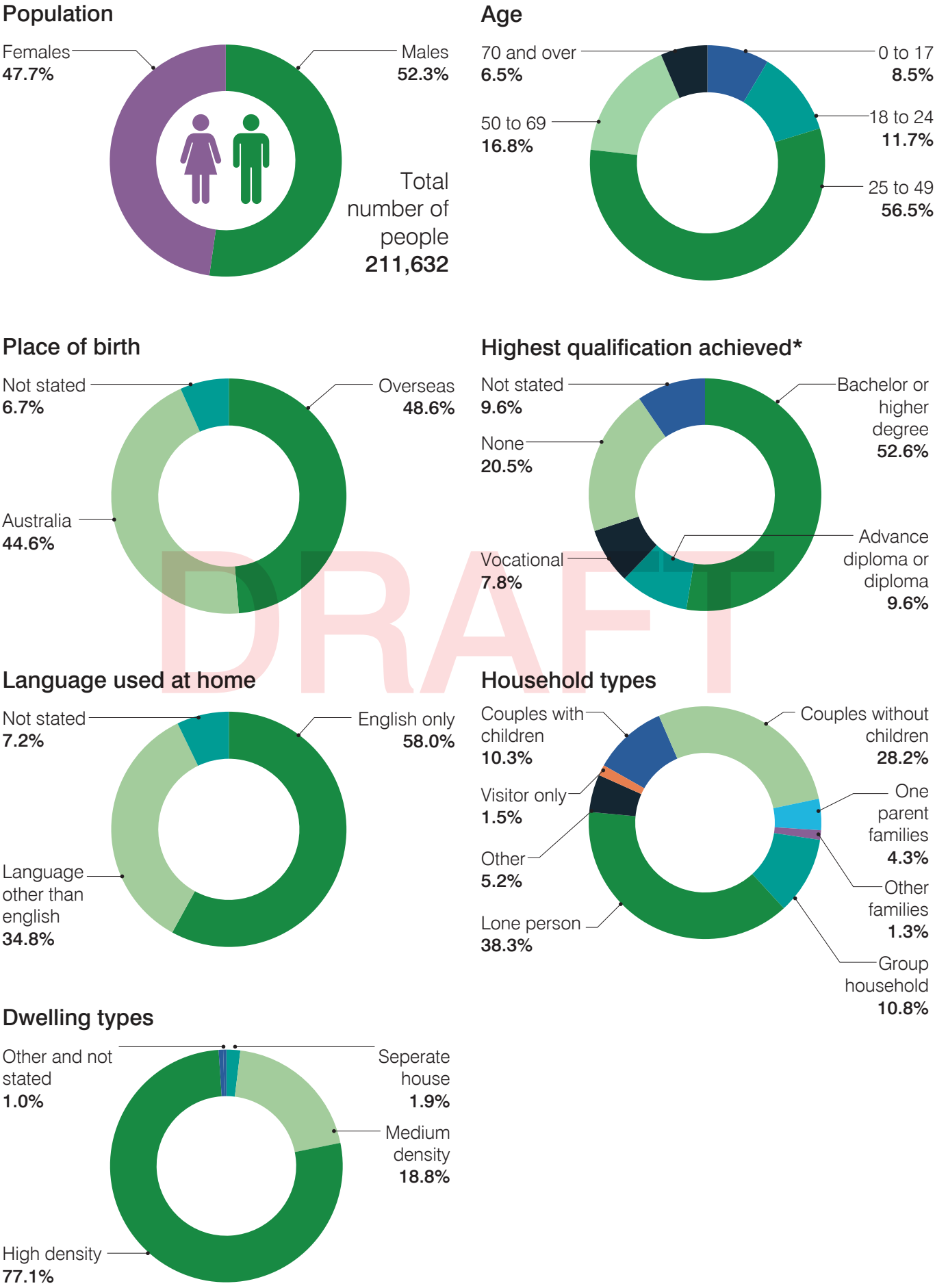
The City’s residents are highly reliant on public open space due to the prevalence of medium and high-density housing. Approximately 97% of residents live in medium or high-density dwellings, with only a small proportion of households occupying detached housing.

Education

The City has one of the most highly educated populations in Australia. More than half of residents hold a bachelor degree or higher qualification, and over two-thirds have undertaken education beyond secondary school.

Highly educated populations are generally associated with strong participation in healthy lifestyle behaviours, including physical activity, active transport and informal recreation. Walking, running, cycling and fitness activities are already among the City’s most popular recreation pursuits and are expected to remain important components of community life.

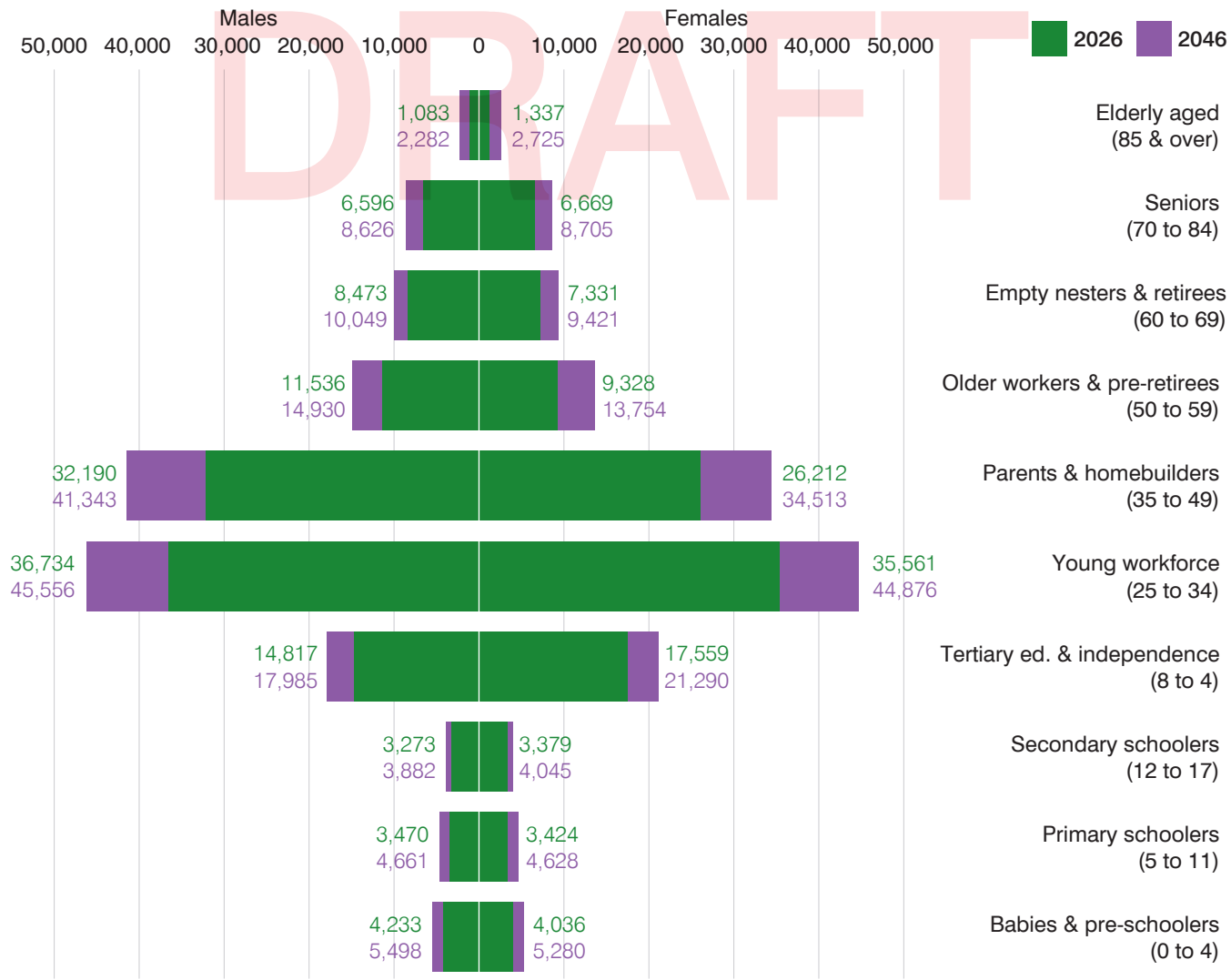
Figure 8: Demographic characteristics - source: profile.id.com.au/sydney



Key takeaways

- The City will continue to be dominated by a large and active working-age population.
- Growth is forecast across all age groups, including children, families and older adults.
- Cultural diversity will continue to influence recreation preferences and patterns of participation.
- High-density living will increase reliance on public parks and recreation facilities.
- Lone-person households highlight the importance of public spaces in supporting social connection and wellbeing.
- The recreation network must be flexible, inclusive and accessible to support a growing and increasingly diverse community.

Figure 9: Population projection to 2046 by age groups



Our communities at a glance

As the City’s population continues to grow, demand on the open space and recreation network will intensify, placing greater capacity pressures across all facilities especially larger parks that provide greater opportunities for active recreation.

	Our residential population will increase by 30.81% from 241,797 in 2025 to 304,049 in 2046.
	Almost half of our residents were born overseas .
	The majority of our residents are young with 56.5% aged between 25 and 49 years of age.
	Around 1 in 5 Australians are living with a disability . Increasing to 50% for people aged over 65. (Australian Bureau of Statistics)
	Our local area is home to one of Sydney’s largest communities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples .
	97% of residents of residents live in medium or high-density housing .

	The City’s 2023 Community Wellbeing Survey showed: 25% of young people aged 16–29 years, 21% of people aged 30–39 years, and 22% of people aged 40–49 years, unwillingly limited spending on sports and recreation due to their household financial situation in the past 12 months.
	38% of households are lone-households and 28% are couples without children .
	The number of older residents (65 years and over) will grow by 34.68% from 31,089 in 2025 to 41,807 in 2046.
	The number of children (14 years and under) will grow by 30.35% from 21,477 in 2025 to 27,995 in 2046.

What the community wants and needs

Our communities appreciate and understand the value of our open space, sport and recreation networks.

Feedback gathered through major strategic initiatives—including Sustainable Sydney 2030 - 2050 Continuing the Vision, Inclusion (Disability) Action Plan, the Resilient Sydney Synthesis Report 2024, the Greater Sydney Outdoors Study, Committee for Sydney Life in Sydney report and insights from the COVID-19 period, consistently highlights the deep value residents place on parks and public spaces.

Sport and recreation demand reflects broader metropolitan and national trends identified through AusPlay and similar participation data, with a shift from exclusively traditional club-based sport toward a broader mix of informal and emerging recreation activities.

Given the City’s demographic profile which is characterised by higher densities, a large working-age population, cultural diversity, and smaller households activities such as walking, running, swimming, cycling, gym-based fitness, and informal recreation are among the most popular forms of participation.

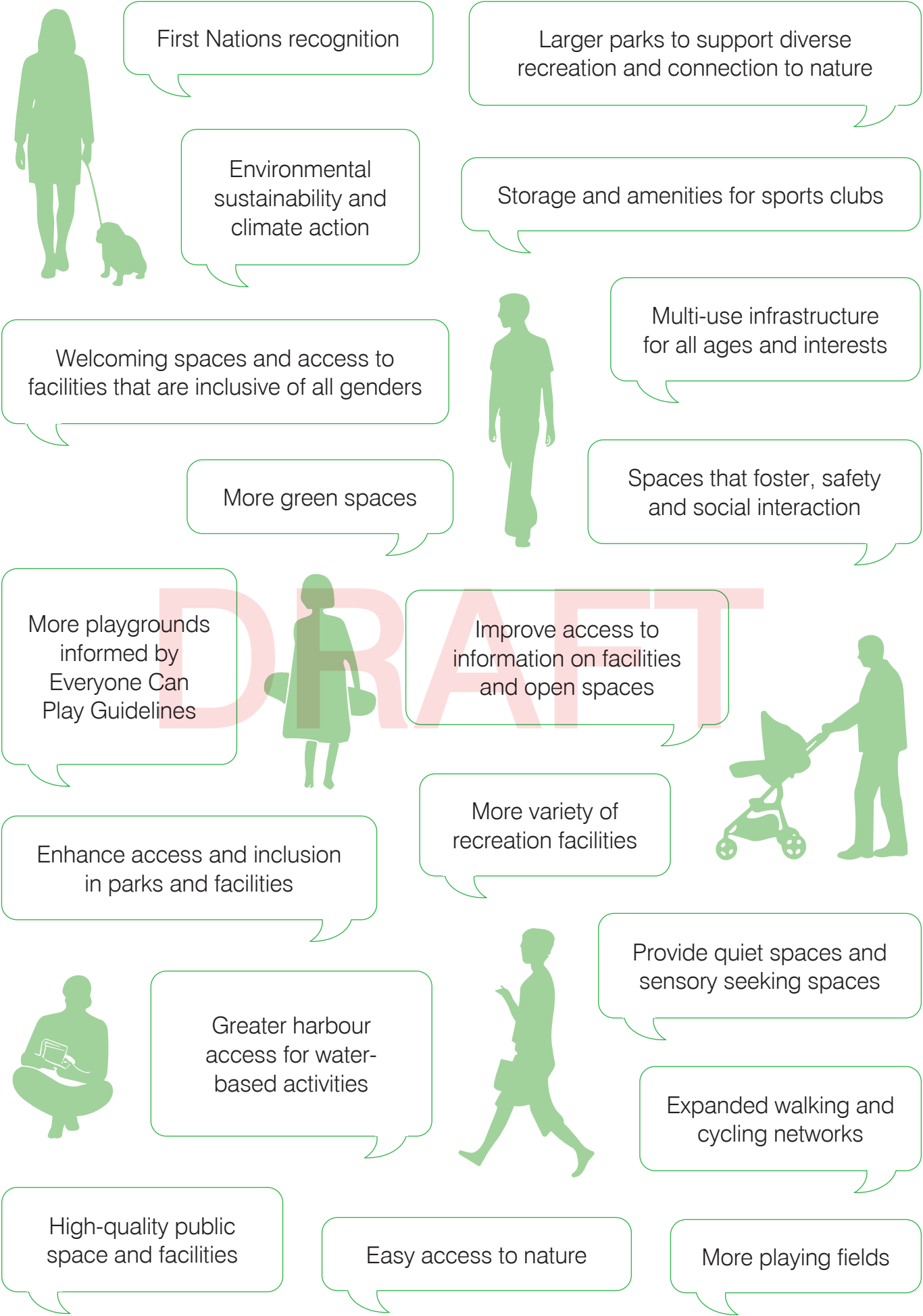
There is also an a growing emphasis on social sport and small-format participation models that respond to changing lifestyles and participation preferences.

As population and employment continue to grow, demand is expected to intensify, placing pressure on capacity, and reinforcing the need for flexible, multi-use facilities that can accommodate a diverse and evolving range of recreation activities.

The community values open space, sport and recreation infrastructure as essential contributors to health, wellbeing, liveability and social connection.



Basketball players at a Youth Week event
Photo: Katherine Griffiths / City of Sydney



Greater Sydney outdoors survey

In 2019, the Department of Planning and Environment conducted a broad survey of Sydneysiders to develop the Greater Sydney Outdoor Study. Proponents of the study received over 6,800 responses to their 15-minute online questionnaire and met with focus groups of representatives from Greater Sydney’s five districts.

The study goals include:

- To understand how Sydneysiders use and value open spaces for recreation.
- To identify which recreation activities Sydneysiders would like their open spaces to provide.
- To understand the different requirements communities have for current and future recreation needs.
- To develop a clear picture of what Sydneysiders would like to see, to ensure recreation needs are met across Greater Sydney.

An updated survey was undertaken in 2025. At the time of writing, survey submissions have closed and the findings are not yet available.

The Eastern City District

The City of Sydney is located in Greater Sydney’s Eastern City District. The 2019 survey found that most people in this district love to walk, hike, jog or run; relax and gather in open spaces; swim in public beaches; visit play spaces; view, create or perform public art; walk the dog; and cycle.

Over three quarters of survey respondents thought having good outdoor recreation areas and waterways is a good way to bring communities together, important for lifestyle and indicated that they have good access to outdoor recreation. Over half indicated that the quality of outdoor recreation in Sydney is a key reason why they chose to live where they do. However just over half also indicated that they would like to see more outdoor recreation in their own residential areas.

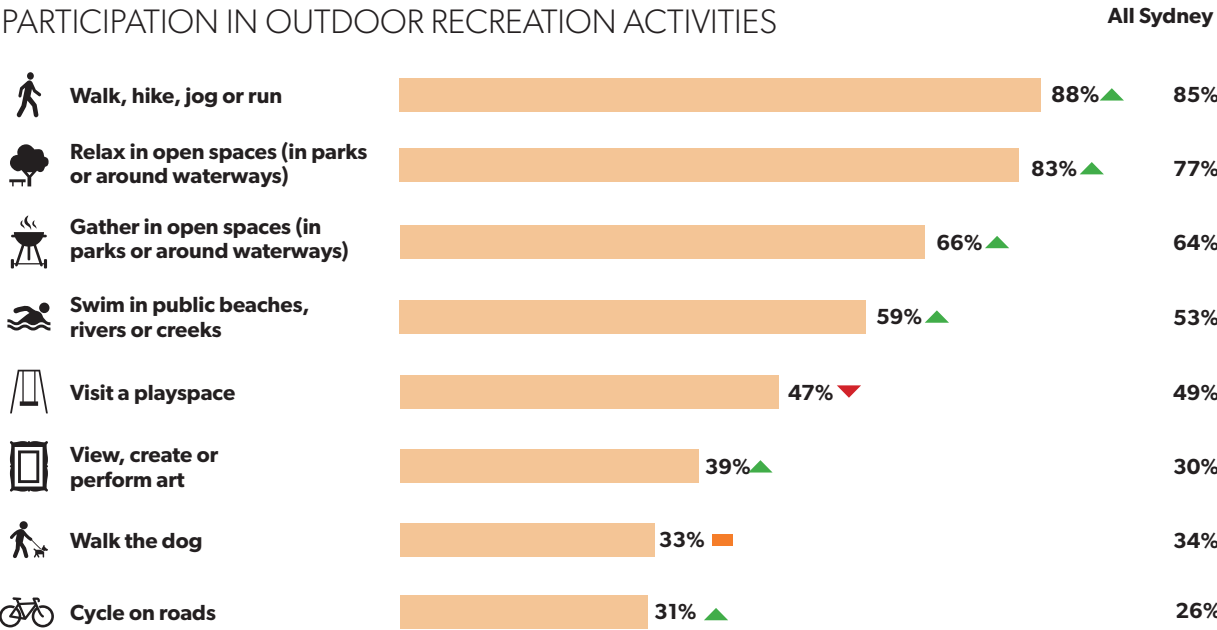
Key survey takeouts

- Better and more walking and cycling networks to help get to outdoor recreation areas without a car.
- Open spaces that feel safe and provide for multiple uses.
- More high quality, open spaces supported by good facilities (especially for areas of high development).
- More opportunities for swimming and water-based activities in the local area, especially on the Parramatta River and Cooks River.
- Improvements to existing parks, to ensure they’re being well utilised.

Greater Sydney Outdoor Study extract - What do Eastern City District Residents love to do? (opposite)
Source: planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/open-space/the-greater-sydney-outdoors-study

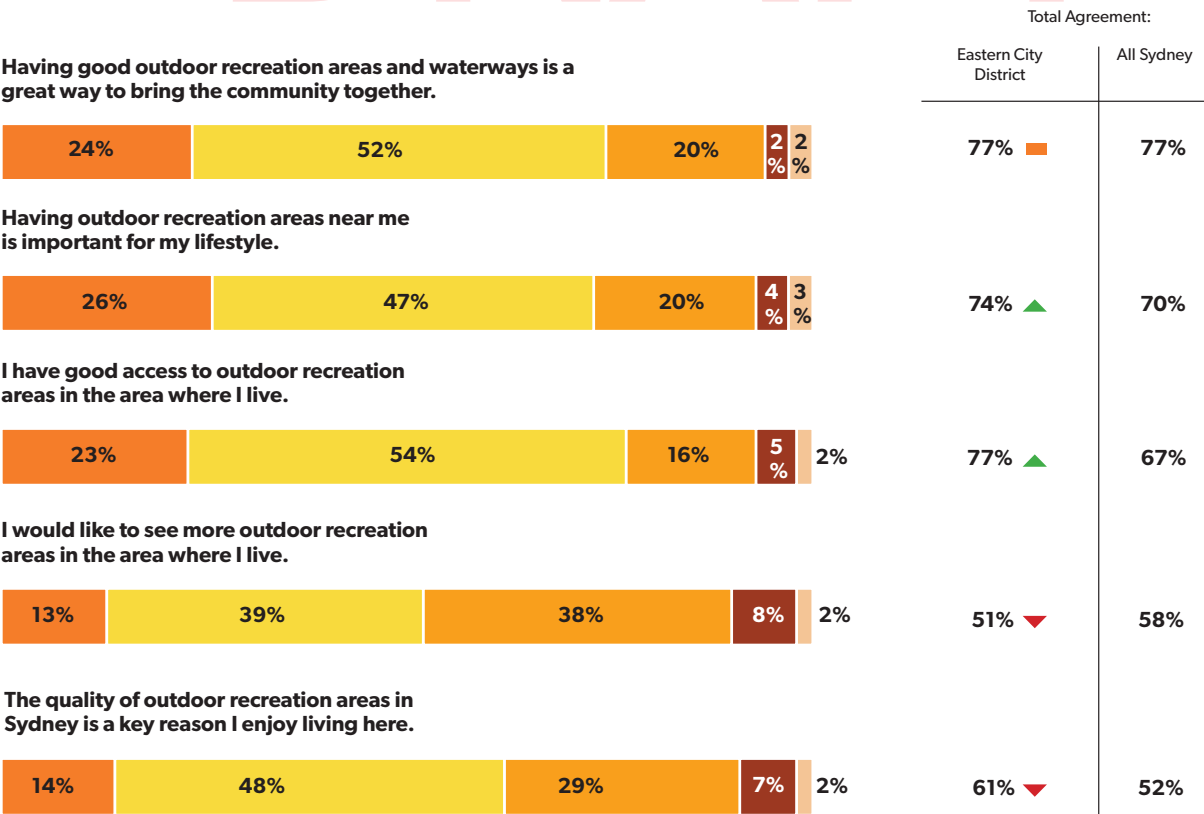
Figure 10: Excerpt from Greater Sydney Outdoors Study

What do Eastern City District residents love to do?



ATTITUDES TOWARDS OUTDOOR RECREATION AREAS AND WATERWAYS

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree



(Note: These numbers have been rounded for simplicity)

Recreation participation

Participation is increasingly characterised by flexible, informal and diverse recreation activities.

Overview

Understanding how people participate in sport and recreation is fundamental to planning future open space and recreation infrastructure. Participation trends help identify which activities are growing, where demand is increasing, how facilities are being used, and the types of infrastructure required to support future communities. They also provide insight into changing lifestyles, recreation preferences and emerging opportunities that may influence future investment priorities.

Ausplay 2025

AusPlay is a publicly funded national survey that collects data on sport and physical participation activity across Australia, its states and territories. Participation numbers and rates are estimates based on survey data collected between July 2024 and June 2025.

A new baseline was established for data collected between 2023 and 2025, meaning data collected between 2015 and 2023 cannot be directly compared.

Recreation participation in NSW

Participation in sport and physical activity remains high across New South Wales. AusPlay estimates that approximately 85% of adults participate in some form of sport or physical activity at least once annually.

Participation remains strong across both men and women and across all age groups. While organised sport remains important, participation is increasingly characterised by informal, flexible and self-directed activities.

Walking, fitness, swimming, running and cycling are attracting broader participation than many traditional organised sports, while social and modified versions of sport are becoming increasingly popular.

These trends are particularly relevant to the City of Sydney. High residential density, limited private open space, a large working-age population and a highly walkable urban environment create strong demand for informal recreation opportunities that can be undertaken close to home, work or study

This highlights the importance of providing recreation infrastructure that supports both organised and informal activities.

Public spaces matter

Outdoor environments play a vital role in supporting active lifestyles, with 61% of Australian adults engaging in physical activity in public spaces such as parks, streets and beaches—more than any other setting.

Most popular recreation activities

AusPlay data identifies recreational walking as Australia’s most popular recreation activity, followed by fitness and gym-based exercise. Swimming, running, bushwalking and cycling also attract substantial participation.

These activities all depend heavily on access to public open space, pathways, trails, aquatic facilities and recreation infrastructure

Participation in organised sport remains particularly important for children and young people. Swimming, football (soccer), gymnastics, dancing and basketball are among the most popular organised recreation activities for children.

However, participation rates generally decline as children move into adolescence, reflecting broader national trends. This decline highlights the importance of providing recreation opportunities that appeal to teenagers and young adults, including informal recreation, social sport and youth-oriented facilities.

Emerging sports and recreation

Participation trends increasingly reflect changing lifestyles and broader social and cultural influences. While traditional sports remain important, a range of emerging activities are experiencing strong growth.

Social sport

Many people are moving towards social and modified forms of sport that prioritise enjoyment, flexibility and social interaction rather than formal competition. Activities such as social basketball, futsal, touch football and social volleyball continue to attract growing participation.

Pickleball and padel

Modified racquet sports such as pickleball and padel are among the fastest-growing recreation activities internationally and are increasingly attracting participants within Sydney. These

activities place additional demand on both indoor and outdoor court infrastructure.

Running groups and outdoor fitness

Running clubs, park-based fitness programs and informal fitness communities have experienced substantial growth. These activities utilise parks, paths, streets and public spaces and require relatively little dedicated infrastructure beyond quality public environments.

Water based recreation

Participation in swimming, kayaking, paddlecraft and other water-based activities is increasing. Sydney Harbour and the City’s waterways are becoming increasingly valuable recreation assets that support both organised and informal participation.

Urban sports

including skateboarding, parkour, 3x3 basketball, and climbing—are experiencing significant growth in participation, driven by their accessible, non-organized, and lifestyle-oriented nature.

Mountain biking is a highly popular and growing recreation activity, attracting a broad age range and strong repeat participation, with increasing demand for well-designed trail networks that support beginner to advanced skill levels, nature-based experiences, and regional tourism.

Roller derby is an inclusive, predominantly women-led sport with a strong emphasis on community, empowerment, and participation, maintaining steady popularity through grassroots leagues.

Recreation user groups

The City’s recreation facilities support a broad and diverse range of users including organised sporting clubs, schools, community groups, social sporting competitions, casual participants and individuals undertaking informal recreation.

The diversity of recreation users highlights the need for a network that is flexible, adaptable and capable of accommodating multiple forms of participation.

Providing facilities that support multiple user groups and varying patterns of participation will be essential to maximising community benefit and meeting future recreation demand.

Recreation activities

The recreation facility network supports an extensive and diverse range of recreation activities that reflect the needs and preferences of a growing, highly urbanised and culturally diverse community.

Recreation opportunities occur across parks, recreation centres, aquatic facilities, sports fields, courts, streets, plazas, cycleways and waterfront locations, supporting both organised and informal participation.

While traditional organised sports remain an important component of the recreation network, participation is increasingly characterised by informal, flexible and self-directed activities.

Key takeaways

The City’s recreation network supports approximately 96 unique organisations.

This includes 35 education providers comprising:

- 17 primary schools
- 14 secondary schools
- 4 universities/tertiary providers

The network also supports 61 community sport and recreation organisations.

Football/soccer is the largest user group (16 organisations), followed by cricket (9) and rugby league (8).

Some of the sports and recreation activities our residents, workers and visitors participate in



includes City of Sydney, other agencies and private sector providers.

Ausplay survey data

Top 5 activities (sport and recreation combined)		
Adults	Men	Women
1. Walking	1. Walking	1. Walking
2. Fitness/gym	2. Fitness/gym	2. Fitness/gym
3. Swimming	3. Running/jogging	3. Swimming
4. Running/jogging	4. Swimming	4. Running/jogging
5. Cycling	5. Cycling	5. Yoga
Children	Boys	Girls
1. Swimming	1. Football/soccer	1. Swimming
2. Football/soccer	2. Swimming	2. Dancing
3. Gymnastics	3. Basketball	3. Gymnastics
4. Dancing	4. Cricket	4. Football/soccer
5. Basketball	5. Rugby league	5. Netball

Emerging activities

- Pickleball and paddle
- Oz-tag, flag gridiron and ultimate frisbee
- BMX and mountain biking
- Urban sports
- Futsul
- Badminton and volleyball
- Exer-gaming and technology
- Watercraft sports and recreation
- Swimming in the harbour



Wentworth Park cricket nets
Photo: Abril Felman / City of Sydney



Volleyball players at Perry Park
Photo: Chris Southwood / City of Sydney

AusPlay survey

(demographic and participation insights)

Female participation

Female participation in sport and recreation continues to grow and has reached historically high levels. Participation by women and girls has increased across both traditional organised sports and informal recreation activities.

Several factors have contributed to this growth:

- Improved facility design
- More inclusive programming
- Increased visibility of women's sport
- Greater investment in female participation pathways
- Growth in informal recreation opportunities.

These trends reinforce the importance of ensuring recreation facilities are designed and managed to provide equitable access and inclusive participation opportunities.

Older adults

As the population ages, participation by older adults is becoming increasingly important. Many older residents are actively seeking opportunities to maintain health, mobility and social connection through recreation and physical activity. Popular activities among older adults include:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Low-impact fitness
- Group exercise
- Social recreation programs

Future recreation infrastructure will need to support active ageing through accessible design, comfortable environments and opportunities for low-impact participation.

Cultural diversity

Evidence from AusPlay and related sport participation research indicates that people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are more likely to participate in informal recreation activities such as walking, fitness, swimming and cycling, while soccer, basketball, volleyball and racquet sports are among the most popular organised sports. However Australians who speak a language other than English at home are generally less likely to participate regularly in sport and physical activity than those who speak only English at home.

Barriers to participation

While participation rates are generally high, barriers continue to prevent some people from participating as often as they would like. Common barriers include:

- Age and life-stage factors
- Health conditions
- Disability
- Cost
- Time constraints
- Lack of convenient opportunities
- Lack of confidence or social support.

The provision of affordable, accessible and welcoming public recreation facilities can help reduce many of these barriers and encourage greater participation across all sections of the community.

Participation motivations

Understanding why people participate in recreation is as important as understanding what activities they undertake.

The strongest participation motivations include:

- Physical health
- Enjoyment and fun
- Weight management
- Being outdoors and experiencing nature
- Social interaction and connection.

These motivations highlight the broad role of recreation infrastructure in supporting wellbeing and people do not participate solely for sport or competition.

What this means for the City

The City’s recreation network will need to support a growing and increasingly diverse range of recreation activities. While organised sport will remain important, future demand will increasingly be driven by flexible, informal and self-directed recreation.

Several key themes emerge from the participation data:

Greater demand for informal recreation

Walking, fitness, running, cycling and swimming will continue to generate strong demand for parks, streets, pathways, aquatic facilities and public spaces.

Flexible infrastructure

Facilities must support multiple activities and adapt to changing participation trends over time.

Social recreation

Increasing demand for social sport and informal recreation requires infrastructure that supports both organised and casual participation.

Inclusive participation

Facilities must accommodate people of different ages, abilities, genders and cultural backgrounds.

Recreation beyond sport

Future recreation planning must recognise the importance of informal recreation and social interaction alongside traditional sporting activities.

Infrastructure drivers

Major infrastructure projects are transforming the City’s open space and recreation network. While some open space has been lost, these developments have also created new public open space, expanded cycleways, and enhanced access to key sporting and recreational facilities.

The Sydney Light Rail

has reshaped key parts of the City, transforming Alfred and George Streets into vibrant pedestrian boulevards. Footpaths along Chalmers and Devonshire Streets were widened, while new pocket parks were introduced through street closures at Devonshire Street near Holt, Waterloo, and High Holbourne streets. Wimbo Park was also expanded, creating additional green space. Beyond these urban design improvements, the Light Rail provides a high-capacity public transport link to Moore Park, the Entertainment Quarter, the Sydney Cricket Ground and Allianz Stadium and supports future public open space initiatives that may emerge.

Sydney Metro

is Australia’s largest public transport project, comprising four lines that connect Sydney’s north-west, west, south-west, and greater west. The M1 line, opened in May 2019, and Sydney Metro West, currently under construction, both run beneath the City. These metro lines will significantly improve access for workers and visitors, while also driving higher residential densities around stations outside the city centre. To accommodate these growing populations, additional or enhanced public open spaces and recreational facilities will be essential.

WestConnex

This project delivered new and improved shared pedestrian and cycle paths at S Peters as well new connection over Alexandra Canal allowing access for Mascot residents to access Sydney Park. Plans initially anticipated that residual land surrounding the St Peters Interchange would be remediated and converted into open space and parkland, with a land bridge linking the area to Sydney Park over Campbell Street. However, this transformation has not yet happened.

Figure 11: Three city squares project idea



Social drivers

Social trends such as rising loneliness, increasing cultural diversity, and the growth of lone-person households underscore the need for inclusive and welcoming public spaces that foster social interaction and strengthen community connections.

Open space and recreation infrastructure are increasingly recognised as essential social infrastructure that supports community wellbeing, inclusion, health and quality of life. While parks and recreation facilities have traditionally been planned to support sport and physical activity, their role has expanded significantly in recent decades. Public spaces now contribute to social connection, community resilience, cultural expression, mental health, equity and social cohesion.

For the City of Sydney, these social functions are particularly important. The City’s growing population, high levels of urban density, diverse communities and changing household structures are increasing reliance on public spaces as places for everyday interaction, recreation and community life. As cities become denser and lifestyles more complex, the social value of open space will continue to grow.

Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing are among the most important drivers of open space and recreation demand. Regular physical activity contributes to improved physical health, reduced risk of chronic disease, improved mental wellbeing and enhanced quality of life.

The increasingly sedentary nature of modern lifestyles reinforces the importance of accessible recreation opportunities that encourage people to be physically active as part of their daily routines. As awareness of health and wellbeing continues to increase, demand for recreation infrastructure that supports active lifestyles is expected to grow.

Mental health and contact with nature

The relationship between public open space and mental wellbeing is becoming increasingly important. Access to parks, green spaces and natural environments has been linked to reduced stress, improved mood, enhanced cognitive function and greater overall life satisfaction. In highly urbanised environments, public open spaces often provide the primary opportunity for residents to experience greenery, natural landscapes and respite from the built environment. Benefits associated with access to nature include:

- Reduced stress and anxiety
- Improved mental wellbeing
- Enhanced concentration and productivity
- Opportunities for relaxation and reflection
- Improved social and emotional health

As urban density increases and private open space becomes less common, the role of parks in supporting mental wellbeing will become increasingly significant.

Social connection

Public spaces provide important opportunities for people to come together, interact and build social relationships. Parks, plazas, recreation facilities and community spaces support both organised and informal social interaction and help foster a sense of belonging within neighbourhoods.

The equitable distribution of open space in high density neighbourhoods is vital to ensure residents have convenient access to parks that function as shared “backyards” fostering social interaction and providing opportunities for recreation.

Loneliness and social isolation

Loneliness and social isolation are increasingly recognised as important public health and social issues. Although the City is highly populated, many residents experience limited social interaction due to factors such as living alone, flexible working arrangements, lifestyle pressures and changing family structures.

The NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the prevalence, causes and impacts of loneliness identified access to quality public spaces, green space, community facilities and local amenities as important protective factors against loneliness, highlighting the role of the built environment in supporting social connection and wellbeing.

In this context, parks, plazas and other public spaces perform a critical social function beyond recreation. They provide accessible and inclusive settings for everyday social interactions, informal gatherings, and community events.

Equity and inclusion

Equitable access to open space and recreation opportunities is an important social objective. Not all residents have the same ability to access, use or benefit from parks and recreation facilities. Factors that can influence participation include:

- income
- age
- disability
- cultural background
- gender
- diverse sexualities

- housing circumstances
- access to transport

Open space has a unique role in supporting equity because it provides low-cost or free opportunities for recreation, exercise and social interaction. Future planning should continue to focus on ensuring that all communities have access to high-quality open space, regardless of where they live or their personal circumstances.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander connections

The City of Sydney is located on the traditional lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have maintained deep cultural, spiritual and environmental connections to Country for thousands of years. Open space planning provides opportunities to:

- celebrate Aboriginal culture and heritage
- support caring for Country
- incorporate community involvement knowledge
- recognise significant cultural sites and stories
- strengthen opportunities for employment ,cultural learning and interpretation

Embedding Aboriginal perspectives within open space planning contributes to cultural recognition, reconciliation and a stronger sense of place.

Environmental drivers

Open space is becoming increasingly important as environmental infrastructure, supporting climate resilience, urban cooling, biodiversity and sustainability alongside recreation and community wellbeing

Open space and recreation infrastructure play an increasingly important role in helping cities respond to environmental challenges. Parks, streets, waterways, trees and public spaces are no longer viewed solely as recreation assets; they are essential components of urban green infrastructure that contribute to climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, urban cooling, water management and community wellbeing.

As the City of Sydney continues to grow and urbanise, pressure on the natural environment will increase. At the same time, climate change is expected to result in hotter temperatures, more frequent heatwaves, changing rainfall patterns and increasing pressure on urban ecosystems. These environmental changes will directly influence how open space is planned, designed, managed and used.

Future open space and recreation planning must therefore balance community recreation needs with broader environmental objectives, ensuring parks and public spaces deliver both social and ecological outcomes.

Climate change and urban resilience

Climate change represents one of the most significant long-term challenges facing cities worldwide. Rising temperatures, increasing heatwave frequency, changing rainfall patterns and more extreme weather events are expected to affect both the function and use of public open space. Within highly urbanised environments such as the City of Sydney, the impacts of climate change are often amplified by the urban heat island effect, where large areas of hard surfaces and built form

absorb and retain heat. Public open spaces provide important opportunities to moderate these impacts through vegetation, tree canopy, permeable surfaces and water-sensitive landscape design.

Parks and green spaces will increasingly function as climate adaptation infrastructure by:

- Providing urban cooling.
- Reducing heat stress.
- Managing stormwater.
- Increasing resilience to extreme weather.
- Supporting biodiversity.
- Providing refuge during heat events.

As climate conditions continue to change, the environmental performance of parks and recreation spaces will become as important as their recreational function.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation must remain central to the planning and management of the City’s open space network. Meeting the City’s environmental targets will require ongoing infrastructure upgrades and management practices to increase canopy and greening, and improve water and energy use.

Urban heat and cooling

Urban heat is one of the most immediate environmental challenges affecting residents, workers and visitors. Dense urban environments typically experience higher temperatures than surrounding areas due to the concentration of buildings, roads and other heat-absorbing surfaces. Access to shaded and vegetated public spaces becomes increasingly important during periods of extreme heat. Trees, parks and green corridors help reduce ambient temperatures and create more comfortable outdoor environments for recreation and everyday use.

For recreation infrastructure, this has several implications:

- Greater demand for shade in parks and playgrounds.
- Increased importance of tree canopy.
- Growing reliance on aquatic facilities during hot weather.
- Increased demand for evening recreation opportunities.
- Need for heat-resilient recreation facilities and materials.

Future park design will need to prioritise user comfort through increased canopy cover, water-sensitive landscapes, shelter and climate-responsive design.

By connecting parks with expanded tree canopy and native vegetation along streets and pathways, we can create green corridors that provide habitat for wildlife support biodiversity, and strengthen ecological resilience.

Tree canopy and urban greening

Urban greening is a key environmental priority for the City of Sydney. Trees and vegetation contribute significantly to environmental sustainability by improving air quality, reducing temperatures, managing stormwater and enhancing biodiversity. They also improve the visual quality and amenity of public spaces.

The City’s environmental strategies identify ambitious targets for increasing urban canopy and greening across the local government area. Achieving these outcomes will require continued integration of greening initiatives into parks, streets, plazas, recreation facilities and public domain projects.

Future recreation planning will need to balance greening objectives with active recreation requirements, particularly on larger sports and recreation sites where both functions compete for space.

Biodiversity and habitat protection

Despite its highly urbanised character, the City supports a range of native flora and fauna and contributes to broader regional ecological networks. Parks, bushland remnants, waterways, street trees and foreshore landscapes all play an important role in supporting urban biodiversity.

The City’s Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan seeks to expand indigenous vegetation, improve habitat quality and strengthen habitat connectivity across the local government area. A key objective is the creation of biodiversity corridors and habitat stepping stones that allow species to move through the urban environment.

Figure 12: Ecological networks in the LGA

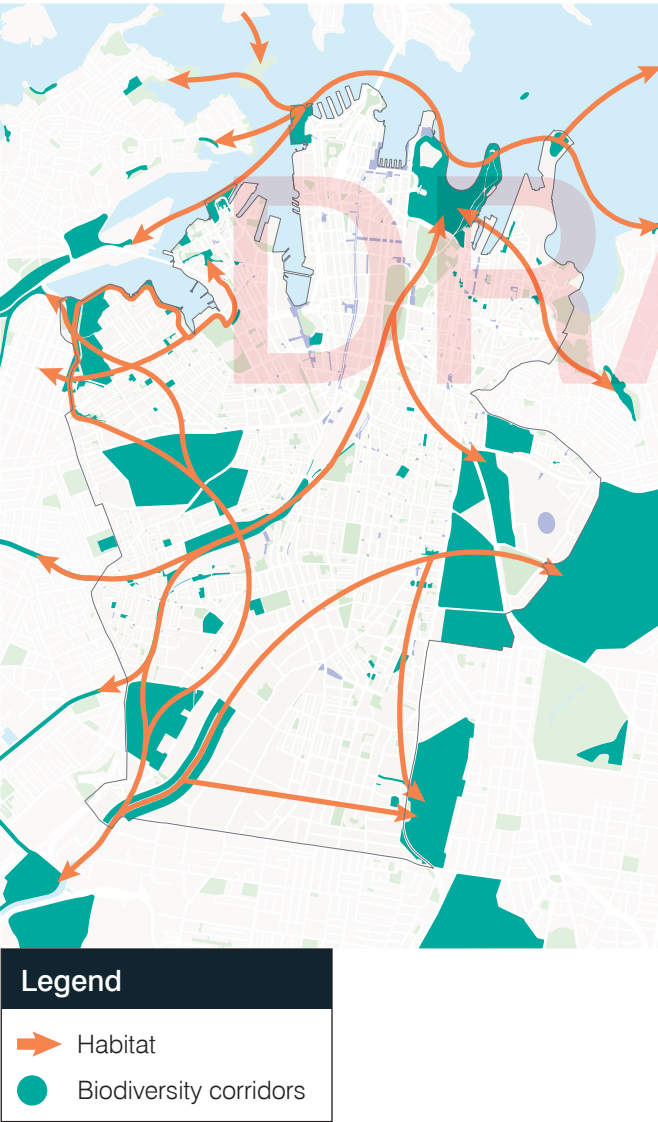


Image (opposite page): **Sydney Park**
Photo: Katherine Griffiths / City of Sydney

Water management

Increasing attention to water management is influencing the provision and design of open space and recreation infrastructure. Stormwater management, water-sensitive urban design (WSUD) and water reuse initiatives can help improve water quality, support urban cooling, reduce flood impacts and contribute to more sustainable and resilient public spaces.

Sustainability and resource use

Parks and recreation facilities consume water, energy and maintenance resources throughout their lifecycle.

The City has had a long standing commitment to ensure infrastructure will operate more efficiently and minimise environmental impacts. In particular:

- Water-efficient irrigation systems.
- Renewable energy infrastructure.
- Sustainable materials.
- Resource-efficient facility design.
- Reduced carbon emissions from operations and maintenance.

The City’s commitment to achieving net-zero emissions creates opportunities for recreation infrastructure to contribute positively to broader environmental objectives.

Balancing recreation and environmental outcomes

Future open space planning will increasingly require balancing recreation demands with environmental objectives. As population growth drives demand for additional sports fields, courts, playgrounds and other facilities, environmental considerations must remain an integral part of planning and design. Key tensions may include:

- Recreation facilities versus tree canopy expansion
- Active use areas versus biodiversity outcomes.
- Public access versus ecosystem protection.
- Facility development versus stormwater management objectives.

These challenges highlight the importance of designing multifunctional open spaces capable of delivering environmental, social and recreation benefits simultaneously.



Summary

This part has examined the demographic, social, environmental, recreation and infrastructure trends that are shaping future demand for open space, sport and recreation infrastructure across the City of Sydney.

Importance of public space

The strategic context highlights a growing reliance on public open space and recreation facilities to support health, wellbeing, and social connection in an increasingly urban environment. As private open space decreases, demand for high-quality, accessible parks, sports facilities, and informal recreation networks will continue to rise, requiring both expansion and more efficient use of existing assets.

Climate resilience and cooling

Open space will play an increasingly critical role in responding to climate change. Parks, green corridors, and tree canopy are essential for urban cooling, heat-refuge provision, stormwater management, and biodiversity protection. Future facility provision should prioritise shaded spaces, water-sensitive design, and resilient landscapes that can withstand heat, drought, and extreme weather events.

Population growth

Population growth and increasing residential density will place sustained pressure on public open space to accommodate everyday recreation, social interaction, and respite. This will require a greater quantity of well-distributed, high-quality open spaces that are accessible, multifunctional, and capable of supporting intensified use within compact urban environments.

Demographic change

Demographic change will also drive more diverse facility requirements. While young adults will remain the dominant demographic, increased numbers

of children, older adults, and retirees will require universally accessible spaces that support different abilities, life stages, and activity preferences.

Lone person households

With lone-person households increasing, public open spaces play a crucial role in bringing people together. Well-designed open spaces provide safe, inclusive places that support social connection, visibility and a sense of belonging, helping reduce isolation and strengthening community ties.

Workers and visitors

The City of Sydney is a major employment centre that attracts a large daily influx of workers from across metropolitan Sydney, resulting in high daytime population densities and increased demand on public open spaces. With around 120,000 people both living and working locally, and the City serving as a key destination for visitors and tourists, accessible and high-quality open spaces are essential to support diverse everyday recreational needs. covid / wfh

Cultural diversity

Cultural diversity will continue to shape how open space is used. As not all communities engage with formal sporting clubs, recreation provision must remain adaptable, supporting informal, social, and culturally diverse activities. Flexible spaces that can accommodate multiple uses will be increasingly important.

Health and wellbeing

Open space and recreation facilities function as essential preventative health infrastructure, supporting physical activity, mental wellbeing, social connection, and everyday contact with nature. Accessible, free or low-cost spaces play a critical role in strengthening social cohesion and delivering significant health, social, and environmental benefits in high-density urban areas.

Recreation patterns are changing

Recreation participation is becoming increasingly diverse and flexible. While organised sport remains important, a growing proportion of recreation activity occurs through informal, self-directed and social forms of participation. Walking, running, cycling, swimming, fitness training and outdoor recreation are now among the most popular recreation activities. Emerging activities such as pickleball, padel, social basketball and outdoor fitness programs are also creating new demands on facilities and public spaces.

Access and connectivity matter as much as provision

The value of open space is influenced not only by how much exists but also by how easily people can access and move between spaces. Walking and cycling are among the most popular recreation activities in the City and are also critical means of accessing parks and recreation facilities

Inclusion and equity must remain central

The City's population is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of age, culture, household composition and lifestyle. Providing equitable access is not simply about facility distribution; it also requires consideration of accessibility, affordability, safety, comfort and cultural relevance. Inclusive design should therefore remain a core principle across all future investment and planning decisions.

Conclusion

The City of Sydney is entering a period of significant change. Population growth, increasing density, evolving recreation preferences and environmental pressures will continue to reshape how people use parks, public spaces and recreation facilities.

These trends reinforce the importance of a strategic and integrated approach to planning open space and recreation infrastructure.

Future success will depend on protecting and enhancing the existing network, increasing capacity where possible, embracing innovation and ensuring facilities remain accessible, inclusive and resilient.



Rainbow Path at Prince Alfred Pool
Photo: Chris Southwood / City of Sydney

Part 2

Open space network and assessment

- Open space network
- Open space assessment

DRAFT

Open space network

The City of Sydney contains a diverse network of public open spaces that contribute significantly to the health, wellbeing, liveability and environmental performance of the city.

Historical context

Prior to European settlement, the City of Sydney was part of the traditional Country of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, who have maintained a deep connection to the land, waterways and harbour for thousands of years.

The City of Sydney is home to some of Australia's most significant public parks and open spaces. Hyde Park, dedicated in 1810, was Australia's first public park, while The Domain, established in 1788, was opened to the public in the 1830s. Centennial Park, opened in 1888 as the largest urban park in the Southern Hemisphere, was the site of Australia's Federation inauguration in 1901.

Parks including Redfern Park, Rushcutters Bay Park, Alexandria Park, Belmore Park and Prince Alfred Park emerged from the 19th-century parks movement, which promoted public recreation, health and social wellbeing. More recently, Sydney Park was created through the rehabilitation of the former Bedford Brickworks site, while urban renewal in Pyrmont and Green Square has delivered new open space networks through public domain planning and redevelopment initiatives.

Open space inventory

An inventory of publicly accessible open space was undertaken to establish the baseline for assessment. The inventory identifies:

- Park name and location.
- Ownership and management arrangements.
- Park classification.
- Size and area.

- Recreation facilities.
- Sports infrastructure.
- Play opportunities.
- Environmental features.
- Accessibility characteristics.

The inventory provides a comprehensive understanding of the quantity and distribution of open space throughout the local government area and forms the basis for subsequent analysis.

Detailed schedules are provided in Appendix 2.

Open space ownership and management

Open space within the City is owned and managed by a range of public agencies and organisations. This shared management structure means that recreation outcomes are influenced by decisions made across multiple organisations.

Partnerships and collaboration therefore play an important role in protecting, enhancing and expanding access to open space throughout the city.

For the purposes of this study, the assessment considers both City-managed open space and the broader publicly accessible network available to residents, workers and visitors.

Open space settings

To support a high level assessment, this study groups open spaces into broad setting types based on their overall character or "look" of the various open space to be found across the City.

Collectively these spaces support a wide range of activities including recreation, sport, relaxation, social interaction, cultural events, active transport, environmental education and biodiversity conservation.

Habitat



Foreshore parks



Parks



Types of open space (left to right)

Bamal Way Link
Photo: Paul Patterson / City of Sydney

Bushcare
Photo: Katherine Griffiths / City of Sydney

Chifley Square
Photo: Paul Patterson / City of Sydney

Bicentennial Park
Photo: Paul Patterson / City of Sydney

Ancillary/links



Civic/urban spaces



Light rail corridors



Street closures



George Street South
Photo: Chris Southwood / City of Sydney

Hyde Park
Photo: Katherine Griffiths / City of Sydney

???
Photo: ??? / City of Sydney

Figure 13: Open space settings

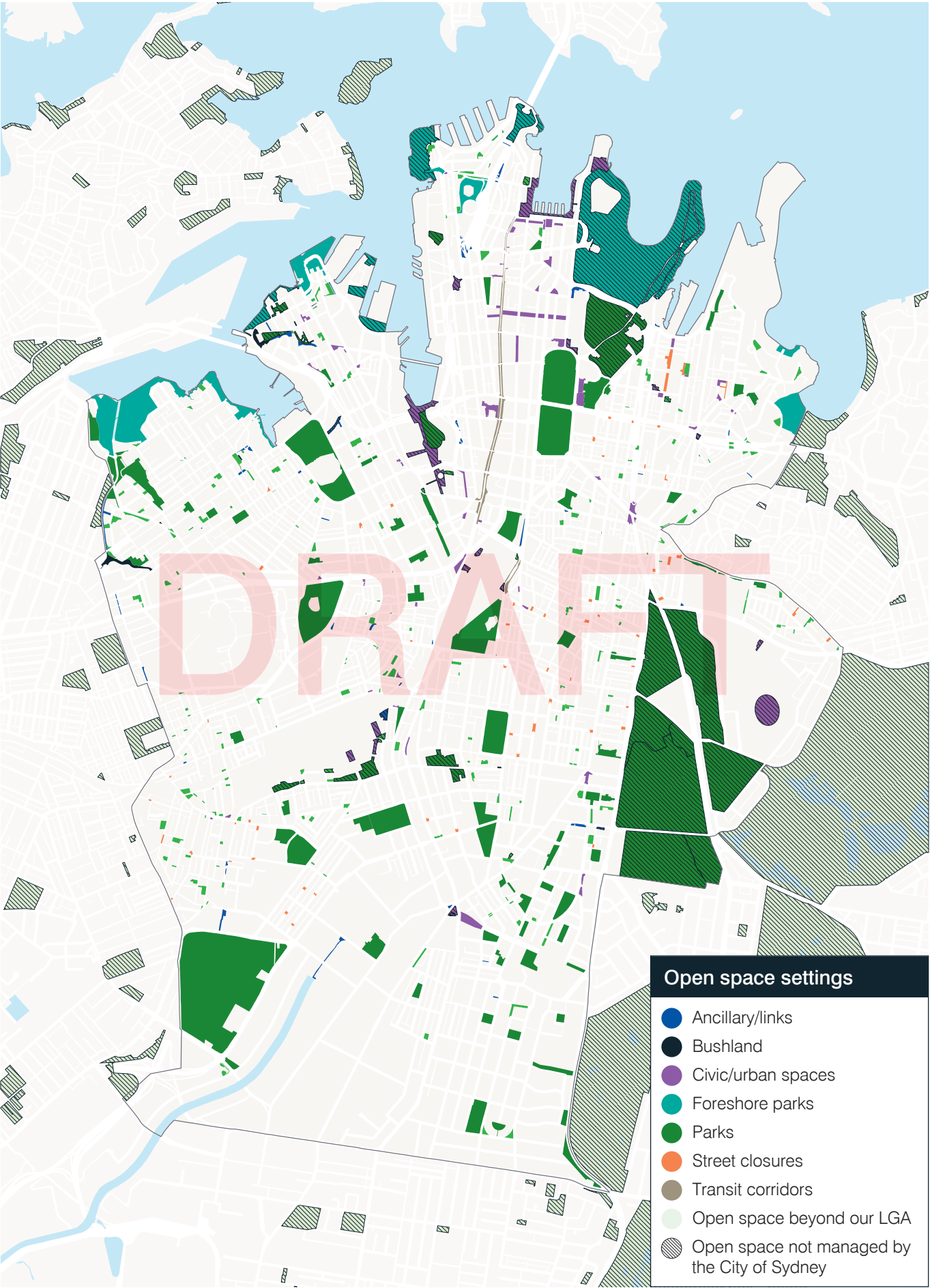


Figure 14: Open space setting types

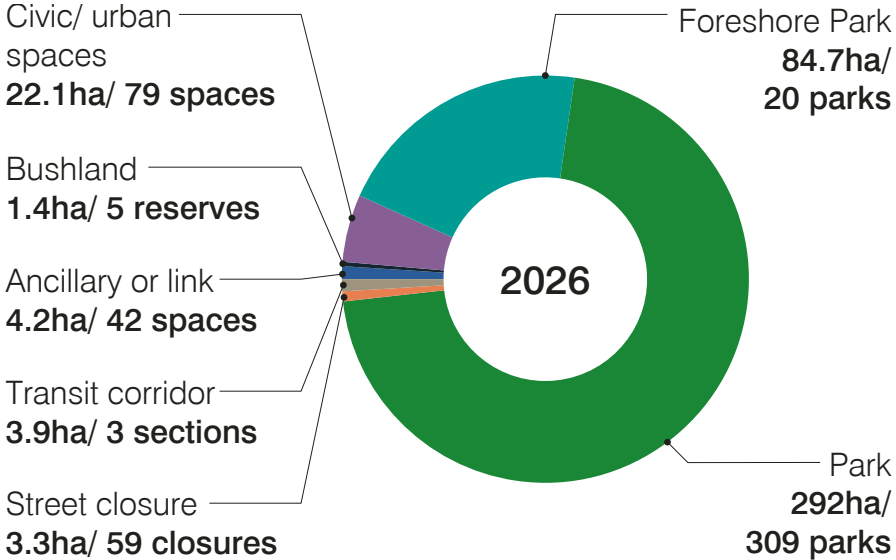


Figure 15: Open space provision (m²) by setting type - managed by the City

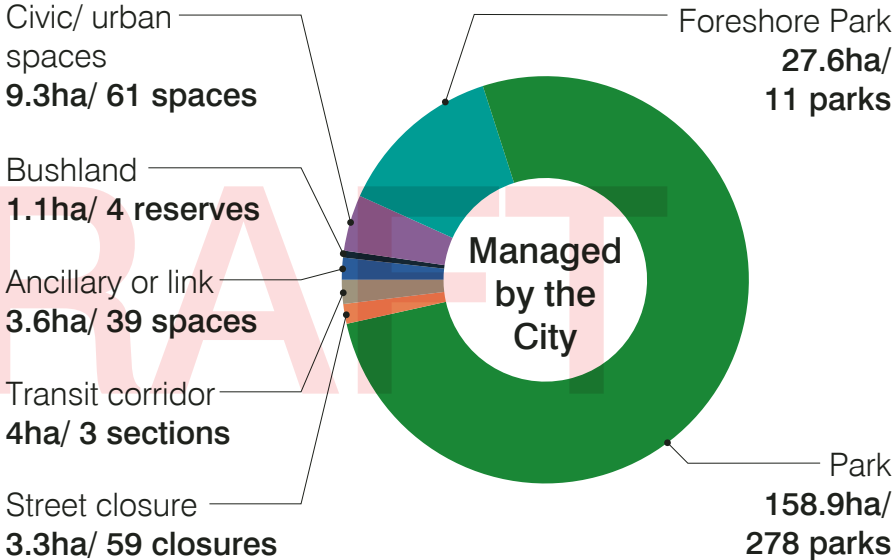
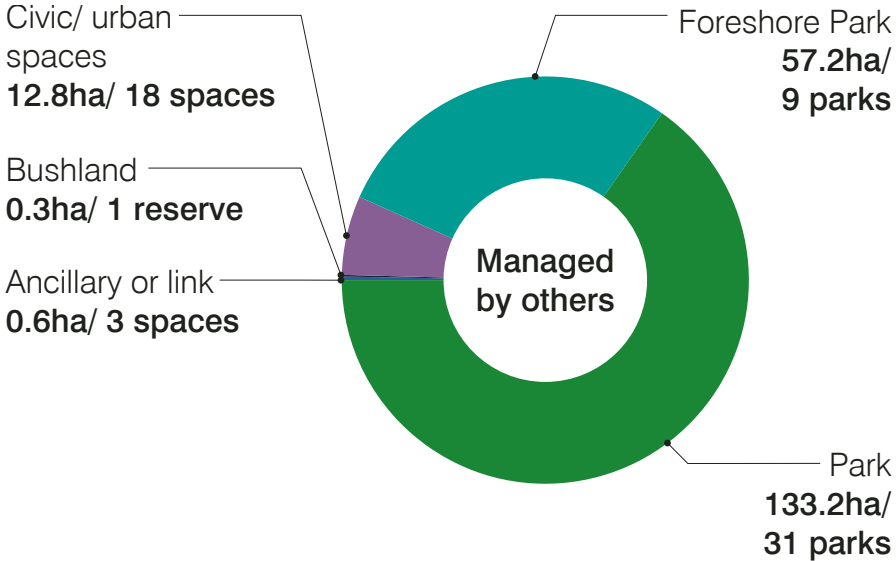


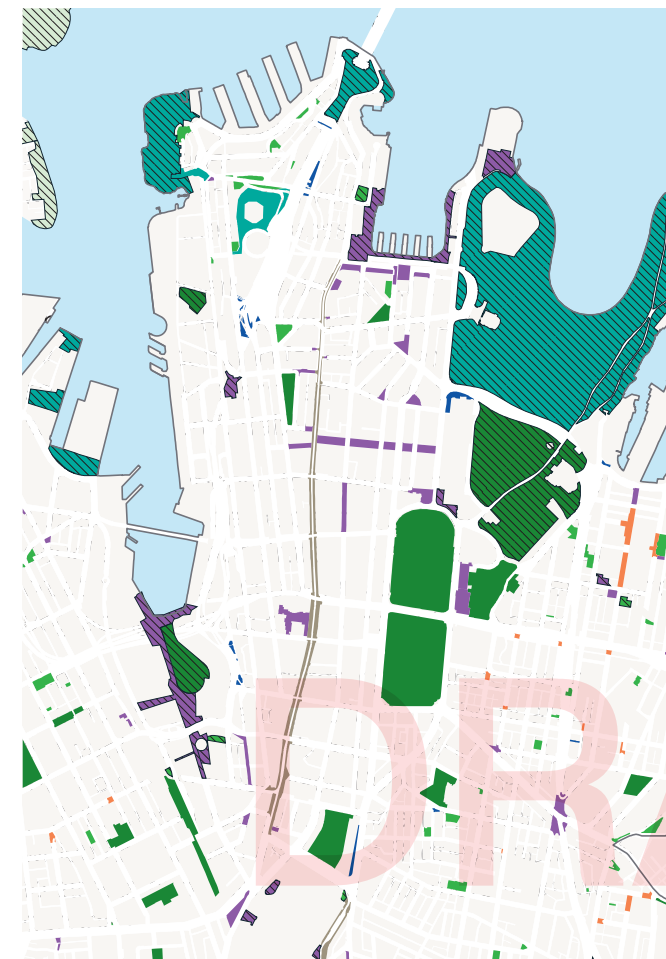
Figure 16: Open space provision (m²) by setting type - managed by others





Pedestrians crossing George Street behind the Light Rail
Photo: ??? / City of Sydney

City centre public space



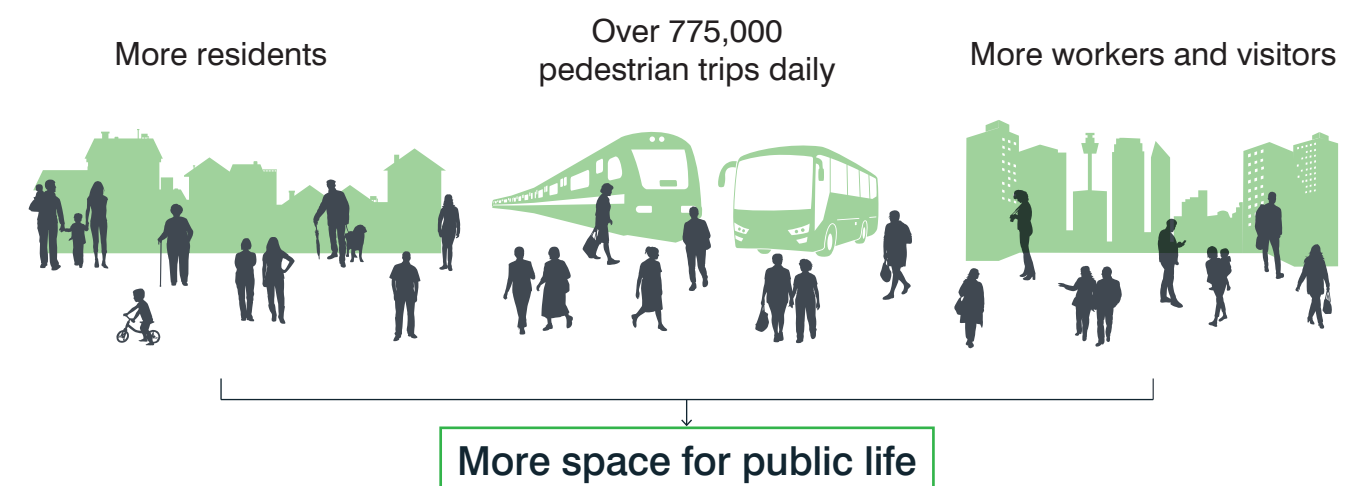
The City of Sydney's Public Domain Plan for the city centre provides the strategic framework for this change, focusing on the rebalancing of space by reducing the dominance of vehicles and reallocating space to pedestrians, cyclists, trees, seating, outdoor dining and public transport. This framework informs investment in streets, laneways and public spaces across the city centre, including Dixon Street, Loftus Street, Martin Place and Hyde Park.

George Street is central to the transformation of the city centre. With the delivery of light rail, the long held vision for George Street is being realised through the creation of a pedestrian focused boulevard with significantly more space for public life.

A defining element of the Gehl vision for the city centre is the creation of three major civic squares at Circular Quay, Town Hall and Central Station, linked by the transformed George Street boulevard. Together, these spaces form a connected sequence of public places through the heart of the city.

Town Hall Square is a cornerstone of this vision, reimagining Sydney's civic heart through the creation of a new major public square. To realise this long term vision, the City of Sydney has progressively acquired key properties over several decades.

Envisioned as Sydney's new living room, Town Hall Square will be a place for gathering, celebration and everyday use, supporting social and cultural life in an inclusive and accessible public space.



Open space assessment

An open space network assessment evaluates how effectively public spaces meet community needs. It considers whether spaces are fit for purpose, accessible, and suitable for both current and future recreation.

The findings help identify gaps, guide investment priorities, and shape improvements that align with demographic trends and community expectations.

Use of benchmarks

Traditional population-based benchmarks, such as the standard of 2.83 hectares of open space per 1,000 residents, have notable limitations in high-density urban environments. Developed for the low-density cities of the early 20th century, these measures are increasingly impractical because the amount of land required to meet benchmark targets grows in direct proportion to population increases. In dense urban areas, where opportunities to acquire new open space are limited, achieving these standards is often unrealistic.

As a result, reliance on fixed per-capita benchmarks can underestimate the recreation needs of rapidly growing, vertically living communities and fail to reflect the importance of accessibility, quality, and capacity of open space.

In this study, benchmarks are used as flexible indicators rather than strict targets. They serve as a ‘health check’ to:

- compare provision across different cities and contexts;
- help prevent the net loss of open space; and highlight instances where supply is falling below acceptable levels and may require intervention.

Applied in this way, benchmarks support a more nuanced assessment that accounts for density, demographics, urban form and the experience of residents that are often overlooked in conventional, per-capita standards.

The Sydney Plan

The Sydney Plan introduces a new benchmark framework for public open space that focuses on accessibility, equity and liveability.

- 95% existing and planned residents should be within 400m (5-minute walk) of a local park of 3,000sqm or greater;
- in medium- and high-density areas, residents; should be within 200m of an open space (minimum size 1,500sqm);
- no reduction in the total area of public open space;

The Department will also prepare, consult with each Council specific provision benchmarks respond to existing and planned urban typologies and anticipated growth.

What other cities and agencies are doing

Melbourne’s 2024 review of its 2012 Open Space Strategy found no consistent best practice population or land area ratios across global cities. It now adopts a needs based, performance led approach. A key objective is ensuring all residents and workers are within 300 metres or a 10 minute walk of open space, particularly in growth areas.

Many international cities and NSW councils also use quantity and proximity benchmarks to evaluate the performance, distribution, and accessibility of their open space networks. Benchmarks include ensuring residents live within 300–400 metres of public open space, and per-capita open space measures, which range from 6–10m² of open space per resident. Refer to Appendix 1.

Assessment framework

Understanding how effectively this network is meeting community needs requires more than a simple assessment of the amount of land available.

Contemporary open space planning recognises that successful open space networks are characterised not only by quantity, but also by accessibility, distribution, diversity, quality and their ability to accommodate future growth and changing patterns of use.

This part establishes the assessment framework that has been used throughout this study to evaluate the performance of the City’s existing open space network and identify future opportunities, constraints and priorities.

The framework is designed to answer six key questions:

Provision

- How much open space is available?

Accessibility

- Can people easily reach open space?

Distribution

- Is open space equitably distributed?

Connectivity/ linkages

- How well connected is the network?

Size

- Do parks provide the scale and functionality required?

Quality

- Are parks and public spaces attractive, functional and fit for purpose?

Together, these assessment dimensions provide a comprehensive understanding of network performance and help identify the actions required to ensure the City’s open space network continues to support a growing and increasingly diverse community.

In this study, benchmarks are interpreted as guiding indicators rather than absolute standards.

Their purpose is not to determine whether a community has “enough” open space, but to inform a broader assessment that also considers accessibility, quality, functionality, and local context.

Open space provision

Why quantity matters

Quantity is the most traditional measure of open space provision and provides an indication of the overall supply of public open space available to support residents, workers and visitors.

As population increases, open space provision can decline unless new parks and public spaces are secured. Monitoring quantity therefore provides an important indicator of whether provision is keeping pace with growth.

While quantity provides a useful measure of supply, it does not indicate whether parks are accessible, fit for purpose or capable of meeting community needs. These factors are explored in subsequent sections.

Currently 15.3% of our local area or 411.7ha is dedicated to public open space.

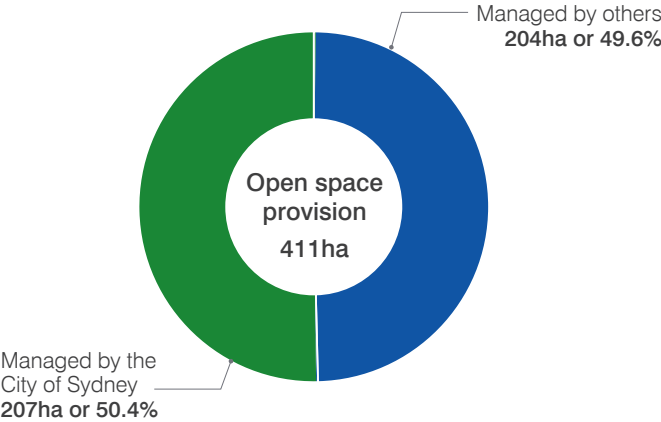
Current provision

We own or manage 207 ha. with a further 204 ha managed by other government authorities, agencies or institutions.

Consisting of parks, pocket parks, urban spaces, street closures, small pockets of bushland, gardens, and links, our open spaces provide our communities places for play, sport, socialisation, celebration, protest, respite, greening and habitat.

Ownership / management

Figure 17: Proportion of open space managed by the City of Sydney and others



Open spaces are owned, managed, and maintained by three main categories of landholders:

City of Sydney

Spaces owned or under the care, control, and management of the City.

Other authorities and institutions

Areas managed by government agencies, trusts, institutions, or private owners. Nearly half of the City's open space is managed by external entities primarily state agencies highlighting the need for sustained collaboration and partnership.

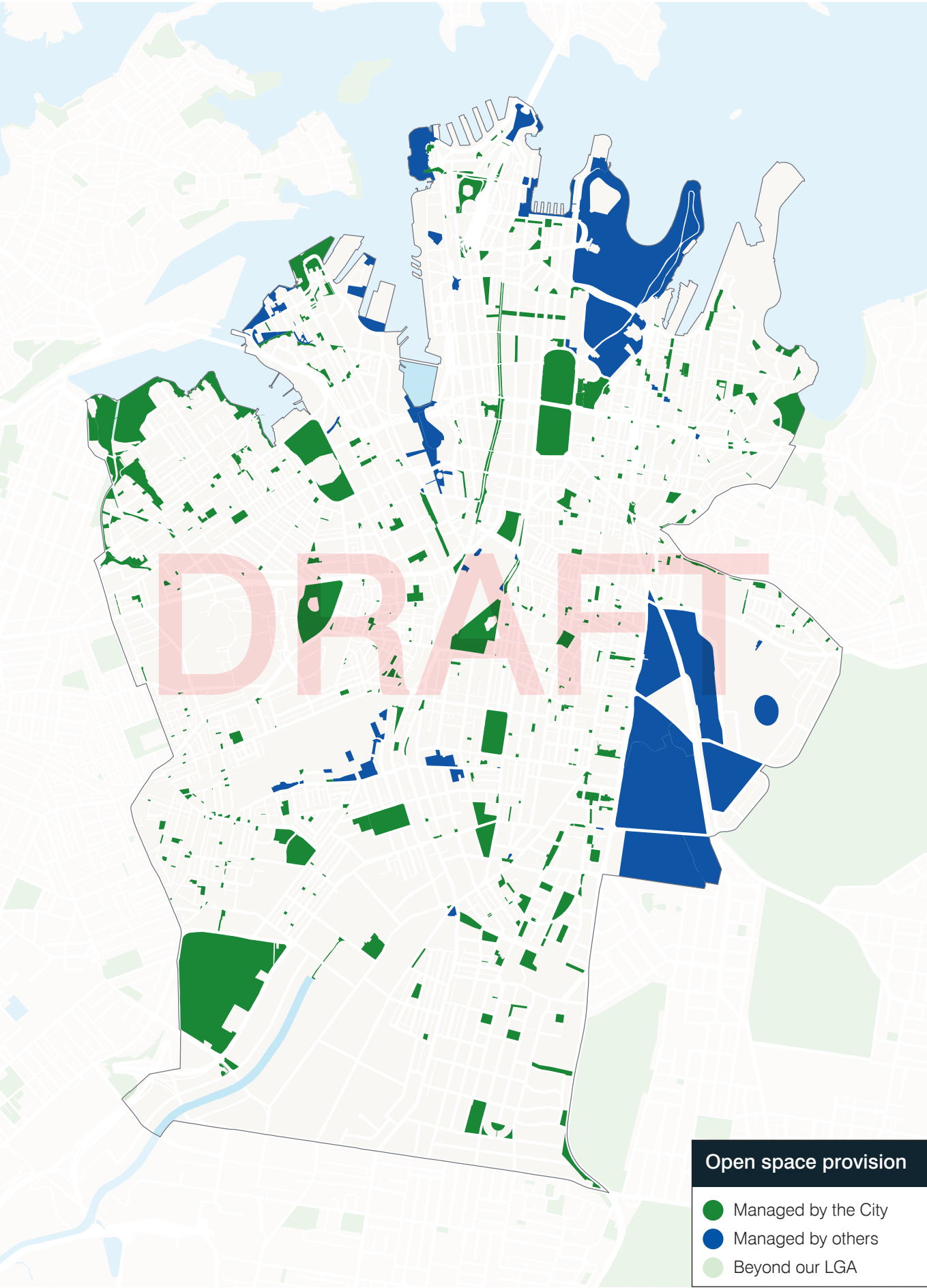
Adjoining local government areas

Open spaces outside the City's boundaries that are regularly accessed by Sydney residents and workers.

Critical role of other agencies and providers

The ability to meet future open space needs will increasingly depend on the contribution of state agencies, neighbouring councils, and other providers. These spaces will play a vital role in supporting the recreational needs of City residents as local supply becomes more constrained.

Figure 18: Open space provision



Additions and losses

The City of Sydney’s open space network has steadily expanded through contributions from both the City and other government agencies. Since 2004, growth has been driven by land dedications, acquisitions, and the transformation of streets into public spaces. Delivery of open space has been through land acquisitions . dedications through development or partnerships with other agencies.

Many of the newly created parks exceed 5,000m², with Harold Park standing out as the largest at 3.8 hectares. These larger parks are increasingly critical in supporting higher urban densities, offering space for diverse recreational facilities and community activities.

Street conversions have also become a vital strategy, most prominently demonstrated along George Street with the light rail project. As land availability becomes more constrained, streets will play an ever-growing role in delivering accessible public open space and enhancing the city’s urban character.

Despite these gains, the network has also experienced losses of more than 5.0 hectares of public open space, primarily due to infrastructure projects by state government agencies. Such reductions must be acknowledged, as they diminish efforts to expand and strengthen the network. With demand for open space rising alongside urban density, it is essential that infrastructure planning does not default to re-purposing public open space as the most expedient option.

Ultimately, protecting existing open space is fundamental to accommodating Sydney’s growing population.

A balanced approach—expanding where possible while safeguarding what already exists—will ensure the city continues to provide equitable, sustainable, and accessible environments for all.

Between 2004 - 2015 over 22ha was added consisting of:

- 11 hectares added to the open space network managed directly by the City
- 11.2 hectares added to the open space network managed by other agencies

Since 2016 over 20 hectares of public open space to the network, increasing its capacity to meet community needs (Figure XX). This includes:

- 18.5 hectares added to the open space network managed directly by the City
- 1.82 hectares added to the open space network managed by other agencies

During the same period, there has been a loss of 5.0 hectares of open space, primarily due to the introduction of new transport infrastructure and the expansion of the NSW Art Gallery.

DRAFT



Gunyama Park, Green Square
Photo: Jessica Lindsay / City of Sydney



Drying Green, Green Square
Photo: Jessica Lindsay / City of Sydney



Wulaba Park, Green Square
Photo: Katherine Griffiths / City of Sydney



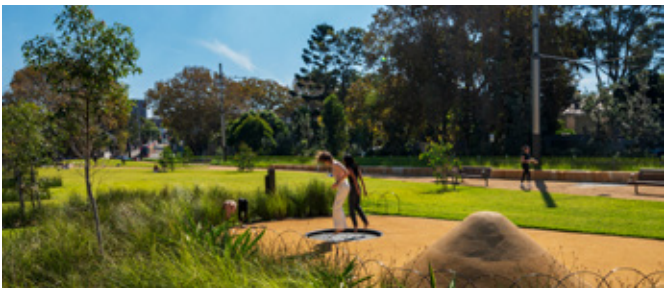
Crescent Lands, Annandale
Photo: Will Jones / City of Sydney



Harold Park
Photo: Adam Hollingworth / City of Sydney



Butterscotch Park
Photo: Katherine Griffiths / City of Sydney



Wimbo Park
Photo: Will Jones / City of Sydney



Margaret Street closure at George Street
Photo: Will Jones / City of Sydney

Refer Appendix 3 for further details on open space additions 2004-2015.

Figure 19: New open space added (2016 - 2026)

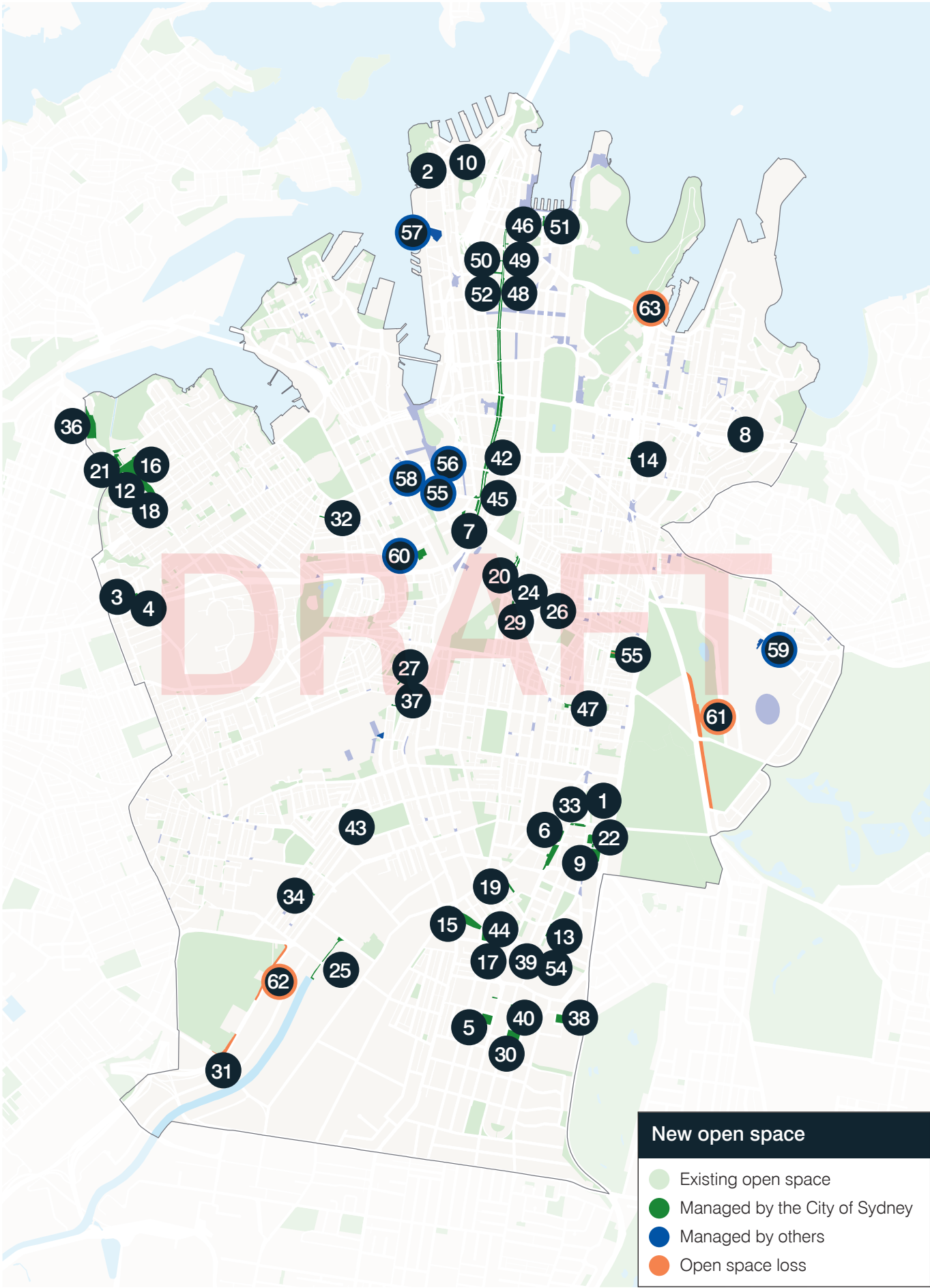


Table 1: New open space (2016 - 2026) managed by the City

Open space		Village/ activity hub	Setting	Area (m²)	Date created
1	Amelia Street Road Closure	Green Sq & City Sth	Street closure	307	2016
2	Argyle Place 4010 Streetscape	CBD & Harbour	Civic	241	2016
3	Booler Community Centre	Glebe Point Rd	Park	401	2016
4	Daranggara Park	Glebe Point Rd	Park	1,618	2016
5	Sweetacres Park	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	4,997	2016
6	The Ropes Walk	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	2,527	2016
7	Thomas Street Road Closure	Chinatown & CBD South	Civic	818	2016
8	Ward Avenue 5040 Streetscape	MacLeay St & Woolloomooloo	Ancillary or link	298	2016
9	Wulaba Park	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	5,544	2016
10	Nita McCrae Park	CBD & Harbour	Park	922	2017
11	Public Path Way 5010 Streetscape	Green Sq & City Sth	Ancillary or link	305	2017
12	Arcadia Park	Glebe Point Rd	Park	462	2018
13	Burning Park	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	1,351	2018
14	Frances Newton Reserve	Oxford St	Park	281	2018
15	Green Square Library and Plaza Park	Green Sq & City Sth	Civic	8,411	2018
16	Harold Park	Glebe Point Rd	Park	36,542	2018
17	Matron Ruby Grant Park	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	3,699	2018
18	Toxteth Park	Glebe Point Rd	Park	577	2018
19	906 Bourke Street (Hyperion Park & Kingsborough Way)	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	3,547	2019
20	Chalmers Street pedestrian area	Crown & Baptist Sts	Transit corridor	4,437	2019
21	Cullen Close Closure	Glebe Point Rd	Park	793	2019
22	Dyuralya Square	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	2,322	2019
23	George Street pedestrian area - central	CBD & Harbour	Transit corridor	16,718	2019
24	Holt Street 5020 Streetscape	Crown & Baptist Sts	Street closure	502	2019
25	Sheas Creek Shared Path	Green Sq & City Sth	Ancillary or link	3,035	2019
26	Waterloo Street 5070 Streetscape	Crown & Baptist Sts	Street closure	376	2019
27	10A Caroline Street Streetscape	Redfern St	Civic	722	2020
28	53-57 Campbell Road Streetscape	Green Sq & City Sth	ancilliary or links	1,838	2020
29	Buckingham Street 5010 Streetscape	Crown & Baptist Sts	Street closure	320	2020
30	Butterscotch Park	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	5,556	2020
31	Campbell Road 5040 Streetscape	Green Sq & City Sth	Ancillary or link	3,775	2020
32	Elger Street Community Garden	Glebe Point Rd	Ancillary or link	472	2020
33	Lachlan Street 5010 Streetscape	Green Sq & City Sth	Ancillary or link	1,633	2020
34	Lawrence Street 5020 Traffic Treatment	King St	Street closure	241	2020

Table 1: (Continued)

Open space		Village/ activity hub	Setting	Area (m²)	Date created
35	The Ropes Walk	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	6,345	2020
36	Glebe Foreshore Parks - Crescent lands	Glebe Point Rd	Park	11,066	2021
37	125 Eveleigh Street Streetscape	Redfern St	Ancillary or link	257	2021
38	Garraway Park	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	3,260	2021
39	Gunyama Park - Stage 1 and Gunyama Park Synthetic Field	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	11,425	2021
40	Honeykiss Park	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	2,913	2021
41	Tosh Lane 5020 Streetscape	Green Sq & City Sth	Ancillary or link	270	2021
42	George Street pedestrian area - south	Chinatown & CBD South	Transit corridor	15,127	2022
43	Getiela Sports Courts and Surrounds and Getiela Synthetic Sportsfield (Alexandria Park Community School)	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	9,727	2022
44	The Drying Green	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	6,210	2022
45	Barlow Street Forest	Chinatown & CBD South	Civic	385	2023
46	Ngana gili Plaza	CBD & Harbour	Civic	1,094	2023
47	Surry Hills Village Pocket Park	Crown & Baptist Sts	Park	519	2024
48	City North - Bond Street closure	CBD & Harbour	Civic	89	2025
49	City North - Dalley Street closure	CBD & Harbour	Civic	123	2025
50	City North - Jamison Street closure	CBD & Harbour	Civic	177	2025
51	City North - Loftus Street closure	CBD & Harbour	Civic	863	2025
52	City North - Margaret Street closure	CBD & Harbour	Civic	873	2025
53	George Street pedestrian area - north	CBD & Harbour	Transit corridor	3,167	2025
54	Gunyama Park Stage 2	Green Sq & City Sth	Park	6300	2026
55	Wimbo Park extension	Crown Street	Park	3100	2024
Total				185,135	

Table 2: New open space (2016 - 2026) managed by others

Open space		Village/ activity hub	Setting	Area (m²)	Date created
55	Darling Drive Reserve/ Scape forecourt	Chinatown & CBD South	Park	482	2017
56	Darling Square	Chinatown & CBD South	Civic	2,134	2020
57	Hickson Park	CBD & Harbour	Park	6,200	2020
58	Reflection Park	Chinatown & CBD South	Park	1,435	2020
59	Sydney Football Stadium outdoor gym and court	Oxford St	Civic	1,565	2022
60	UTS Alumni Green	Harris St	Park	6,422	2016
Total				18,238	

Table 3: Open space lost (2016 - 2026)

Open space		Village/ activity hub	Setting	Area (m2)	Date lost
61	Moore Park - light rail works	Crown & Baptist Sts and Oxford St	Park	27,004	2019
62	Sydney Park - WestConnex road works	King St	Park	10,641	2019
63	The Domain - Art Gallery of NSW extension	CBD & Harbour	Park	13,153	2020
Total				50,798	

Adjacent open space

Figure 15 shows open spaces outside the City of Sydney that remain easily accessible to nearby residents. While not counted in the City’s formal open-space provision, major regional parks such as Centennial Park and neighbouring parks like Rushcutters Bay Park and Camperdown Park and Rest Park provide valuable additional capacity for recreation and significantly complement the City’s network.

In the same way, parks situated along the City’s edges offer amenity and facilities to neighbouring communities, reinforcing the shared benefits of open space across local government boundaries.

Sydney Park already attracts strong visitation from the Inner West, and the new WestConnex pedestrian and cycling link over Alexandria Canal at Bourke Street has further increased visitation from Mascot urban renewal area by giving residents a direct, link to the park.

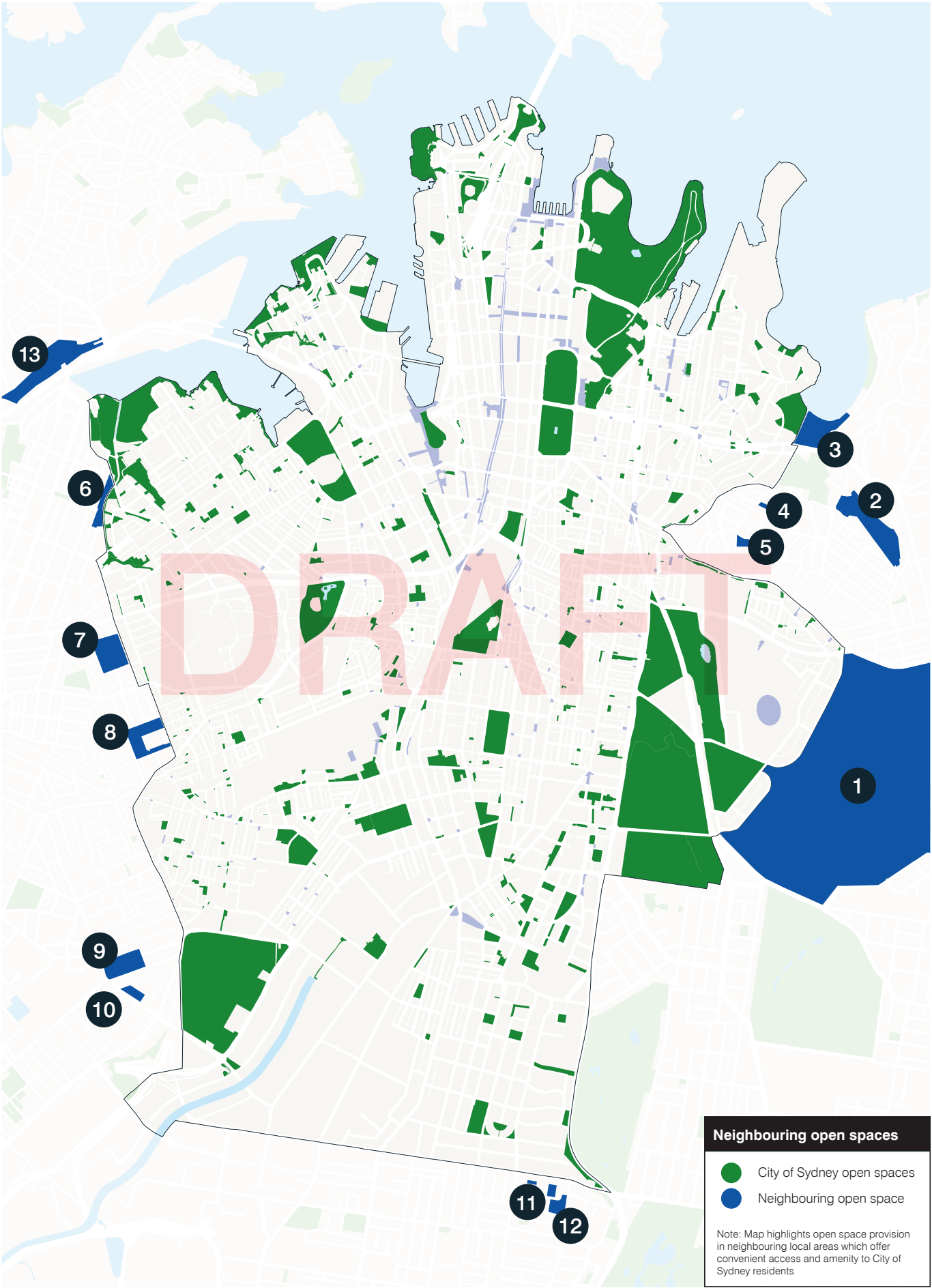
Evaluating open space provision outside our boundary is necessary to recognise that, for certain sections of the City, neighbouring council areas may offer the most accessible parkland.

228ha
adjacent
parkland

Table 4: Open space provision in adjacent local government areas

Adjacent open space		Local government area	Area (m2)
1	Centennial Park	Randwick and Woollahra	1,890,000
2	Trumper Park	Woollahra	79,000
3	Rushcutters Bay Park (Woollahra Council)	Woollahra	52,600
4	Dillon Street Playground	Woollahra	5,500
5	Paddington Women's Hospital Park	Woollahra	5,500
6	Smith Hogan & Spindlers Park	Inner West	15,935
7	Camperdown Park	Inner West	45,875
8	Camperdown Memorial Rest Park	Inner West	39,271
9	Camdenville Park	Inner West	37,074
10	Simpson Park	Inner West	8,880
11	Bridget Tight Reserve	Bayside	5,000
12	Jack Munday Reserve	Bayside	12,840
13	Rozelle Interchange Parklands	Inner West	9,0000

Figure 20: Neighbouring open space



Residential open space provision

Open space per resident is a key measure for assessing whether communities have adequate access to a park within a defined location. This measure becomes especially critical in places experiencing higher residential densities, where opportunities to secure additional land for open space are limited.

Table 5 illustrates past, current, and projected open space provision per resident. It accounts for both confirmed new open spaces awaiting delivery and planned areas already approved. The figure also presents the current and future residential populations of each village alongside the total open space area and the corresponding rate of provision per resident.

Open space area per resident

Year	Open space per resident (m²)
2016	18.5m²
2026	18.1m²
2046	14.8m²

Despite planned open space dedications, acquisitions and the conversion of Moore Park South to parkland, the amount of open space available per resident is projected to decline over coming decades. Strong population growth is expected to outpace the delivery of new open space, resulting in increased pressure on existing parks and recreation areas.

Open space provision is also uneven across the City’s village areas. By 2046, Green Square, City South and Macleay Street villages are projected to have less than 6m² of open space per resident, highlighting significant disparities in access across the local government area.

This level of provision is below several commonly referenced international and local benchmarks, including Singapore (8m² per person), Paris (10m²), Chile (10m²), Parramatta City Council (10m²) and Inner West Council (13.3m² per person). For more information refer to Appendix 1.

Despite planned open space dedications and acquisitions, population growth is expected to outpace the delivery of new open space, reducing the amount of open space available per resident. This will place increasing demand on existing parks and recreation areas, particularly larger destinations that accommodate both informal recreation and organised sport..

Table 5: City of Sydney and village residential densities and open space provision (m² and per person)

Village	Area (km²)	Estimated residential population		Residential population density (persons/km²)		Open space provision * (m²)		Open space per person	
		2026	2046	2026	2046	2026	2046	2026	2046
City of Sydney	26.67	237,241	304,048	8,896	11,401	4,314,354	4,514,354	18.1	14.8
CBD & Harbour	3.14	10,820	18,210	3,443	5,794	1,034,718	1,061,346	95.63	58.28
Chinatown & CBD South	1.10	22,706	38,302	20,662	34,854	122,344	137,695	5.39	3.59
Crown & Baptist Streets	2.76	22,343	25,457	8,092	9,220	850,973	850,973	38.09	33.43
Glebe Point Road	2.52	24,447	27,014	9,709	10,728	388,033	436,010	15.87	16.14
Green Square & City South	5.90	47,961	64,961	8,132	11,014	295,695	353,709	6.17	5.44
Harris Street	1.39	19,267	23,793	13,901	17,166	148,913	173,514	7.73	7.29
King Street	2.98	23,505	27,014	7,888	9,066	483,463	509,375	20.57	18.86
Macleay Street & Woolloomooloo	1.41	19,268	20,913	13,669	14,836	96,300	96,300	5.00	4.60
Oxford Street	2.51	18,454	19,771	7,342	7,866	364,836	364,836	19.77	18.45
Redfern Street	2.96	28,470	38,613	9,613	13,038	329,079	378,295	11.56	9.80

* includes Moore Park South park conversion