

15.9. PLAYSPACE AND SKATE STRATEGIES 2023 - 2035

REPORT INFORMATION

Report Author	Neal Ames - Recreation & Open Space Planner
Date of Meeting	13 December 2023
Authorising Director	Paul De Szell - Director Liveable Communities

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report presents the final *MidCoast Playspace Strategy 2023 – 2035* and *MidCoast Skatepark Strategy 2023 – 2035* for adoption.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Notes the feedback provided by the community during the public exhibition periods.
2. That the *MidCoast Playspace Strategy 2023 – 2035* and *MidCoast Skatepark Strategy 2023 – 2035* be adopted.

FINANCIAL / RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The public exhibition process for the Draft *MidCoast Playspace Strategy 2023 – 2035* and Draft *MidCoast Skatepark Strategy 2023 – 2035* had minimal financial implications for Council other than those required to promote the engagement process to the community and stakeholders.

The actions identified in the Strategies will have significant long-term financial implications for Council and where financial impacts are anticipated these have been identified in the Strategies, along with their anticipated sources of funding.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no anticipated legal implications from the adoption of the *MidCoast Playspace Strategy 2023 – 2035* and *MidCoast Skatepark Strategy 2023 – 2035*.

RISK IMPLICATIONS

There are no identified risks associated with the activity.

BACKGROUND

Council provides and maintains a great variety of open spaces and recreation facilities to cater for the recreational and play pursuits of our community. Council's commitment to the community is to protect our natural environment whilst providing affordable recreation and play opportunities through the provision of high-quality infrastructure that will increase participation and enhance the physical activity undertaken by the community.

Council is also committed to the sustainable management of MidCoast's open spaces. Both environmental and cultural character and values are protected within our open spaces. Council acknowledges the value that traditional owners bring to our natural environments and is committed to promoting and protecting traditional owner engagement and values.

DISCUSSION

Council adopted the *Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035* (OSRS) in July 2023. The OSRS is one of the most important planning strategies produced by Council. The previous Councils that made up the new MidCoast Council all had some form of planning document for their open space, however, since amalgamation Council has been managing our public open spaces without strategic planning documents that provide direction for those spaces or the activities that are undertaken in them. The OSRS and its supporting strategies will give us that direction.

Council manages more than 4100 ha of public open space, made up of 826 different parks and reserves, 217 of which are crown land reserves which we manage on behalf of the State. Within these parks and reserves there are 45 sports field facilities, containing 81 individual sports fields. In addition, Council manages numerous other specialist sports facilities, such as multi-purpose courts, tennis courts, basketball courts, skateparks, BMX tracks and 79 playspaces.

These facilities are a significant investment by MidCoast Council on behalf of the community, both in the initial capital investment to install them, but more importantly, the ongoing investment in maintenance and replacement. We therefore need a clear planning mechanism that provides an evidence-based framework that guides provision of these facilities.

The *MidCoast Playspace Strategy 2023 – 2035* and *MidCoast Skatepark Strategy 2023 – 2035* are critical components of the open space and recreation planning portfolio. These two strategies are based on the vision and guiding principles of the OSRS.

Community Engagement

Council has undertaken more than two years of ongoing community engagement around our parks and the activities that our community does in them. The focus of the OSRS was on delivering community outcomes through the facilities that we provide in our parks. The community has told us consistently that they want high value contemporary facilities.

Starting with the Open Space and Recreation Needs Analysis, and then on the draft OSRS, and then both the Play and Skate strategies we have sought the community's feedback on the planning portfolio. Therefore, the level of community input into this extensive planning process is significant, and our confidence is high that we have a clear understanding of what the community wants for our parks and reserves, and the activities that we do in them.

During the period from 28 September to 6 November 2023 the two strategies were placed on community consultation. During this period a Have Your Say webpage was active. The main mechanism for providing feedback was by completing a formal submission.

Feedback

During the public exhibition period we received 43 formal submissions from the community for the Playspace Strategy, of which 10 were late submissions. For the Skatepark Strategy we received 54 formal submissions from the community, of which 4 were late submissions. These submissions were mainly location based; in that they are specific to the location that the person lives in. There were no submissions about the Strategies themselves, but rather the individual actions in the respective Action Plans, or actions that the submitter wanted to put into the Action Plans.

The table below sets out the themes from the feedback. Our response and how the individual strategies deal with these themes is also included.

Attachments 3 & 4 present a brief description of each of the individual submissions, commentary about the requests, and any changes made to the respective strategies because of the submission. All individual submissions have been provided in Attachments 5 & 6.

Serial	Theme of submission/s	Response
1	<p>Play and Skate</p> <p>A significant number of submissions for both strategies were from Wingham.</p>	<p>This reflects the significantly low number of facilities in the town, as well as their condition. The main focus of the submissions was to support the recommended Central Park upgrade, in the case of the Playspace Strategy, and in the case of the Skatepark Strategy support for the new skatepark at Railway Bridge Reserve.</p> <p>The new Local playspace upgrade currently underway at Abbott Reserve will provide a new play facility in the short-term, and in the future, once all actions have been delivered there will be ample provision for Wingham.</p>
2	<p>Playspaces</p> <p>Ancillary infrastructure</p> <p>Several submissions were focused on ancillary infrastructure to be provided along with playspaces (and skateparks), such as shade, fencing, BBQ's and toilets</p>	<p>The play hierarchy provides one of the planning components of the play planning framework. The hierarchy identifies what inclusions should be provided for each level of facility. The aim is not to over-embellish parks, thus saving on CAPEX and OPEX over time.</p> <p>The play hierarchy and facility embellishment are directly related to Length of Stay (LOS), which is another component of play planning. LOS is a determinant of how long a child will be engaged in a playspace. The higher the level of the facility the longer the LOS. LOS, along with hierarchy should guide embellishment.</p> <p>Shade, BBQ's and toilets should be provided from District level facilities and above, where the LOS is longer and where these ancillary facilities are needed.</p> <p>There are exceptions to this, such as facilities in small, isolated towns, such as Stratford and Wards River, where we are recommending Local level playspaces, to meet the current and future demand,</p>

Serial	Theme of submission/s	Response
		but where we will also provide ancillary infrastructure, such as shade, toilets and BBQ's.
3	<p>Playspaces</p> <p>Fencing</p> <p>Several submissions requested fencing around playspaces.</p>	<p>The Playspace Strategy includes a section on fencing, which includes the rationale on when it should and shouldn't be provided.</p> <p>Fencing of playspaces is a contentious subject, with many parents wanting it, but most experts saying that it should be provided sparingly.</p> <p>The recommended approach, as detailed in the Strategy, is to consider fencing on a case-by-case basis, dependant on the local conditions, and this should be determined during the design community engagement phase prior to construction.</p> <p>Fencing should not be provided on all playspaces as a policy.</p>
4	<p>Playspaces</p> <p>Catchment</p> <p>At least one submission spoke about "inequality" in facility provision in towns that are located in the same location, such as Hawks Nest/Tea Gardens.</p>	<p>All the strategies speak to the planning concept of catchment, and how using a catchment approach to provision ensures a more equitable approach to provision.</p> <p>All the strategies "interlock", so that regional parks provide a "hub" experience. In the case of HNTG Providence Bay Park provides district play, skate and court, hence providing for the whole area.</p>
5	<p>Skate</p> <p>Providence Park Hawks Nest</p> <p>There was strong support for removing the existing skatepark at Tea Gardens and the construction of a new District level skatepark at Providence Park in Hawks Nest. Issues with the existing facility are that it is too far out of town, that children don't like the facility and that parents don't think their children are safe there.</p>	<p>Providence Bay Park in Hawks Nest has been identified as a "youth hub" and a community hub for the district. All recreation strategies recommend critical infrastructure, such as a District playspace, a District skatepark, a new multi-purpose court for basketball and pickleball and a Fenced Off-leash Dog Area (FOLA) for the park, along with the new fitness equipment recently installed by the HNTGPA. Moving the</p>

Serial	Theme of submission/s	Response
		<p>skatepark is a critical component in establishing the park as the district hub.</p> <p>Council has a good working relationship with the HNTGPA and they are completely supportive of all the projects identified for the area in the strategies. This community hub approach to facility provision will ensure that the southern part of the LGA has a distinct district hub for recreation, in one of the most visited parks in the LGA. In addition, the nearby Myall Park, with the croquet and tennis clubs has been identified for more multi-purpose courts to cater for the growth in pickleball, and which will also provide more capacity for tennis.</p> <p>Continued high visitor numbers, and the expected growth in residents necessitates establishing a community and youth hub in the area.</p>
6	<p>Skate</p> <p>Harrington Skatepark</p> <p>Quite a number of submissions highlighting the issues with the current skatepark at Harrington.</p>	<p>We agree with all the observations. The Harrington skatepark has been identified in the Skatepark Strategy for an upgrade to a District level facility. However, it was categorised as a long-term project. After reviewing the submissions, it has been decided to move the Nabiac skatepark from a short-term to a long-term priority and to subsequently move the Harrington facility from a long-term to a short-term priority. This aligns with the projected catchment for each facility.</p>

COMMUNITY IMPACTS

The *MidCoast Playspace Strategy 2023 – 2035* and *MidCoast Skatepark Strategy 2023 – 2035* will give the community confidence that their valued public open spaces are being managed with a future focus.

ALIGNMENT WITH COMMUNITY PLAN/OPERATIONAL PLAN

The *MidCoast Playspace Strategy 2023 – 2035* and *MidCoast Skatepark Strategy 2023 – 2035*, as part of the larger planning portfolio align with the following objectives of MidCoast Council's Community Strategic Plan:

Community Outcome 1: *A resilient and socially connected community.*

Our diverse communities offer active and social opportunities for everyone; they are safe and are places where we work together with a creative focus acknowledging our rich history and culture

1.2 We have access to a wide range of services and activities that contribute to the wellbeing of all members of our community.

1.4 We protect the health and safety of our communities.

Community Outcome 2: *An integrated and considered approach to managing our natural and built environments.*

Our natural environment is protected and enhanced, while we maintain our growing town centres and manage our resources wisely.

2.1 We protect, manage and restore our natural environment and our biodiversity.

2.2 We understand and manage environment and climate change risks and impacts.

2.5 We balance the needs of our natural and built environment.

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

The following attachments are available on the meeting page of council's website under the 'Attachments to Agenda' heading. The copy of Attachments 3, 4, 5 & 6 on the website have had the personal information redacted to protect the privacy of the members of the public providing the submissions.

Attachment 1 MidCoast Playspace Strategy 2023 – 2035 (103 pages)

Attachment 2 MidCoast Skatepark Strategy 2023 – 2035 (56 pages)

Attachment 3 MidCoast Playspace Strategy – Community Feedback and Change Register (22 pages)

Attachment 4 MidCoast Skatepark Strategy – Community Feedback and Change Register (20 pages)

Attachment 5 Playspace - Submissions (92 pages)

Attachment 6 Skatepark - Submissions (120 pages)