Executive summary

The Willoughby Public Spaces and Recreation Strategy (the Strategy) guides the planning, delivery and management of Willoughby City's (our City's) public space and recreation network for the next ten years.

Public spaces for recreation

Public spaces for recreation include our:

- Public open spaces - Our parks, playgrounds, waterfronts, outdoor sportsgrounds, plazas and bushland trails. We have 455 hectares of public open spaces.
- Streets - We have close to 200km (or approximately 227 hectares) presenting an opportunity to increase our public space network for recreation.

A changing landscape

State housing targets mean an additional 13,000 people will live in our established and already densely populated areas. Our City has reached 'peak open space' meaning we have challenges in delivering new public spaces due to limited land availability and high land costs.

Alongside this, the recreational preferences of our community are shifting. We are more culturally diverse and more of us are living in apartments. Responding to these changes, cities worldwide are adopting innovative approaches to public space planning and delivery.

A new approach

In this context, this Strategy aligns with the *NSW Government Public Spaces Charter 2021*. It goes beyond conventional supply and demand approaches, and considers new ways to get the most out of what we have already, and to deliver new and improved public space outcomes through growth.

The Strategy adopts a placemaking lens. This means identifying opportunities to reimagine public spaces in partnership with our community to increase recreational opportunities, and deliver future public spaces that respond to community needs and interests. This placemaking approach is underpinned by active community involvement and shared responsibility for public space design, activation and management.

This will allow us to be more flexible and adaptable in our recreational offerings, as well as test and validate ideas promptly to ensure they suit our community's needs.

What our community told us

Our community's input and feedback has been key to the development of this Strategy. The consultation for this Strategy was conducted in two stages with the aim of understanding how people currently use public spaces and how they want to use them in the future, identifying priorities for this Strategy, and suggesting location-specific ideas.

Our community expressed a profound appreciation for the value and utilisation of our public spaces. In the future, they would like to use our public spaces for a wide range of recreational activities, including relaxation and reflection, play and creativity, sports and exercise, learning and connection, as well as socialising and celebrating.

They told us that some areas in our City have limited access to public spaces. This is further substantiated by a walking catchment analysis, which shows gaps in access within the suburbs of Chatswood, Artarmon, and Roseville. Notably, major roadways such as the Pacific Highway create barriers to seamless access.

Feedback highlighted that some of our existing spaces are currently underutilised but hold untapped potential for increased usage. Additionally, they told us our public spaces can be more effectively activated to encourage greater participation and foster stronger community connections. Another widely discussed opportunity was to reimagine spaces not traditionally designated for recreation, such as local streets, along with leveraging future growth to deliver new public spaces.

Our community were highly supportive of adopting a placemaking lens to public spaces. They believe this approach offers an increased opportunity for them to actively shape the future of these spaces through a grassroots, community-led process.

Based on extensive research, including input from the community, the Strategy outlines the following vision, principles and strategic priorities. It also includes suggested ideas for further investigation during the implementation of this Strategy.

Our vision

Our City's public spaces promote community connection, resilience, health and well-being.

They are hubs of community activity, making the most use of available spaces to offer a variety of recreational experiences for everyone, while also safeguarding and nurturing our natural environment.

Through collaborative efforts with the community, our public spaces not only enrich daily lives but also contribute to our City's identity, making it a sought-after destination for residents, workers and visitors alike.

Our implementation principles

The following principles, developed with our community, will guide the delivery of this Strategy:

- Collaborative.
- Courageous.
- Equitable.
- Inclusive.
- Iterative.
- High-quality.

Our strategic priorities

We have five strategic priorities:



Create and promote a network of public spaces connected with activated recreational links.



Leverage future development and underutilised assets to deliver new public spaces.



Activate existing public spaces for increased recreational participation.



Encourage shared use and multi-purpose design of sports spaces.



Promote collaborative and co-ordinated planning and delivery.

Ideas and opportunities

Research and community engagement has identified the following priority ideas to improve our public space and recreation network. They will be further investigated during the implementation of this Strategy.

- Extension and activation of roads as lively pedestrian connectors.
- Creation of recreational street links by reducing road space to allow more area for recreational uses.
- Development of a quiet recreational network- to interconnect natural areas, reserves and parks.
- Transformation of Council car parks with surface level recreational facilities and investigating underground options, where feasible.
- Encouraging the integration of new and improved public spaces as part of future development, especially in the Chatswood CBD growth areas.
- Collaboration with schools and other public land agencies for shared use of public spaces for recreation.
- Exploring the feasibility of re-purposing walls, roofs and terraces of Council buildings for recreational purposes.

Investigation of these opportunities will be prioritised where there are currently limitations in access to public spaces.

This Strategy is supported by a Placemaking Toolkit that will guide the adoption of a community-led approach and provide practical tools and ideas to enhance public spaces for recreation.

