Knox City Council
Draft Play Space Plan (2013-2023)
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Executive Summary

A COMMUNITY RESOURCE

Knox City Council provides and manages 207 public play spaces in parks. This is a significant resource that is highly valued by the community. It equates to approximately one playground per 740 people, the highest in the region with exception of the City of Manningham. The ongoing management of these resources represents a significant investment by Council.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Knox Play Space Plan provides a theoretical and practical framework for planning, for design, for management, and for the future direction of individual parks and public play spaces across Knox.

This Plan sits within the framework of Knox Vision, Our City Our Future, and the Knox City Plan 2013-2017 and within the context of other related Council policies.

APPROACH TO PLAY

The Plan views children’s outdoor play as a critically important activity. It recognises the multi-faceted nature of play and the complexities of genuinely making spaces engaging to children while managing a fragile natural environment, keeping an eye on public safety, and keeping parks beautiful and economically viable.

This Plan views children’s activities in the natural environment as so important that active measures need to be taken by Council to facilitate it. Viewed in the context of an urbanizing city, children’s access to open space, to the natural environment, and to quality play opportunities needs advocacy and protection.

The report is structured to consider these matters from both:
- a ‘big picture’ (or planning) perspective, with overview and recommendations for whole precincts,
as well as
- from the detailed perspective of each individual play space, with detailed site reports.
REPORT STRUCTURE

This report (Volume 1) contains all of the general principles and guidelines for planning, designing and managing play provision in Knox.

Section 1 sets out the vision, the context and includes a policy statement on play and definitions of terms.

Section 2 Provides principles for the planning and management of play spaces. These include a hierarchy and classification of parks and playspaces and contain tables that recommend which physical assets should be placed in parks at each level.

Section 3 addresses issues of supply (distribution of parks for play across Knox) and demand (demographic information) and how these affect decision-making about parks for play.

Section 4 is a brief design guide that discusses the design process, and ten illustrated points to aid designers.

Refer overleaf to a diagrammatic representation of the report structure.
Policy statement on play


The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises the importance of play for all children. This convention was ratified by the Australian Government in December 1990. In February 2013 the United Nations issued a General Comment which is an update or reminder to all levels of government, clearly defining the responsibilities that are implicit in the Article. The objectives of the General Comment are to:

- enhance understanding of the importance of Article 31 for children's well-being and development,
- provide interpretation as to the provisions and obligations associated with Article 31, and
- provide guidance on the legislative, judicial, administrative, social and educational measures necessary to ensure its implementation for all children without discrimination and equally.

Given the context and responsibilities inherent in Article 31, it is recommended that Knox City Council recognises the three policy statements below which form the foundations for the Knox Play Space Plan. This policy statement is intended as a philosophical position that will aid decision-making that affects play provision.

Play is significant in the development of all children

Play is critically important to all children in the development of their physical, social, mental, emotional and creative skills. It is the process of a child’s own, self-directed learning and as such is valid for all ages of children. It is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children, but also for the society in which they live. All children have the right to play regardless of their abilities.

The physical environment is significant in providing opportunities for outdoor play.

Play requires free access to a broad range of environments and play opportunities. Decision-making at all levels of government should explicitly foster and support play. During general decision-making processes, Council will consider the impact on children’s opportunities to play and the broader implications for children’s health and wellbeing. The impact of modern society on children’s lives has significantly restricted their opportunity to play freely and has impacted upon play opportunities in the general environment. Council is therefore committed to high quality ‘compensatory’ play provision that is appropriate, accessible, inclusive, local, stimulating and challenging for children in Knox, thereby offering them the opportunity to explore through freely chosen play.

Risk-taking as an inherent part of play and of child development

Council recognises that children have an innate desire to seek out opportunities to take increasing risks, and that this is an essential part of their play and learning. It requires Council to adopt a different management approach from other risk management issues. Council aims to respond positively by extending the range of environments and opportunities available for children’s play while continuing to have due regard for the physical and psychological well-being of community members. Risk–benefit management is a valuable tool in this process.
SECTION 1
INTRODUCTION,
BACKGROUND and CONTEXT
1.1 Play spaces in Knox

PLAY SPACES - A SIGNIFICANT RESOURCE

Knox City Council manages 207 public play spaces. This is a significant resource that is highly valued by the community. It equates to approximately one playground per 740 people, the highest in the region with exception of the City of Manningham.

Together they represent a major investment by Council in assets for use by the Knox community as well as visitors. As well as the assets themselves, this resource includes a significant investment by Council in management of play spaces to ensure continued quality, play value, safety and amenity.

Such an investment must be carefully managed to ensure that it does indeed meet the needs of the community, and that it offers the best value for the available resources.

The Knox Play Space Plan provides a theoretical and practical framework for planning, for design, for management, and for the future direction of individual parks and public play spaces within the Knox municipality.

SCOPE

This Plan applies to public outdoor play settings managed by Knox City Council in public parks and open space. It does not include early childhood centres, school grounds or private play settings, though occasionally if there is a shortage of public open space, it may be recommended that Council could negotiate with other organisations to allow public access.

CHILDREN, TEENAGERS, ADULTS

In general, this report aims to address the needs of children. The term ‘children’ is however used rather loosely and is not intended to exclude older children and teenagers. The needs and interests of different age groups vary as children grow up but they also overlap. Ideally most parks and playgrounds will provide some spaces or activities that can be used by people of any age, including adults and older people.

This report has emphasised the provision of:

- a diverse choice of activity types
- different settings for play and outdoor recreation
- varying degrees of challenge
- design that encourages social interaction, and
- accessible and inclusive spaces that have a multitude of functions and possibilities

across all residential precincts.

This will ensure that as young children become teenagers and adults, the network of parks and playspaces will continue to meet their needs.
WHY PLAY?

Play is the means by which children develop the skills they will need in adulthood. It is important for its own sake, for the wellbeing of every individual, and for society.

Through play children learn to socialise and to get on with others. It has a critical role in the development of creativity and imagination, in emotional and cognitive development, and on the ability of children to learn to take risks and ultimately become independent adults.

In addition to the obvious benefits of movement, exercise and fitness, there are many other vital ways that physical play activities influence children’s physical, neural, social and sensory development. Activities such as spinning, rocking and swinging are important for vestibular development, relating to the inner ear and the development of balance, vision and hearing.

Other spatial and physical movements are also vital. Moving the body in space; climbing over, under and through; the application of pressure; and perceptions of height and depth are all critical to the child’s complete development and the integration of all the senses.

“play: it actively uses previous first hand experiences, including struggle, manipulation, exploration, discovery and practice.” 2

“play: during free flow play, we use technical prowess, mastery and competence we have previously developed, and so can be in control.” 3
The Physical Environment in the Eyes of Children

Children’s play is strongly affected by the opportunities they find in their environment. The physical environment affects play behaviour and can either stimulate play or limit it.

Children see their surroundings in different ways from adults. They notice the potential the environment offers for their play. Whereas an adult may appreciate a tree for its beauty, its shade or the habitat it provides for birds, children may see a wide, low branch that invites them to climb or swing; some weeping boughs amongst which they can build a cubby, or some gum nuts that they can use to decorate their sand castle.

When the environment surrounding a playground provides additional interest to children over and above the play equipment, the whole space will engage them in more complex play, for longer duration and on return visits.

We found that children who had the opportunity to interact with living organisms—whether plants or worms—described what they were experiencing to each other and to their educators. This is one of the first steps to literacy and should not be overlooked when considering whether plants should be part of the play space.4
Natural Elements
There are many reasons why natural environments are valuable in play settings. The literature is rich with research that demonstrates the value of contact with nature and natural environments to humans in general, (and children in particular).

Trees, other vegetation and plant materials; sand, boulders, branches and soil to name but a few, offer environmental and amenity value in parks and also provide considerable interest and play value to children. These elements can be effectively used in parks and play spaces to help achieve many of the goals described in this document.

The Benefits and Limitations of Play Equipment
In recent years, play equipment has become somewhat synonymous with concepts of children’s play, to many providers. It needs to be understood that play equipment is only one type of play provision.

Purpose-built play equipment does often provide a lot of fun, and provides some important experiences for children. For example it excels at providing specific types of movement, such as swinging, sliding and rocking, which are vital in human development and difficult for children to experience in other ways.

It is important to remember though, that play equipment is simply one part of a very wide spectrum of possibilities for children, and not the only option. The open-ended play settings referred to overleaf provide for the imaginative, social and creative types of play which are equally important.

One valuable aspect of fixed play equipment is that (unlike some ‘wilder’ settings) it is universally recognised by adults as a space for children. Once users have been attracted to a space, however, it is valuable to ensure that there are other aspects of the space to discover, and that the play can flow from play equipment into an interesting and complex landscape as the child wishes.

The play opportunities within urban precincts need to be carefully planned as a ‘package’ so that no children must fully depend upon fixed themed and built play equipment alone, within their residential precinct. Play equipment should be viewed as just part of the available choice of settings for children.
Open-Ended Play Settings

The best play environments allow children to adapt different elements for their own play purposes, depending upon their interests at the time. The term ‘open-ended’ describes play elements (materials, structures, spaces) that:

- don’t necessarily have any pre-determined purpose (such as a large boulder, tree log, or a cardboard box) that children can incorporate into their own games, using their own imagination, or
- can be used or adapted for a wide range of play purposes and by a wide range of age groups (such as sand, water, open grass, hard surfaces, trees, a circle of big boulders), or
- enable children to combine a few different elements that interest them, (such as sand and water, or a play fort and sand) to create their own games that may change and develop over time.

The lack of open-ended qualities helps to explain why many purpose-designed play structures remain underutilized. Some equipment has too narrow a purpose – that is, the structures are too prescriptive (such as structures where the play is already clearly defined such as a climber where the only possible activity is climb up, walk along, slide down). In many cases, once they have done this many times, there is nothing that children can add to the experience to make it more interesting or engaging for them.
A New Reliance on Designed Spaces

Access to the natural and open-ended environments that in the past fostered a wide range of child-directed play behaviour is now shrinking. The availability of private yards has changed as higher density housing prevails; left-over spaces are disappearing; and children’s activities have drifted indoors and become more sedentary.

For the first time in history, many children now rely on designed spaces for most of their play experiences. Paradoxically, these need to be carefully planned to ensure that some spaces are not over-designed in order to ensure that children’s exploratory play outdoors is well catered for in natural environments.

In order to address the needs of children, the design of spaces for play should endeavour to provide a physical environment that has enough potential for a rich combination of types of play activities to occur, depending upon the interests of the children at that time.

The challenge for Knox City Council is to aim at providing enough diversity within and between play spaces to accommodate a wide range of age groups and interests of children as they grow.

Community Development - the Social Benefits of Play Spaces

There are often reports of social isolation and lack of connectivity in cities and suburbs. This affects parents, especially those at home with young children.

Play spaces provide good social/meeting opportunities for people in parks. Simple design strategies such as providing suitable social seating that caters for groups of people in play spaces next to children’s centres and schools, for example, can have powerful positive effects in community-building.

The types of furniture as well as informal seating opportunities, the degree of accessibility, and their placement in relation to shade and wind protection all contribute to the degree to which a park or play space is likely to encourage parents and children to meet and get to know one another.
1.2 Vision

The Knox Play Space Plan will ensure that Knox City Council achieves an effective system of play spaces and management with the following outcomes:

- **CHILDREN & FAMILIES**
  - A community that:
    - has access to a diverse, inclusive and geographically accessible range of quality play experiences available for children and families.

- **AN INTEGRATED NETWORK 4 PLAY**
  - A well maintained, diverse network of parks and play spaces that is:
    - planned, located & designed according to a series of design principles & guidelines
    - managed according to a system that is affordable, achievable and sustainable

- **COMMUNITY**
  - Community development through an equitable network of play spaces that support inclusive play and social interaction.

- **THE RESOURCE**
  - A play space network that contributes to the natural environment through:
    - improvements and protection to habitat, biodiversity, waterways and soil
    - education about the environment through play in nature
    - an overlap with other strategies on biodiversity.
1.3 Aims of the Knox play space plan

This Plan aims to assist the Knox City Council to guide the provision, development and management of outdoor play spaces in public parks and other settings, by:

- introducing a philosophy about children’s play and some key theoretical ideas related to play, recreation, and the value of outdoor play in diverse natural settings
- outlining a series of planning principles related to the successful location of parks and play settings in urban and suburban settings
- developing a consistent management approach to play provision including:
  - a classification and hierarchy for play spaces in parks,
  - benchmarks for provision, and
  - general design guidelines for the provision of play spaces across the Knox municipality.
1.4 Knox Vision: Our City Our Future, and the Knox City Plan strategic framework

This Plan sits within the overall framework for Council provided by Knox Vision: Our City Our Future, and the Knox City Plan 2013-2017 and a series of other related Council Plans and strategies which provide background and context. Some key points from relevant strategies are outlined below.

KNOX VISION: OUR CITY OUR FUTURE

Knox Vision describes the community’s hopes and aspirations for the future and guides all strategies developed by Council. Five key themes are used to explain the vision for Knox:

- healthy, connected communities
- a prosperous, advancing economy
- vibrant and sustainable built and natural environments
- culturally rich and active communities
- democratic and engaged communities.

Some statements in the vision relating to parks and play spaces include the following:

- **Diverse leisure and recreational activities**
  Community based initiatives and activities that are affordable, accessible and accommodate all ages, interests and abilities.

- **A healthy environment**
  The natural environment is protected and enhanced through planning controls and community initiatives to reduce air, land and water pollution.

- **Wise use of facilities**
  Cultural and recreation facilities that are well designed, flexible, suitable, affordable and appropriate for all members of the community.

- **A green and leafy image**
  The treed environment of Knox is enhanced through planning controls, community initiatives and the planting of vegetation that is both unique to and appropriate for the local environment. This significant asset is readily identifiable and is extensively valued for the natural landscapes, recreational facilities and abundant wildlife.

- **Open spaces shared by all**
  Open spaces which are shared safe places that increase community cohesion and wellbeing through positive social interactions. It is recognised that people use and value open space differently and that young people using open space is viewed positively.

- **Neighbourhood parks and open space**
  High quality local designed and multi-access neighbourhood parks and open space. Seamless connection to and within these open spaces, which are safe community gathering points.

- **Developing our children and young people**
  Children and young people receiving access to services, programs and facilities that provide them with the best start in life resulting in healthy adults and healthier communities.
STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE KNOX COMMUNITY

The responsibility for play provision connects many different sections of local government. Some of the strategic plans and policies within the City of Knox guiding this work, either directly or indirectly are shown below and some are discussed further overleaf.
SECTION 2
PRINCIPLES FOR THE PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF PLAY SPACES
2.1 Terminology

Play Space
In this report, the term Play Space has been generally applied to any purpose built settings for children’s play. Play spaces frequently include play equipment and their accompanying areas of impact absorbing surfacing, but they may also include, or solely consist of play elements such as trees, boulders and logs, sand, planting, earth-forming, sculpture, or other natural or man-made elements provided for the purpose of play. The play space can also include open areas of lawn; a small forest; hard or soft surfaces for ball games, and mounds or walls if these are provided in the context of a park or children’s play setting.

Play Elements
Play elements include natural or man-made items such as boulders and logs, sand, planting, earth-forming, sculptures etc., which typically have other purposes and sources, but have been brought into a play space to support and enhance children’s play. In this context they become play elements.

Play Provision
Play provision is a term used throughout this document to encompass a range of ways of providing for children’s play in public spaces. It can include playground equipment, ball courts and open grass areas, and may also include areas of planting, hard surfaces, paths, art works and landscape elements that are either purpose designed or may also be appropriated for children’s activities. It may also include play programs, after school care and the like (which are not the subject of this report).

Play Equipment
In this report, the term play equipment has been used to mean purpose-designed structures intended to support children’s play. These may be custom-built or selected from a catalogue, but typically are recognised as purpose-designed and built for children’s physical, creative, imaginative or social/dramatic play. In this context, this category does not include fitness equipment.

Amenities
Play spaces frequently also include amenities such as vegetation, paths and paving, fences, furniture, barbecues, bins, lights, shade structures, toilets, drinking fountains and other items. These are typically provided for a social amenity but some might frequently double up as play elements, such as:
- a path providing for hopscotch or toddler bikes,
- boulders and logs providing for both seating and balancing,
- low walls for climbing and balancing,
- vegetation providing a source of play materials (such as gum nuts), or
- a drink fountain providing a source of water for play in a sand pit.

Parks as the Basic Resource
Most provision for play typically takes place in parks and open space. This document is therefore about the design of both parks and play spaces.
2.2 The play space planning framework

The diagram below shows the various stages in play space planning, and links to other Council processes.
2.3 Principles for planning parks for play and social/family recreation

Fundamentals
Some general terms, principles and intentions are explained below. These are relevant to play provision in parks within residential precincts across Knox.

Play and Social Family Recreation
Parks and open spaces have many different functions. Parks which provide for the specific function of play and social family recreation are the topic of this Plan. Other functions of parks and open space (also described as the ‘lenses’ used in the Knox Open Space Strategy) include:

- conservation/biodiversity/sustainability
- leisure/sport
- drainage/water
- linear trails/connections
- amenity
- community social hubs/people
- cultural/historical, and
- economic.

Although many parks provide for more than one function, this report is specifically about the use of parks for play and social family recreation.

The Role of Play in the Healthy Development of Children
Play in its many forms is significant in the healthy development of children and young people. The location, planning and design of parks has a significant effect on how they will be used. Parks and play spaces play a vital role in encouraging children and families and other community members to play out of doors and thus make a considerable contribution to community health and well-being.

Play Provision as a System
Planning and designing places for play should not be seen as a one-off matter to be resolved on a single, park-by-park basis. Rather, all open space, and each park and play space contributes to an overall ‘package’ available to the public, that must be viewed as an overall system, with each individual park contributing to the diverse whole, and each complementing the other.

Geographic and social connections between places and their users need to be taken into account especially within each residential precinct. For this reason, when assessing each site the assessment might take into account whether there is other open space nearby such as a creek or linear trail or sports field that contributes to the overall patchwork of local play and recreation opportunities.
Dependence

In some cases, a larger than usual population may depend upon just one park for all of their local play and recreation. Such parks are classified as ‘high dependence’ and will require higher quality provision than might otherwise be expected of a park of similar classification. Examples include precincts where there are fewer than the ideal number/distribution of Local parks, or where one Neighbourhood park has to be shared between one or more precincts.

Diversity across Precincts and within Parks

Diversity is a fundamentally important concept in the provision of places for play and recreation.

A diverse ‘package’ of play opportunities needs to be available within any residential area (such as the parks, open spaces, play equipment, creeks, pedestrian zones and any other public spaces where children might play). This is critical in the planning, design and management for play as well as for recreation in general.

As children and families have different interests, and also as some will not have opportunities to move far afield, within each park there also needs to be a choice of play opportunities and settings. The design of each park needs to take this into account.

In practice this means considering the way each park contributes in its own way to children’s play and development such as by providing access to a mix of spaces and settings that provide opportunities for:

- open ended, creative and imaginative play
- play on a wide range of equipment types
- engaging with nature
- social interaction
- physical movement and ball games, and
- bike riding and independent exploration.

Each park needs to provide its own mix to complement the others within the same catchment.

Off-Road Connections

As it is not intended that every park should meet the needs of every resident on its own, it is vital that there are safe routes for children to move around their neighbourhoods and between parks as they get older, via pedestrian and bike routes (preferably off road). These are best to be planned carefully in the initial subdivision design.
Minimum Distance from Homes to Parks

All residents should ideally have access to a park (of any category) within an approximate 10 minute walk or up to approximately 500m, whichever is the lesser distance. The distance must be measured by actual walking routes (not by the radius of circles drawn on a plan) and cannot cross a precinct boundary, (because these are by definition boundaries such as busy roads or other barriers to children’s independent movement. Refer overleaf to further discussion about precincts). This approach takes into account the specific access needs of children and families.

Introducing the Hierarchy of Parks

All parks for social/ family recreation are classified according to their position in a hierarchy that is described in the next section.

Typically a precinct (described below) might contain a number of Local parks and depending upon the precinct size might also contain one or more Neighbourhood or other categories of park.

Precincts – The Basic Planning Unit

Precincts are the basic planning unit which have been used in this report to map and plan play provision across the Knox Municipality. ‘Precincts’ are residential areas contained by any physical or social boundaries or barriers such as busy roads, railway lines or water bodies that might affect the easy independent movement of children on foot or bike. The Knox precincts are based largely on Knox suburbs. Each precinct has been further divided into smaller sub-precincts. Each of these sub-precincts is numbered. Below is a sample map showing the Precinct and the numbered Sub Precinct boundaries for The Basin.

Refer to the Appendix for the maps of each precinct, for the sub – precinct boundaries, and for a summary of the assessment reports on the playspaces within each precinct.
2.4 Classification & distribution of parks for play

Introduction to Tables 1 and 2 overleaf
As mentioned previously, parks are part of a system of open space provision.

Parks are typically classified into a hierarchy for planning and management purposes. Three levels of classification are recommended for parks for the purpose of play and social/family recreation in suburban settings.

These are described overleaf.

The classification relates to the hierarchy and classification described in the Knox 2012-2022 Open Space Plan. This Play Space Plan does not need to cover as wide a range of types or functions of open space as are addressed in the Open Space Plan. The play space classification therefore only includes parks that have the function of play and social family recreation.

Benchmarks for planning, design and management can be attributed to various classifications in the parks hierarchy.

Refer to Table 1 overleaf for the basic classification and description of parks for play in the hierarchy.

Refer to Table 2 for information about site selection for new parks and play spaces, by classification. This table is applicable when an area of land is to be redeveloped as residential housing, and new parks need to be created. It provides guidance as to the size of land required, site conditions, and also to the relationships between the parks, housing, the street, and other community facilities.
### Table 1. Classification of different types of parks; their purpose and distribution

This table outlines the basic classification and description of parks for play in the hierarchy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LOCAL PARKS</th>
<th>NEIGHBOURHOOD PARKS</th>
<th>MUNICIPAL PARKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition and Significance</strong></td>
<td>The basic and possibly most important unit or building block of the open space and play space system. Serve homes generally within walking distance. Unlikely to attract users from much further afield unless located on a trail.</td>
<td>Serve a whole residential precinct. They are typically larger and more prominent than the local play space, with a distribution similar to local primary schools.</td>
<td>These are destination playgrounds, drawing people from further afield than their immediate residential areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role and Function</strong></td>
<td>Primary purpose is for play &amp; social/ family recreation. Important for children old enough to walk or cycle to playgrounds independently. Help make up for a lack of private space. Important meeting places for local children and teenagers. Visits are likely to be of short duration.</td>
<td>Primary purpose is for play and social/family recreation. Visits are often connected to another attraction i.e. to shops, school, kinder, sports etc. and for meeting socially. The role as a community meeting place is a key feature. Visits will be of longer duration than local parks.</td>
<td>Municipal parks have unique features that attract visitors from a wide area including from outside the municipality. Visits are likely to be of extended duration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distribution and Catchment</strong></td>
<td>All residents should have access to a park (of any category) within approx. 10 min. walk or up to 500m whichever is the lesser distance. The distance must be measured by actual walking routes (not by the radius of circles drawn on a plan) and cannot cross a precinct boundary. Connection to other parks via off road trails and linkage parklands is important.</td>
<td>Residents should have access to a neighbourhood park within up to 3km from home. Frequently located near a node such as a shopping centre, school or community centre, or a sports facility. Serve users living relatively close by. Travel by foot or bike as well as by car.</td>
<td>Attract visitors from across precinct boundaries and further afield by car, bike or on foot, (especially if the reserve is connected via off road trails to other residential areas).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2.5 Suitability of land for parks

**Table 2  Site Selection for New Play Spaces, by Classification**

Land allocated for parks and play/social/family recreation (as distinct from conservation, drainage or other purposes) must meet the requirements outlined below. These can also be considered to be goals for existing parks but these might not be achievable in existing situations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALL PARKS INTENDED FOR PLAY/SOCIAL FAMILY RECREATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Site suitability</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The slope, drainage &amp; other site characteristics must allow social interaction, access for people with a disability, and play &amp; recreation to function optimally. Land must not be subject to inundation and must be above the 1 in 20 year flood level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slope must not exceed 1 in 20. If design interventions (such as graded pathways up steep slopes, earthworks, retaining walls or extra provision for water sensitive urban design) are required, additional land must be provided so that the minimum functional size of land is still available for the activities. The site must be free of contamination; easements that restrict development and land use; soil erosion; unwanted previous structures; un-authorised, unusable or hazardous landfill; rubbish; dangerous or diseased vegetation. If the site is also adjacent to land where there is a hazard to children, a suitable and approved fence will need to be provided to prevent access to the hazard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prominence and Surveillance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks must be located:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- in prominent locations within their precinct, so that residents and visitors are aware of them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- where informal surveillance from houses and roads is possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- where they are faced by the fronts of houses and businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- where they can be seen and accessed from as many streets as possible within the precinct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- with a road frontage along at least one side of the park.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connection to Trails</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks should be located where they connect with existing or proposed off road walking and cycle trail networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minimum size for new parks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOCAL PARKS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum dimension 75m. in any direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RELATIONSHIP with other community facilities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.6 Access and inclusion, amenities and assets in parks for play

Parks of different classifications in the parks hierarchy need different levels of accessibility, amenity and intensity of management, depending upon their location, role and function.

Table 3 describes the requirements for new and upgraded parks intended for play and social family recreation for amenities at each level. Naturally all existing parks in Knox will not yet have the same standard of provision, and this table serves as a guide when new work is being carried out.

This table also provides a guide to basic requirements for access and inclusion of people with disabilities to parks for play and social family recreation. This relates to the Knox Access and Inclusion Plan 2011-15. The contents of the AS 1421 suite of Australian Standards for Access and Mobility can be used as a guide for the design of accessible facilities.

Refer also to any Council design standard for other more detailed specifications such as drainage of drinking fountains, wheelchair accessible furniture, slab design, path construction and other details.
Table 3. Amenities for Parks and Play Spaces, by Classification

This table outlines where each kind of amenity is required for new and upgraded parks for play and social family recreation, in addition to actual provision for play activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LOCAL PARKS</th>
<th>NEIGHBOURHOOD PARKS</th>
<th>MUNICIPAL PARKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access and Inclusion for people with disabilities</td>
<td>Within every local precinct, people with a disability must be able to access a choice of play and social opportunities in parks. Parks with a high level of dependence require higher levels of accessibility.</td>
<td>Neighbourhood parks are expected to provide a higher level of accessibility to all features than local parks. Parks with a high level of dependence require higher levels of accessibility including to a choice of play opportunities</td>
<td>Municipal parks are expected to provide a high level of accessibility to all features including to a wide choice of play activities, picnic settings and furniture, and natural areas. Parking for accessible buses is desirable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path System</td>
<td>A basic seamless, wheelchair accessible path system is required linking some shaded seating and play facilities to footpaths</td>
<td>A seamless, wheelchair accessible path system is required linking all social areas and key play areas to surrounding footpaths, car parks etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats and Tables</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Required. Configuration of furniture needs to encourage and facilitate social interaction</td>
<td>A choice of accessible seating styles and picnic furniture required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shade /shelter</td>
<td>Tree shade required over seating and play area/s</td>
<td>Built shelter negotiable; Minimum of tree shade required over seating and play area.</td>
<td>Built shelter/s required as well as tree shade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking water</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubbish bins</td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBQ’s</td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>Negotiable</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilets</td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>Negotiable but must be wheelchair accessible if provided. Ideally shared with other facilities.</td>
<td>Accessible toilets required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike Racks</td>
<td>Desirable</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car parking</td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>Required; may be shared with other facilities.</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting</td>
<td>Negotiable</td>
<td>Negotiable</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signs</td>
<td>Negotiable</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fences</td>
<td>Negotiable depending upon the site</td>
<td>Negotiable</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance Access</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.7 Assumptions and criteria for the assessment of parks and play spaces

Play Space and Precinct Assessment
Each Knox play space has been assessed on the basis of a number of criteria. The individual site reports in a separate volume show the assessments and recommendations. Underlying these assessments are some general assumptions, as well as a set of detailed criteria. These are explained below and in Table 4.

Assumptions
It has been assumed that equipped play provision requires an investment in assets. This means that they need to provide for a reasonable number of residents to obtain sufficient value from the asset. Poorly located play equipment areas (that are only reachable by a very few homes) may need to be removed over time. As outlined in the earlier sections, it has also been assumed that within every precinct and preferably within walking distance of each home there should ideally be provision for play which should a choice of play opportunities and these could include:

- play and exploration in natural areas
- ball games on hard or soft surfaces
- play in equipped play spaces
- bike riding, running and walking around the neighbourhood
- social interaction/meeting in a park or play space that provides for group activities for more than one age group within the one space.

It is assumed that each precinct should collectively provide for a range of age groups including pre-school and primary aged children, older children and teenagers as well as for adults.

It is also assumed that a range of parks and play spaces should be designed to be physically and socially accessible and inclusive to children and adults with disabilities, and that residents will have some choice of accessible settings available across their residential precinct. Given that sometimes provision for access incurs higher expenditure, it is understood that not every park or play space will necessarily achieve the same levels of accessibility.
Criteria and Priority Setting

Table 4 explains the criteria used in the site assessments in this report. It also shows the factors that will be used to set priorities for redevelopment and improvements, as these cannot all be carried out at once. For example when a play space requires improvements, and where it is located in an area with:

- higher levels of socio economic disadvantage
- higher percentages of children in the population
- higher degrees of dependence on the park

and/or where a park has

- existing or potential classification as a neighbourhood play space and social hub

then it will be listed as a higher priority for improvements.

Table 4. Criteria Used in the Assessments of Play Spaces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOCAL/SOCIAL; CONTEXT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social indicators, SEIFA, housing density, no's of children</td>
<td>These explain the social context of the neighbourhood in which a park sits. If an area has poor social indicators, medium density housing and/or large numbers of children, it should be afforded a higher priority for quality play provision. Play provision and social interaction and support can help to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children and their families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of dependence on this park</td>
<td>Where a site is the only playground within a residential area, it is important that it is well-designed for quality play for a wider range of age groups. Where areas have a bigger choice of parks, each individual site is less critical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to other community facilities-school, kinder, sports etc</td>
<td>Where children and also their parents gather before or after school or kinder, these sites could be designed to foster social interaction and quality activities including social/imaginative play for the target age group. Such opportunities to meet provide important ways of community building and building social networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of park</td>
<td>Very small parks (less than 75m in any direction) have more difficulty providing well for social family recreation – and providing choice of activities, without conflicts, in the same space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification/Significance as social hub</td>
<td>Local/ Neighbourhood/ District or Regional- these labels come with benchmarks for development and asset management but also reflect the degree of social interaction likely in any given park or play space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT</td>
<td>EXPLANATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special characteristics</td>
<td>Anything of significance that affects play provision, access or amenity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting type/ Setting type/ Similarity/contrast to Similarity/contrast to other adjacent parks in other adjacent parks in same catchment same catchment</td>
<td>It is valuable that there is a choice of settings for play within any one precinct. In this way different individuals are more likely to find something that interest them. A typical spectrum might range from a landscaped creek setting, to an equipped park with tree shade, to a hard space for ball games or skating, to an urban space within a shopping precinct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially accessible</td>
<td>Some tiny courts have a park or play space which is only accessible via that court. There is likely to be a high degree of ‘ownership’ by the residents in that court but sometimes people from outside the court may not feel the park is available for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically accessible to Physically accessible to wide catchment of wide catchment of streets streets</td>
<td>This is an indicator of how many residents from local streets can be reasonably expected to walk to the park or playspace; it might reflect whether resident know a park is there or not, as well as how far it is from home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to paths/trails / Links to paths/trails / open space open space</td>
<td>By linking parks and play spaces to bike paths and trails the destinations can be expanded and there is less dependence upon a single local space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prominence/Informal Prominence/Informal surveillance surveillance</td>
<td>Spaces which are hard to see into are less likely to be used by the public; they are also more likely to be misused or vandalised if there is no informal surveillance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual/Physical Complex Visual/Physical Complexity</td>
<td>Complex spaces invite exploration and more complex, open ended play behaviour. Children have a fine grained appreciation of their environment; expanses of mulch with uninteresting play equipment typically do not engage them for long.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path system</td>
<td>Paths make spaces more accessible to people of all ages and abilities and are important in encouraging walking and cycling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amenities</td>
<td>Seats, bins, shelters, tables, drinking water, fences and toilets all contribute to the amenity of the environment for users. They may be a factor in how long users stay in a play space or park, and who will be able to use it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT

### Vegetation/Natural elements
Where vegetation and natural elements have been incorporated into a play setting these facilitate a variety of play activities which involve children’s imagination and creativity. Vegetation has a major impact upon the attractiveness of a park or play space.

### Target age groups
Typically play spaces may be targeted at pre-school aged children, junior or senior primary ages, or teenagers.

### Access for people with a disability
Play opportunities are vitally important for children with a disability, and their families. Adults with a disability need access to all facilities as do able bodied adults.

### Activity types/Degree of multi-purpose provision
There are many ways of providing for play. Most playgrounds only provide for a limited range such as swinging, sliding, climbing and rocking. Other activities involve imaginative/dramatic/social play, and these typically make use of more complex open ended settings and environments with loose parts.
SECTION 3
MATCHING DEMAND AND SUPPLY IN A GROWING MUNICIPALITY
3.1 Demographics, demand, and the supply of parks and play spaces

PLAY PROVISION AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

It is a basic premise of this report that wherever possible, residents within the Knox municipality should have access to a park or play space within walking distance (up to 500m) from home (i.e. supply). This is not always achievable in existing suburbs but is the ideal. The supply of parks and open space is not the only criteria considered in this report and other issues (demand) need to be also taken into account for setting priorities for action by the Knox City Council. These are explored below.

Establishment of Priorities

Some areas within the Knox municipality will require a greater priority for action than others. As mentioned previously, of particular concern are areas in which there are:

- high levels of social disadvantage, (because disadvantaged groups may have fewer opportunities to travel to parks further away), and because of the proven importance of play and early childhood development, in children’s successful development
- higher housing densities, (where there are fewer private/back yard opportunities for outdoor play) and/or
- large numbers of children, coupled with
- a lack of quality parks and play areas.

Areas where:

- these demand factors are prominent, and
- where they are coupled with poor supply (a lack of play areas within walking distance),

will be rated as a higher priority.

The site analysis reports and the overviews for each precinct have taken these issues into account in detail for all precincts in Knox.

The recommendations for every reserve, by precinct, are summarised in the Appendix.
Tools
The information that has been used in this Plan to inform this analysis across Knox is:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data for housing density (the analysis used 2006 data for collectors districts) SEIFA
- (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas) Index. This is Census data ranked by area in Australia according to relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage.
- ABS Census data for % of people in the population aged less than 4 years (as the original analysis used 2006 data, these children will in 2013 be aged 6 to 11 years).

The data that was used as a guide has been mapped for Knox and these appear at the end of this Section 3.1.

Multi-age Demographics and Provision for Play in Parks
Planning for the needs of specific age groups can be difficult because investment in parks infrastructure needs to have a shelf life of many years, during which time children grow up and their interests change. Information on age groups is therefore used with caution and should not be used to justify the disposal of open space. Although communities may be planned with a particular demographic group in mind, times will change and there will always be blended families with multiple age groups, visitors and exceptions to the main predicted demographic group, whose needs still must be met.

Communities dominated by older adults and retirees still need a good framework of parks and play spaces. Grandparents have taken on an increasing role as child care providers, and play spaces which are accessible and inclusive are increasingly useful for this group. For this reason, a basic framework of open space, parks and play spaces will always be required, ready to be adapted if necessary in small ways as waves of children move in, grow up and move on. Some details can be changed and the specifics of play elements can be adjusted over time, if required, but the parks and open space framework must remain in place.

Parks should never be disposed of just because the current wave of children have grown up and moved on, even if the play space in the park is removed or changed.
It is recommended that particular attention should be paid to the quality and distribution of play opportunities within higher priority areas. In addition to the typical upgrade of parks and play spaces, solutions and recommendations may need to include the following:

- seeking additional land to acquire in the future for parks and play spaces
- more detailed design detailing for play in existing parks
- placing a higher priority on protecting those natural spaces that do exist
- programming, mobile play services, or other staffed options
- sharing space with schools, churches or other institutions, including Council’s own community buildings and spaces.

Higher Priority Areas need particular attention paid to provision of diverse, quality, accessible opportunities for outdoor play and recreation.

The factors and principles discussed above have been mapped for the Knox municipality and are shown overleaf as follows:

- Map 1 shows the boundaries of residential precincts in the City of Knox and the location of playgrounds
- Map 2 indicates the concentrations of young children in the Knox population
- Map 3 shows areas of relative social disadvantage as measured by the SEIFA index

This demographic data has been utilised in the analysis of each Precinct and as the social context for each site assessment report.
All of the Data is sourced from the 2006 ABS Census, analysed and provided by Knox City Council.
MAP 1

Showing the boundaries of residential precincts used in the Knox Play Space Plan and the location of playgrounds
MAP 2

Showing the relative concentrations of children aged 0-4 years in the Knox population (2006 data).
MAP 3

Showing areas of relative social disadvantage as measured by the SEIFA index (2006 data)
3.2 Recommendations and Site Assessments

Directory
The demand and supply data discussed previously provides background and context for the assessment of each individual playground. Viewed as part of an overall system of parks and open space provision across Knox, these recommendations are grouped on the basis of the precincts in which they are located.

To Find Specific Site Recommendations

| Locate the Precinct in which the reserve is located | Alphabetical list of Reserves in Appendix show the Precinct name and its location at Appendix 2 |
| Locate the Sub Precinct where the reserve is located | Precinct Maps and Precinct Assessment Reports |
| Find out how the context, demand and supply information feed into each set of site recommendations | Read the Precinct Overview which has a summary of all factors considered |
| Read reports on each play space, taking into account local context and groups of reserves that need to be considered as a ‘package’ together. | Each Precinct is divided by barriers such as busy roads and railway lines. The report takes these into account and the individual site assessments are grouped into Sub Precincts which are numbered and shown on the Precinct map. |

Location
Appendix of Volume 1
Play Space Assessment by Precinct and Individual Reserve.

Each play space has been assessed based on the criteria outlined in this Plan, at a precinct level, a sub-precinct level and at a site-specific level. These assessments and recommendations are summarised in the tables in Appendix One, by precinct.

Each precinct summary table provides an overview of the whole precinct. It shows how demand and supply information has been used to inform the ‘big picture’ or overall context behind each recommendation for each individual reserve. This summary considers:

- whether there are any demand (social/demographic or other factors) that would raise the priority of any sub precincts for urgent consideration, and
- whether there are supply issues (lack of availability of parks and open space within walking distance of any residential areas, or issues with quality of open space) affecting each sub precinct.

The precincts have been further divided into sub-precincts. These are numbered on the precinct map. **Sub-precincts** are areas where busy roads or barriers such as a railway line are likely to pose a barrier to children’s independent movement. The provision for play therefore has to be considered on a sub-precinct basis.

The summary table also lists play spaces and reserves that need to be treated as a ‘package’ with each other because of their location together; these reserves need to complement one another and not duplicate the same experience within their sub-precinct.
Outline of section 4

This Section discusses design for play in parks.

As mentioned in Section 1, the physical design of parks and play spaces has a vital role in nurturing and sustaining play for children as they grow up.

This is a very large topic that could fill many books. It is a complex topic, as play itself has so many personal, psychological and social dimensions which are out of the control of a Council simply aiming to provide a quality system of parks and play spaces.

Although this report cannot do full justice to this very big topic, some brief information is included here as a guide. It aims to provide some key information that is readily accessible and acts as a general guide for anyone undertaking design work in Knox play spaces.

The information is provided in different ways. These are summarised below.

4.1 Play Provision in Parks

Table 4 General Rules for Play Provision in Parks
This is a broad set of rules that need to be considered at the beginning of any planning or design process affecting a play space. It introduces processes that need to be considered from the outset.

Table 5 General Site Planning for Play Spaces within Parks.
This is a brief summary of site issues that need to be considered when planning how different activities and design elements relate to one another on site.

4.2 Ten Key Characteristics that Deliver Best Value for Play in Parks
This is a brief illustrated guide aiming to show the relationship between play and design and how to maximise the value that can be obtained for play and social family recreation, from every park.
### 4.1 Play provision in parks

#### Table 5 General Rules for Play Provision in Parks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Playground Standard</th>
<th>Play spaces, equipment and surfacing must comply with current Australian Standards for playgrounds, play equipment and surfaces.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>The designer must collaborate with Council’s maintenance staff prior to sign off for any project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintenance access must be planned for and provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developers must maintain and repair all play and park facilities, plant materials and landscape in a manner consistent with the Knox Playgrounds Asset Management Plan (PAMP) before handover.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Council playspaces will be maintained within the Knox Playgrounds Asset Management Plan (PAMP).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Maintenance regime will be consistent with the degree of usage and with the classification of the playspace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play spaces in Local Parks</td>
<td>Each Local park must be designed as part of a network of complementary activities and settings within each precinct. Avoid duplication of equipment or settings within adjacent play spaces across any precinct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Spaces in Neighbourhood Parks</td>
<td>Neighbourhood parks must be designed to complement all other parks and playspaces within the same catchment, offering different activities and settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Play spaces</td>
<td>Municipal play spaces need to be unique and to be designed to reflect themes and character of their unique setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access and Inclusion</td>
<td>Play provision in parks needs to be designed with the fundamental principles of access and inclusion in mind and in particular to comply with Table 3 in this document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Designers/providers need to be able to demonstrate the sustainable features of the proposed project with the aim of using sustainable materials, sourcing locally, protecting soils and habitat, increasing biodiversity, minimising carbon footprint, erosion and environmental damage and other aspects as required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Designers and providers need to follow council guidelines on consultation and engagement with users and affected residents, and respond to community ideas in the design</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 4.2 General site planning in parks

#### Table 6  General Site Planning for Play Spaces within Parks

| Location of active play elements within a park | Avoid the location of any activity areas where they cause nuisance or invade the privacy of adjacent residents. Avoid locating:  
- elevated play equipment where users can see over fences into private spaces  
- ball game areas where balls can easily be hit, kicked or thrown into private property  
- picnic spaces, noisy equipment or activities close to houses. |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Relationship between elements within a park   | Aim to locate creative/role play/social/imaginative /natural play elements together so that the play value of each element is extended by the relationship between them. Refer to the next section for more discussion on design for play.  
Locate activity areas within parks so that conflicts between activities and users are minimised. For example, orient ball play areas away from picnic zones, play equipment and quiet play zones (such as sand).  
Avoid co-locating very active, busy areas for running or movement where the movement interferes with more sedentary play.  
Locate picnic and seating areas where there is a good view and relationship with play spaces, especially for younger children.  
Locate swings and other equipment with strong swinging, spinning or rocking movements away from through traffic, so that people (especially young children) don’t inadvertently walk across the path of movement. |
| Space itself                                  | To be successful, places for play and social activities must take into account the qualities of space itself as well as play equipment. In order for parks and playgrounds to succeed, the amenity of the space must be considered, and how comfortable, complex, attractive or engaging it is for users.  
The following aspects of space need to be considered in creating an appealing park or playspace:  
- scale suitable for the purpose and the numbers of users  
- light and shade  
- partial enclosure/complexity  
- visual interest/detail  
- physical protection from the elements – i.e. sun, wind. |
4.3 Ten key characteristics that deliver best value for play in parks

PLAY VALUE

Because a park and play space represents a long term capital investment for Council and is an important resource for the community and for the environment, it is vital that all planning, design and management processes deliver the best possible value over a long time.

Value is not only represented in the assets and their monetary value (even though these are considerable).

Children (and society) benefit from all the developmental opportunities that quality play experiences deliver to them.

The community also benefits from having ecologically stable, healthy environments in parks, from the opportunities to meet one another in highly amenable outdoor settings, and from opportunities to build social relationships.

The ten points overleaf describe some key features that provide added value for play, even where standard play equipment is used.

There are many and varied ways of achieving these goals on the ground. Because it is unlikely that any one small park will achieve all of the points described overleaf, it is emphasised that the system of parks across a precinct or whole municipality has to be considered, and each park design needs to take into account and complement what is provided nearby.

Although play value itself is rather subjective and difficult to quantify, this report concludes that best play value is obtained where a park or play space provides:

- all user/s with some basic opportunities for immediate play, in the forms of social/physical/imaginative/cognitive/creative play
- but where there are also opportunities for children to:
  - explore further and adapt some elements in the space for their own purposes,
  - and to
  - combine any of the types of play activities mentioned in this report (social/physical/imaginative/cognitive/creative play) in different ways to suit themselves over time, for repeat visits.
Social and inclusive design

Successful spaces welcome residents and visitors of all ages and abilities to meet and interact in a space that is accessible, appealing and welcoming. How this is done will depend upon the nature of the park and the budget. It may for example include:

- a few well located seats connected by a path and shaded by a tree or
- one or more picnic shelters with furniture and barbecues.

Key features:
- Furniture must be of an accessible design and located so that people with mobility aids/wheelchairs can be part of the social space
- Choice of seating in sun and shade
- Seating to be located where adults can interact with each other and with playing children
- Seating and furniture to be located on a seamless accessible path system.

Consider the following elements:
- Seamless path system
- Accessible seating
- Shelter or shade protection from wind
- Location and configuration of seating that encourages visitors to interact with each other and supervise children
- ‘Doughnut’ idea – a central location for the social space surrounded by the play activities.
Facilities accessible by all users
Seamless path system to accessible play space

Special site features encourage social interaction

Easy circulation routes encourage all users
Natural elements and loose materials

Why nature?
There are numerous reasons why nature is important to children.

The future of the planet
An important over-arching reason is that future generations need to be familiar with, curious and passionate about natural systems in order to protect the environment. As more than 50% of the world’s population now lives in cities, this will become increasingly challenging to provide meaningful connections with nature for the world’s population. The Knox community still values this connection but needs to protect it for the future. Parks are part of an ecological system and have an impact on habitat, ground water, air quality and other environmental factors.

Ever changing intrigue
Natural environments and materials change constantly, as they grow, change with seasons, develop with age, and attract interesting live creatures such as birds, mammals, reptiles and small invertebrates. Children find intrigue in observing the minutiae of nature close, up as well as enjoying the grandeur of large trees and natural systems such as creeks, forests and wetlands.
Variety

Because natural and living things are not manufactured, they offer far more variety and complexity than most purpose built play structures. These require a child to think about how they will handle the challenge of climbing a tree, for example, and allow children to develop their judgement and skills as they do so.

Loose materials for play

The quality described as “Open ended-ness” is discussed further in Item 4 in this section. Natural materials are ultimately open-ended as children are free to gather and use them in their imaginative games in whichever way they see fit.

Flowers, leaves, gumnuts, sand, soil, pebbles, twigs, branches and logs are just some of the natural materials that children frequently use in their imaginative and creative play. These materials are frequently used alongside and inside more traditional play structures and enhance the play there.

This demonstrates the importance of placing natural elements close to other settings for play.
Spatial Interest

Natural elements sometimes define some very beautiful and appealing spaces which children as well as adults enjoy.

Other Natural Elements
Blurry boundaries

Typically, most parks in Victoria provide for play via a designated play space that is likely to include some play equipment within a bordered area of mulch.

The same park also frequently offers less defined natural or vegetated spaces, areas of grass, possibly a hard surfaced path or court, and other man-made or natural elements.

One of the purposes of this Plan is to encourage the blurring of the boundary between these distinct zones, as the less defined (open-ended) areas often offer children experiences that they value, when they are ready to explore further, and that are not found in the mulched equipment zones.

Providing opportunities to explore and discover beyond the border of the mulch may require a staged process in a small park:

- **Step one** requires the availability (or creation) of interesting bush, planting, creeks, terrain or other elements in the park that interest children (and also may simultaneously provide valuable habitat, bio-diversity etc.). See also the previous Item 2.
- **Step two** is to create a relationship between this resource and the play space (Item 10 below explains the importance of this).
- **Step three** may require the inclusion of an ‘invitation’ to explore further- for example by providing an inviting bridge or pathway out of the designated play space, some stepping stones or some sculptured forms or other means of linking the spaces.
The edges of a space can bring additional interest to the play

Blurred boundaries between play equipment and natural areas encourages more interaction between the two zones
Open-ended design features

Some features in most play spaces will typically need to be purpose-built for particular types of play (such as swings). However, at least some elements in the space should be adaptable for different uses, or have no particular purpose, in order to provide for children’s own imaginative/creative play.

This characteristic is described as “open ended” and provides scope for children to invent games of their own. This kind of self-directed play, appropriating elements in the physical environment for a variety of purposes limited only by the child’s imagination, is fundamentally important to children.

Typically this kind of play incorporates imaginative games, usually some kind of role play or fantasy, may utilise loose materials found on site (sand, leaves, flowers etc.), and uses the physical environment as a prop (small corners, changes of level, climbing, hiding spots etc.) depending on the ages of the children. Research¹ has shown that this kind of play rarely relates to an adult devised theme set by the play space designer (such as a boat or train or other idea) and comes from the children themselves.

This is the exact equivalent of the child finding the box more interesting rather than the present at Christmas time, precisely because the child (rather than an adult or manufacturer) can determine how to play with it.

In parks this is a difficult issue to explain as well as to successfully implement. We therefore recommend a compromise – a core of purpose-built elements which do provide what adults freely recognize as provision for play, but coupled with other design features which satisfy the possibilities for open-ended play sought by children.

All of the natural elements described in Item No. 2 discussed previously contribute to this open-ended play, as do spaces that:

- are flexible, adaptable and multi-purpose (refer to Item No 7)
- those with some complexity (No 8)
- and where the relationships between spaces (No 10) benefit this type of play.

Examples of some design features that allow children some scope to interpret their play are included below.

Some features have no distinct purpose and so can serve any purpose imagined by children.
Climbing and risk taking

Climbing to develop life skills
There is no doubt that children need to be able to test, develop and extend their abilities as they grow older.
The ability for children to climb and test themselves physically is linked to the development of self-confidence and autonomy, as balance, co-ordination and strength develops along with children’s sense of judgment, decision making and persistence.

Children learn to manage risk by experimenting, finding out their limitations, failing and trying again.

The importance of risk taking
Risk is an inherent part of life, and attempts to eliminate all forms of risk taking behaviour are unrealistic and counter-productive, resulting in children unable to recognize or deal with serious dangers when they do arise. It is preferable that children have opportunities to learn to take graduated risk in settings where the price of failure is not life threatening or serious injury.
What kinds of challenge?
Opportunities for children to climb and extend their skills progressively in public play spaces therefore make a vitally important contribution to this skill development in our children.

This can be done with purpose built climbing structures as well as in trees and in other incidental settings such as boulders, walls and edges. When these are provided as part of a playground, Australian Standards for playgrounds guide the design in order to reduce the risk of injury.

When climbing opportunities present themselves outside designated play areas, these should be recognised for their value, and the benefits as well as any risks need to be weighed up (if any assessment is required).

Design - Play spaces need to…

- offer children the chance to acquire skills at their own pace
- allow children to opt in or out by choice
- some children need support in learning to climb
- aim to also provide some climbing opportunities that are not purpose designed (such as trees) and therefore allow children to test their skills and judgment, within the relative safety of a park.

Provide choice of degrees of challenge or children will seek it elsewhere.
Consider the sensible ergonomics of structures that are purpose built for climbing.

Aim to also provide some climbing opportunities that are not purpose designed (such as trees) and therefore allow children to test their skills and judgment, within the relative safety of a park.

Aim to make climbing sociable; going somewhere; connected.
Key forms of movement

Movement plays a key role as children grow and develop, aiding their:

- progression from primitive reflexes to high levels of control and fine motor skills
- development and integration of the senses
- balance and co-ordination
- hand-eye co-ordination
- perception of the body in space
- ability to perceive distance
- perceptions of weight, gravity and speed
- understanding of cause and effect

as well as the ability to manage the risks discussed on the previous page.

From birth, babies work on balance and hearing and connecting these to vision, through movement and play. All the senses thus learn to work together.

In addition to the five ‘external’ senses, three internal (‘hidden’) senses play a huge role in children’s development:

- **Vestibular sense** (head position)
- **Kinaesthetic or body movement sense** (feeds back about changes made in body position)
- **Proprioceptive sense** (held together by a sense of feeling where the body is in space).

Movements such as spinning, swinging, rocking, balancing, sliding, hanging upside down, bike riding, jumping and rolling all contribute to this vital development.
Play equipment is excellent at providing for these forms of movement and there is a huge variety of products from which to choose. When selecting equipment that caters for movement, consider the over-arching principles that have already been mentioned in this document, such as those described below.

**Diversity**- make sure that any equipment selected for one park offers a different choice or style of play from other nearby parks.

**Inclusive and accessible** – make sure that within every precinct children with a disability and of different ages can find some moving equipment that suits their needs (e.g. children with a physical disability, toddlers, teenagers etc.)

**Adaptable/multi-purpose** (refer overleaf.)

**Sociable** (e.g. swinging or sliding together).
Flexibility and adaptability

Parks, play spaces and equipment that can be used by:
- children either in a group, or by themselves
- both older or younger children, and
- able and less able children, and
- by children in a variety of ways

deliver better value to the community than items or spaces which only have a narrow purpose or a narrow group who can use them.

This does not mean that across a precinct we cannot provide items that are quite specialised.

It does mean that thought should be given to who might be physically able to use any of the play items selected for a play space, and if some groups are unlikely to be able to use it, (for reasons of age, ability, physical size etc.) consider where they can find a similar experience within the precinct.

This forces some consideration of diversity as well as social inclusion between spaces and between parks.

How

Where budgets are limited, it is preferable to select play items on the basis of whether many different people can use them, and in how many different ways.

Play elements that are open-ended, as discussed previously (in Item 4), will by definition be adaptable and provide for a variety of ways in which children can utilise them for their own purposes.
Choose items which can be used by as many different ages, sizes and abilities of users as possible.
Programmable spaces are adaptable to the needs of the group.
Photo courtesy Darebin City Council Youth Dept.
Complexity

When spaces within a park or play area vary in size, and when there is some visual complexity within a play space, children benefit from the potential for more complexity and variety in their play.

Planting and changes of level contribute to visual and spatial interest and complexity.

**Space itself** suggests and encourages some types of behaviour to children:

- Long narrow spaces (such as at an airport terminal) seem to suggest running.
- When you can’t see all of a space it encourages you to explore, play chasey or play hide and seek games.

Routes up and down, over and through, and complex levels that offer opportunities to run and climb through three dimensional space provide benefits for play that are not available in flat spaces with a simple array of open decks and thin posts.

Where solid walls, plants, hedges, fences, or other built features define smaller spaces, children adapt these ‘rooms’ for imaginative/role play in smaller groups.
Changes in level within a park or play space provide opportunities to look down, roll down, jump down, balance along and enjoy in any number of ways that children will devise for themselves. Quite small, seemingly insignificant sub-spaces within a park can have value to children. The divisions that separate and define individual spaces might be quite subtle.

Frequently children need to construct their own small cubbies and dens to enclose themselves and provide the right scaled spaces for their play. In parks where there are loose thin branches and leaves available, these might be used for this purpose. This kind of play is very important to children and there are fewer and fewer places where it can take place. Some games require smaller spaces and simply would not occur in flat, open, exposed terrain. This topic is closely related to the issues raised in the discussion on natural elements and loose materials (Item No 2) and open-ended design features (Item No. 4).
A landmark or
signature feature

Signature
Many parks are memorable to children and families because there is something special that gives a unique local identity to the park or play space.

Children might give the park a local name like “egg park”, “rocket park”, or “train park”.

Such “signature” items, no matter how small, are a good landmark for parents. This is important because parks dominated by natural elements may not always ‘read’ as a play space at first, and parents may not think to take their children there.

Inherent magical qualities
Some places have features that immediately attract children to play because of some inherent qualities (affordances) that demand children’s attention.

Examples may include a unique tree or iconic structure, a special landform, a hiding space, or some other special feature. Items that are special to children might not be those that are obvious to adults. Every park should have something special that gives it a character and identity. This does not need to be very large or expensive. It may be a natural feature such as a natural outcrop of rock or a special tree. If a park has such a feature, it should be retained and protected.

Children will sometimes have particular activities that they only play in that place

Some examples are shown below.
The physical location of elements in a park, and their relationships to one another, are critically important in how and whether a park or the play space is used, or used to its maximum potential. There are two broad aims as described below.

**Avoid conflicts**
- Separate busy active zones from sedentary play
- Separate noisy from quiet
- Separate vulnerable children from boisterous more risky activity areas

Some items need to be located where vulnerable children don’t cross their path

Sand play needs to be protected from busy activities
Maximise the benefit from locating two zones next to one another

Open grass or paved ball game area near a play and picnic space provides convenience and supervision for parents as well as activities that can flow easily between the two zones for most age groups.

Co-location that stimulates games and play between more than one area. For example the combination of a cubby space with a sand pit and some loose materials such as water, twigs or flowers that can all enhance the cubby play.

Combine social interaction/ observing areas with an activity area such as for older children and teens. Older children love to watch each other and to interact socially, so linking social /seating spaces with an active area such as skating areas, ball courts or an exciting feature like a flying fox work well together.
End notes


2 Herrington, S, Lesmeister C, Nicholls, J, & Stefiuk, K 7c's- An Informational Guide To Young Children’s Play Spaces, viewed 2 April 2013
http://www.wstcoast.org/playspaces/outsidecriteria/7Cs.pdf

3 Herrington, S, Lesmeister C, Nicholls, J, & Stefiuk, K 7c's- An Informational Guide To Young Children’s Play Spaces, viewed 2 April 2013
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4 Herrington, S, Lesmeister C, Nicholls, J, & Stefiuk, K 7c's- An Informational Guide To Young Children’s Play Spaces, viewed 2 April 2013
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5 Townsend, M & Weerasuriya, R 2010, Beyond Blue to Green: The benefits of contact with nature for mental health and well-being, Beyond Blue Limited, Melbourne Australia

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