



# PLAY WOLLONGONG

STRATEGY 2014-2024  
CHILDREN 0-12 YEARS

Adopted by Council 23 June 2014

# PLAY WOLLONGONG STRATEGY

This Play Wollongong Strategy has been developed with lots of help and feedback from our community. We'd like to thank everyone who has provided input, especially our local children.

A snapshot of how this document has been informed...



## Play Wollongong Strategy Supporting Documents

- Background Research Report
- Children's Demographic Profile Report
- Community Engagement Report (Phase 1 November 2013)
- Current Situation Report (January 2014)

# OUR 10 YEAR VISION FOR PLAY

"Wollongong offers a range of high quality play spaces that are distributed equitably across the city, are well maintained and meet the needs of the community. Wollongong's play spaces are safe, enjoyable, challenging and serve as important community spaces that foster social connectedness and wellbeing."



## WHY IS PLAY IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN?

People of all ages and abilities engage in play. Play helps to enhance mental, physical and emotional wellbeing and is a good use of leisure time.

Play happens at our parks, natural areas, beaches, public swimming pools, playgrounds, outdoor exercise stations, skate facilities, youth precincts, public art installations, ball courts, civic centres, bicycle tracks and many other locations.

Wollongong City Council is in a unique position to enable, enhance and promote play opportunities by providing a broad range of quality facilities, infrastructure and programs.

Play Wollongong has been developed as a first step to guide the future direction of play across the Wollongong Local Government Area (LGA). This strategy focuses specifically on 0 to 12 year olds, however in the future it's envisaged that we'll consider developing strategies around play opportunities for other age groups such as young people and older persons.

Wollongong City Council supports the International Play Association's (IPA) definition of 'play':

**PLAY**, along with the basic needs of nutrition, health, shelter and education, is vital to develop the potential of all children.

**PLAY** is communication and expression, combining thought and action; it gives satisfaction and a feeling of achievement.

**PLAY** is instinctive, voluntary, and spontaneous.

**PLAY** is a means of learning to live, not a mere passing of time.

Play is recognised as a fundamental human right in Article 31 of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which states that the child has a right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities.

**"Everything getting dirty"**

(Stakeholder Workshop)

"Playing (unsupervised) with friends in parks, pools etc"  
 (Stakeholder Workshop)

### WHAT IS 'PLAY SPACE'?

We recognise that play can occur at any place, at any time and does not require the formal designation of a site or the type of play equipment historically placed in public parks and referred to as 'playgrounds'.

Council supports the Greater London Authority's definition of a play space:

"A waterslide where you land into a pile of mud..."  
 (Children's Consultation)



"...one where children's active play is a legitimate use of the space. Play Spaces are based on playability which in some cases is the result of fixed play equipment and in others, a feature of some parks, recreation grounds, natural areas and other types of public open space. Playability is not just a matter of the physical characteristics of a space, it can also be influenced by social and cultural characteristics."

Greater London Authority, 2008

### WHY DO WE NEED A PLAY STRATEGY?

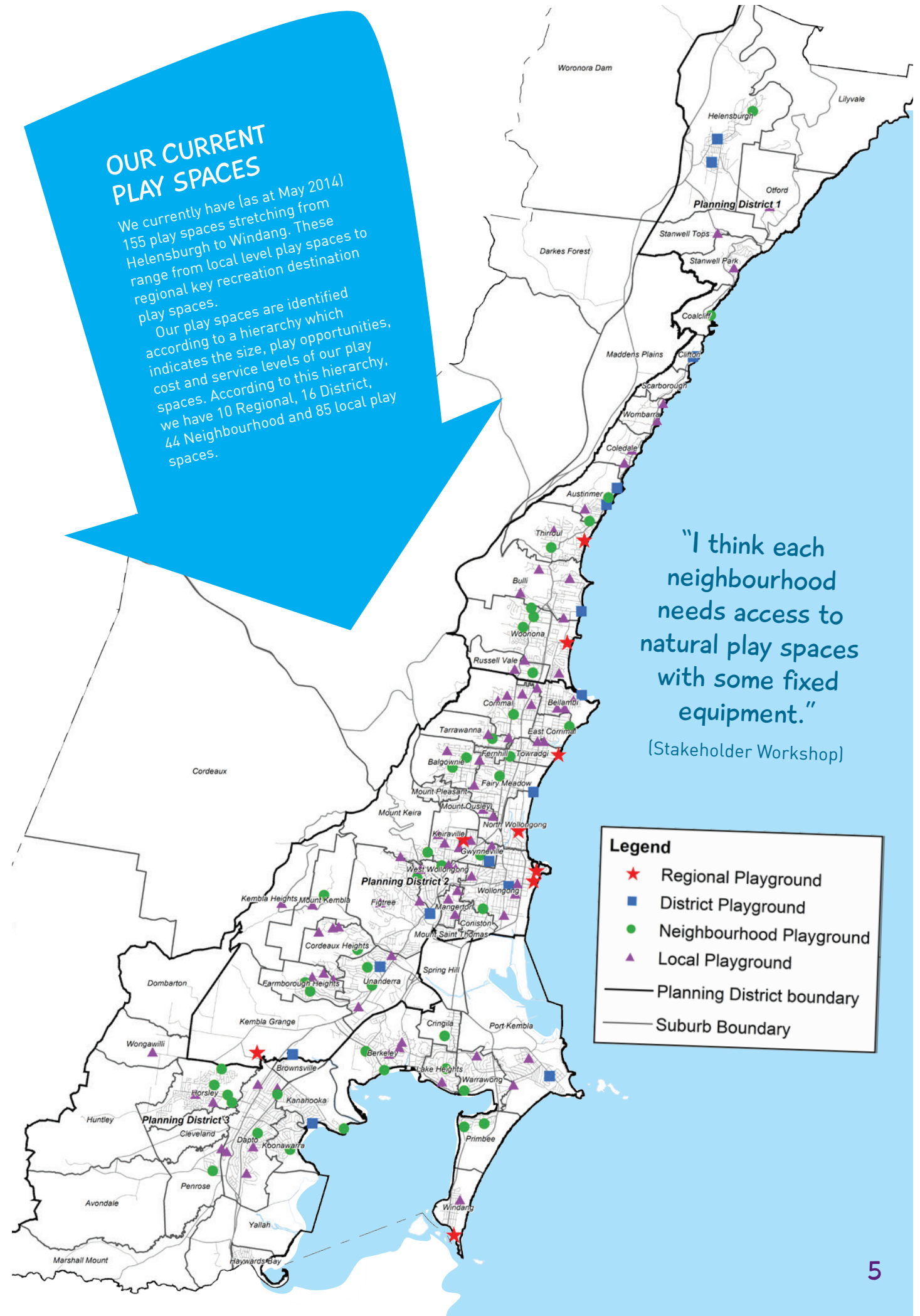
Council is committed to providing quality play spaces across the city that meet the ongoing needs and expectations of our community. Many of our existing play spaces are well located and offer valuable play experiences, but others are in poor condition, are poorly located and/or offer limited play opportunities.

The cost associated with play spaces is significant. A simple local play space containing two to three play items such as a swing, climbing unit and a slide, typically costs around \$60,000. A large landscape designed play space such as the Thirroul Beach Reserve Regional Play Space costs around \$500,000. With this in mind, a strategic city wide approach is needed to ensure we meet the community's needs and use available resources wisely. Play Wollongong has been developed to assist Council in delivering a strategic approach to play.

### OUR CURRENT PLAY SPACES

We currently have (as at May 2014) 155 play spaces stretching from Helensburgh to Windang. These range from local level play spaces to regional key recreation destination play spaces.

Our play spaces are identified according to a hierarchy which indicates the size, play opportunities, cost and service levels of our play spaces. According to this hierarchy, we have 10 Regional, 16 District, 44 Neighbourhood and 85 local play spaces.



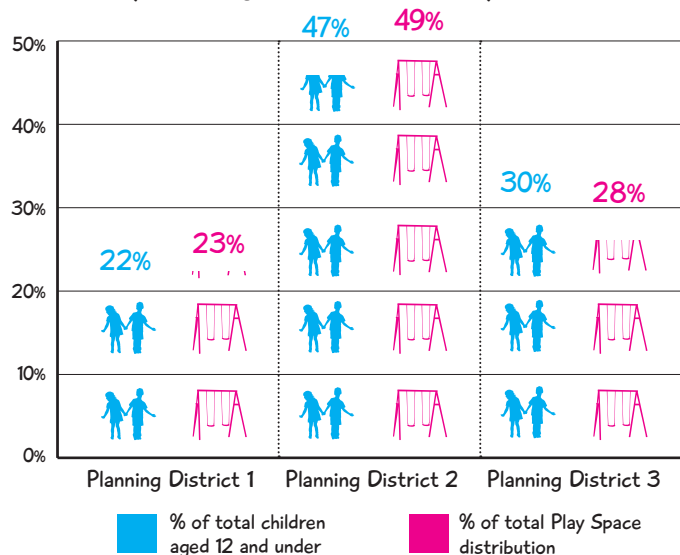


"People will travel a small distance to use better facilities and equipment rather than use poor equipment and facilities that are close. It would be better to do less playgrounds well."

(Stakeholder Workshop)

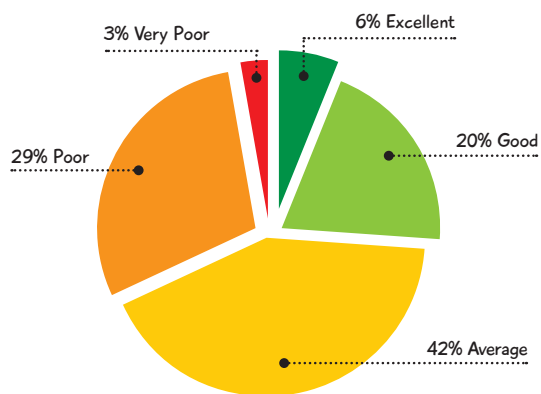
Council's recreation planning describes three Planning Districts and nine Planning Areas (as at May 2014). Our existing play spaces are distributed across the Planning Districts, with 35 play spaces in District 1, 76 play spaces in District 2, and 44 play spaces in District 3. The current distribution of play spaces largely reflects our population of children in each Planning District.

Comparison of Play Space and Children Distribution by Planning District (as at May 2014)



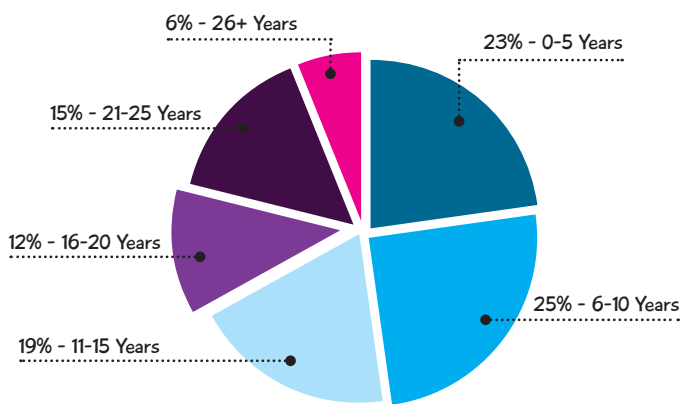
Our existing play spaces vary in condition, age and the play opportunities they offer.

Play Space Condition (as at May 2014)



With such a large supply of play spaces, our current replacement costs is estimated at \$12.3 million.

Distribution of Play Space Equipment Age (as at May 2014)



## Opportunities

- Our city enjoys an abundance of natural play spaces.
- Recently installed award-winning play spaces have become key recreation destinations.
- Town and Village Plans can enhance opportunities for play through civic spaces, public open space, public art etc.
- Public private partnerships may develop over time.
- New release areas provide the opportunity to get it right, from the planning stages.

## Challenges

- We have a high number of existing play spaces to manage within limited resources.
- Our coastal location, and issues with vandalism in some areas, often results in high maintenance and replacement costs.
- We need to find a balance between providing risk taking and challenging play opportunities, while meeting safety standards.
- The cost of repairing, replacing and removing play equipment is increasing.
- Our community expectations are increasing.
- An annual capital budget allocation of \$1M is required over the next four years of the Delivery Program, but the current average budget allocation leaves a shortfall of approximately half of this each year. This needs to be considered in the context of Council's current focus on financial sustainability and other priorities.
- Some suburbs within the LGA are experiencing an undersupply, while others are experiencing an oversupply of play spaces.
- There is an average 10 year life expectancy of equipment.
- The balance of providing natural elements with safety and maintenance requirements.
- Play spaces that are linked to major parks are becoming increasingly popular, however not all play spaces can or should be of this level or scale due to demand to resource social equity availability.

"Risk-taking, exciting, no supervision from adults"

(Stakeholder Workshop)

## RELATIONSHIP TO KEY STRATEGIC COUNCIL DOCUMENTS

Play Wollongong aligns to Council's Strategic Framework for Open Space, Recreation and Community Facilities, Planning People Places (2006) and addresses our Community Goal of 'We are a healthy community in a liveable city'.

A Play Wollongong Strategy provides a plan of how we will achieve our 10 year vision through key guiding principles and a series of strategies. It will guide Council's Five Year Delivery Program and Annual Plan and inform a program of play space renewals, removals and upgrades.



"A big light bulb so you can see and play in the dark."  
(Children's Consultation)

## THE FUTURE OF PLAY IN WOLLONGONG

We're committed to the following principles to ensure best practice and deliver high quality play spaces in a sustainable manner. These principles will influence the location, planning, design and management of play spaces to fully support the needs of children. These principles form the foundation upon which Play Wollongong's strategies have been developed and help us to achieve our 10 year vision for play.

## PRINCIPLE 1

Quality play opportunities are equitably distributed across the city, including large regional play spaces and smaller local play spaces.

To ensure that quality play spaces are equitably distributed, and meet local needs and demand we consider a range of factors:

- number of children living in each area
- forecast population figures
- measures of advantage and disadvantage
- transport options
- access to existing infrastructure and services
- local geography, and
- tourism opportunities.

"I believe that local level parks have very limited (play) value due to the poor quality of the equipment and facilities in these locations. They are a drain on funds and resources which could be better reinvested in the neighbourhood park and play programs."

(Stakeholder Workshop)

### Strategies:

- 1.1 Pursue additional play space opportunities where there is an under-supply, in areas where there are lots of children and/or where the community experiences disadvantage.
- 1.2 Explore partnerships with other organisations where there are limited open spaces to create play options at locations, such as shopping and community centres.
- 1.3 Allocate financial resources fairly, based on Planning Area need, not just play space condition.
- 1.4 Balance expenditure between large, medium and small play spaces.
- 1.5 In consultation with the community, remove or relocate play spaces where there is an over-supply or existing spaces are under-used.
- 1.6 Undertake needs-based assessments, site assessments and consult with the community before developing new play spaces.
- 1.7 Implement a play space hierarchy and use standard features across the city's play spaces.

### What the community told us....

People value quality over quantity. They suggested that the supply of play spaces across the LGA would be best focussed on a smaller numbers of higher quality play spaces rather than lots of spaces that may not meet the play needs of children and families.

They strongly supported the need to provide fair and equitable provision of play spaces across the LGA, giving particular consideration to areas experiencing disadvantage and the important role neighbourhood and local level play spaces play in these areas.

"Making cubbies with boxes and cloth"

(Stakeholder Workshop)





## PRINCIPLE 2

Play Spaces are easily accessed by walking and encourage healthy living and independent access by children.

Wollongong enjoys a large number of green open spaces that support high quality play experiences for children. Providing play spaces in areas that are easily accessible, open and close to other amenities such as transport, shops and services helps to ensure that these spaces are well used. Play spaces that are highly visible to the surrounding area can also help to connect the community by providing important gathering spaces for local families.

Best practice research tells us that ideally all children should have access to a play space within approximately 400 metres of their home, which is considered an easy walking distance. In many of Wollongong's suburbs, this goal is already achieved and in some areas exceeded. Where there are overlapping catchments, keeping additional play spaces may be suitable where there are high numbers of children or physical barriers to access, such as busy roads, railway lines or topography.

In some suburbs it may not be possible or appropriate to achieve a 400 metre radius due to geographical constraints or very low numbers of resident children. In these cases, a play space should be provided in a location which provides the best access by the greatest number of local children.

### Strategies:

- 2.1 Locate play spaces where they can be easily accessed by walking and cycling.
- 2.2 Where appropriate, provide supporting infrastructure such as pathways, crossings, parking, bicycle racks and signage to increase accessibility.
- 2.3 Promote play spaces and work in partnership with Healthy Cities Illawarra to maintain the Play Illawarra website.
- 2.4 Work with developers to ensure play spaces in new release areas are well located and designed, and offer a high level of play value.
- 2.5 Retain play spaces in areas where there are high numbers of resident children and physical barriers to accessing alternate play spaces.
- 2.6 Work in collaboration with the community on the location of play spaces within open space.
- 2.7 Consider community champions to drive projects which activate play spaces.

### What the community told us....

Consultation has highlighted the importance of good connection to walking routes, pathways amenities and parking, to increase the accessibility of a play space.

Children need support to independently access play spaces in their own areas, close to home.

"Every day old ideas get teleported out and replaced with new ones."

(Children's Consultation)



## PRINCIPLE 3

Meaningful engagement is undertaken with the community including children, in relation to play space planning, provision and management.

Engaging with local communities is an important part of creating play spaces that children and families want to visit. Research and experience show that when communities are engaged in the planning of play spaces they are more likely to experience a sense of pride, ownership and connection to the space. This has many benefits including enhanced usage, increased safety and reduced graffiti and vandalism.

As part of Council's commitment to create a Child Friendly City, children and the broader community have been engaged in play space design since 2008. Children have been integral to informing location, design and key features of play spaces and in some sites, have created the artworks which feature in play spaces.

### Strategies:

- 3.1 Roll out a program of Planning Area-based engagement when considering the renewal, enhancement or removal of play spaces.
- 3.2 Consult with children and the community on the future use of a space where existing play equipment needs to be removed.
- 3.3 Ensure children's consultation is informed by best practice.
- 3.4 Work with the local community and engage children and young people when planning or renewing play spaces in areas with a history of anti-social behaviour.
- 3.5 Involve children and the broader community in the design of public art features and in accordance with Council's Public Art Policy.

### What the community told us...

Where children are directly engaged in the development of play spaces the space is more likely to have high play value and include activities which challenge and interest children. Children really are the experts in play.

"Feeling FREE and in CONTROL"

(Stakeholder Workshop)



## PRINCIPLE 4

Play spaces are well designed, inclusive of all ages and abilities and encourage participation in play.

Well-designed play spaces provide a range of age-appropriate experiences that can help to foster independence, support social interaction, develop learning and encourage creativity. They give children freedom to safely test their boundaries and take risks relative to their developmental stage. Play space design should allow and encourage children of different ages to be able to play together.

Children don't all access play spaces in the same way, but they are all entitled to participate in play. The equipment in a play space does not need to be accessible to every child, but access to the social experience of play is important. Good design of public play spaces makes this possible.

When planning inclusive play spaces, consideration is given to accessible play features, physical access, reach ranges, visual impairment, social interaction and sensory elements. Supporting infrastructure such as accessible parking, appropriate fencing, toilets and paths of travel help meet the needs of carers and children accessing the space.

### Strategies:

- 4.1 Provide regional and district level play spaces which have a high number of accessible features and cater to a broad range of ages.
- 4.2 Provide neighbourhood and local play spaces with equipment that's flexible and suits a broad age range.
- 4.3 Where possible, select play space elements that support inclusive play.
- 4.4 Consider the needs of all children and their carers in the design of play spaces including compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (1992).
- 4.5 Consider informal natural play spaces or low cost / high value equipment such as swing sets where an existing play space is not deemed suitable for renewal.
- 4.6 Promote awareness of existing play spaces and features for children with disabilities.

### What the community told us...

Play spaces need to cater to all levels of ability and stages of development.

**"Outdoors:  
in the bush;  
risky playground  
equipment;  
riding my bike  
EVERYWHERE"**

(Stakeholder Workshop)

**"Something that  
looks impossible to  
do. Something really  
challenging that  
tests your skills."**

(Children's Consultation)

## PRINCIPLE 5

Informal play spaces and the provision of natural play elements is given priority, recognising the benefits of connecting with nature.

Evidence shows that exposure to nature has benefits for children and the wider community. Wollongong has a rich natural environment and variety of public open spaces. This adds enormous value to play locally.

'Children who play regularly in natural settings are more active, are sick less often and less likely to be overweight. They are more resistant to stress, play in more imaginative, diverse and creative ways and engage in less bullying behaviour.' (Source: Children's Nature Network/ Kids Safe NSW).

Natural elements that feature in good play space design include wet/dry creek beds, bridges and tunnels, mounds and slopes, sand and mud pits, plants and trees.

Informal play spaces within open space, public art, shopping centres, malls, civic centres and community squares are also an important part of delivering a diverse range of play. These spaces do not necessarily include traditional, fixed play equipment and can offer cost effective alternatives without limiting the value of play in that space. Manufactured play equipment and soft fall is very costly, and providing informal play spaces helps to deliver equitable, high quality play experiences with available resources.

### Strategies:

- 5.1 Create informal play spaces within local parks using natural elements due to their high play value and the efficient use of budget.
- 5.2 Increase the diversity of play opportunities by including informal play in the design of public and other spaces across the city.
- 5.3 Include public art and infrastructure that offers play value in public spaces.
- 5.4 Include landscaped features in the design of regional and district level play spaces.

### What the community told us...

Adults tell us that their most fond memories of playing as a child involved being outdoors, getting dirty, climbing in trees and making things with natural materials for imaginative play.

**"Fun; socialising; street play; mostly outdoors  
in parks, beaches or backyards; minimal  
manmade resources; great imaginative play  
using natural resources"**

(Stakeholder Workshop)





# PRINCIPLE 6

Play spaces will provide children with an appropriate level of risk and challenge while complying with relevant safety standards.

Play spaces should encourage children to take manageable risks and test their limits. Societal and adult perceptions on appropriate levels of risk need to be balanced by the huge benefits children gain from accessing challenging play opportunities. Risk and challenge also need to be balanced with requirements of the Australian Safety Standards for Play Equipment.

Children are aware of risk, safety and danger, and have different perceptions of different activities. Some play activities (such as climbing a tree or swinging on a swing) can be viewed by children as potentially dangerous and capable of causing harm, while others view these activities as opportunities for freedom, self-expression and challenge. Providing play spaces that allow children to experiment and learn about their own abilities and comfort with risk is important.

### Strategies:

- 6.1 Implement a maintenance schedule to ensure that play spaces are well maintained and available for community use.
- 6.2 Consider shade, fencing, park furniture, safety surfacing, smoke free signage and amenities when designing play spaces.
- 6.3 Look for opportunities to educate the community on the importance of play, natural play, and children taking safe risks.
- 6.4 Remove play equipment which is unsafe, regardless of whether there's sufficient budget to renew it.

### What the community told us...

Children told us the types of play spaces they dream of are things like "a waterslide where you land into a pile of mud....." and "something that looks impossible to do, something really challenging that tests your skills."  
 Many adults tell us that their most fond memories of play involved risk and were mostly "outside, dirty, natural materials and unsafe".

"Hiding in trees and secret places."

(Stakeholder Workshops)

"A big blue swing with a large net that lots of people can fit on at the same time."

(Children's Consultation)



# ACHIEVING PLAY WOLLONGONG

The following indicators will help us track whether we're achieving our vision for play in Wollongong over the life of the strategy.



INDICATOR	HOW IT WILL BE MEASURED
▲ Community satisfaction with play spaces	Community Survey
▲ Community awareness, knowledge and reference to play spaces	Play Illawarra website visitation
▲ Partnerships between Council and other organisations that result in facilitating play opportunities in public open space	Number of partnership projects
▲ Opportunities for children and families to have their say in the renewal of a play space	Number of engagement activities undertaken
▲ Level of satisfaction (%) with accessibility and appearance of play spaces	Community Survey
▲ Percentage of community who utilise play spaces on a weekly basis	Community Survey
▲ Percentage of residents who cycle or walk to play spaces	Community Survey
▲ Play opportunities in areas experiencing high levels of social disadvantage	Number of play spaces compared with recognised indicator for level of socio-economic disadvantage (SEIFA)
▼ Play spaces in condition rating > 3 (on a scale of 1 - 5)	Annual play space audit report

"Outside; dirty; natural materials; unsafe."

(Stakeholder Workshop)





## SOME OF OUR CURRENT PLAY SPACES

In recent years Council has focused on the development of key recreation destinations through enhancing regional play spaces at Thirroul Beach Reserve, Belmore Basin, Wollongong Botanic Garden, Towradgi Park and Stanwell Park Reserve. These play spaces are landscape designed unique play spaces that cater to a broad range of ages and typically cost between \$250,000 and \$600,000. These play spaces (two of which are award winning) have very high utilisation and the feedback from the community has been positive.

Bruce Park, Warrawong is an example of the importance and the success of engaging local children and families in the planning and design of a play space where play opportunities are limited and there are high numbers of resident children.



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