



WHITTLESEA PUBLIC GARDENS MASTER PLAN

JULY 2018

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The *Whittlesea Public Gardens Master Plan* has been prepared for **Whittlesea City Council** by **Thompson Berrill Landscape Design P/L**.

Version	Revision	Date
Draft	V1	Oct 2017
Revised Draft	V2	May 2018
Final	V3	July 2018

Introduction

Whittlesea Public Gardens is a 14.78 hectare reserve located in Lalor at the western end of Barry Road.

The Gardens and lake were opened to the public in 1994 and hosted the popular Whittlesea Community Festival from 1998 up until this year.

Following completion of the Hume Freeway Craigieburn Bypass in 2004 the City of Whittlesea developed a Master Plan to guide further development of facilities at the Gardens. Implementation of this plan included installation of the public toilet, playground, picnic shelter and extensive planting. However persistent drought conditions dried out the lake and damaged the liner such that it could not sustain permanent water.

More recently, as new residential development proceeded to the north, a series of water quality treatment wetlands were completed and new facilities such as the dog off leash park and fitness station have been added to bring new users to the park.

The City of Whittlesea Open Space Strategy nominated Whittlesea Public Gardens as one of four most important municipal open spaces within the municipality. The Gardens will provide open space for the expanding local community as well as the main eastern visitor access point into the 650ha Merri Creek *Marran Baba* Parklands. Following completion of the final missing link in Merri Creek Trail between Bolinda Road and Mahoneys Road, the Gardens will also form the start/end point of the 21km Merri Creek Trail providing off road pedestrian and cycling access all the way to the Melbourne CBD attracting increasing regional visitation.

The Open Space Strategy identified the following key issues to be addressed in the development of the new Master Plan:

- Improvement to the landscape character and quality to broaden the appeal and use of the Gardens;
- Continue to seek State Government funding of facilities for the regional visitors and;

- Improvement to the visibility and safety by way of upgrading the eastern interface to the park.

The Master plan will inform the Council's capital works program, funding applications and priorities for infrastructure renewal, replacement and redevelopment and over the next decade. Key objectives for the Master Plan include:

- Create an iconic regional park for the northern suburbs and gateway/destination within the Merri Creek *Marran Baba* Regional Parklands;
- Support existing local community use and improve access to the Gardens.
- Provide new open space facilities to cater for the expanding local community and to attract new visitors to the area
- Improve public safety and reduce opportunity for illegal activities and vandalism of new and existing facilities.
- Improve parkland interface treatment including removal of redundant security fencing.
- Develop an integrated water management strategy to resolve the future of the former lake, uses for harvested/recycled stormwater and enhancement of existing wetlands.
- Upgrade and expand the existing playground, BBQ and picnic facilities
- Upgrade/replace the existing toilet facility and improve security and safety.
- Upgrade the existing path network to improve all weather, all ability access.

- Provide new way finding and interpretive signage regarding cultural and environmental values.
- Renew existing planting and update vegetation management to improve sustainability, diversity and public safety.
- Ensure the spatial arrangement of the existing and new facilities maximises opportunities for community events and festivals.
- Designate differential levels of service for different open space areas within the Gardens to minimise ongoing maintenance and asset renewal costs.
- Integrate future residential development to enhance the Gardens environment.

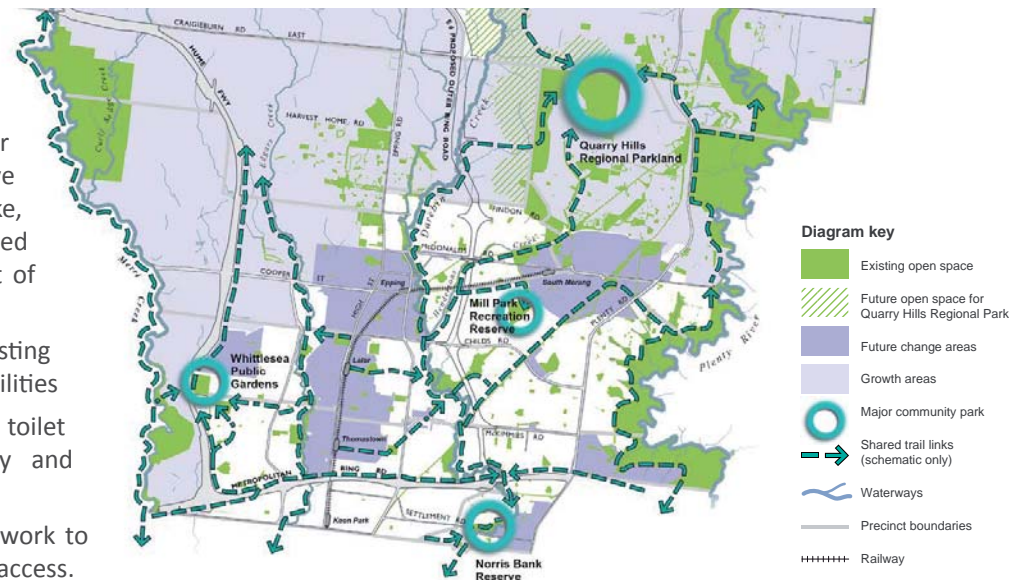


Figure 1: Major Community Parks (Whittlesea Open Space Strategy 2016)

Project Process

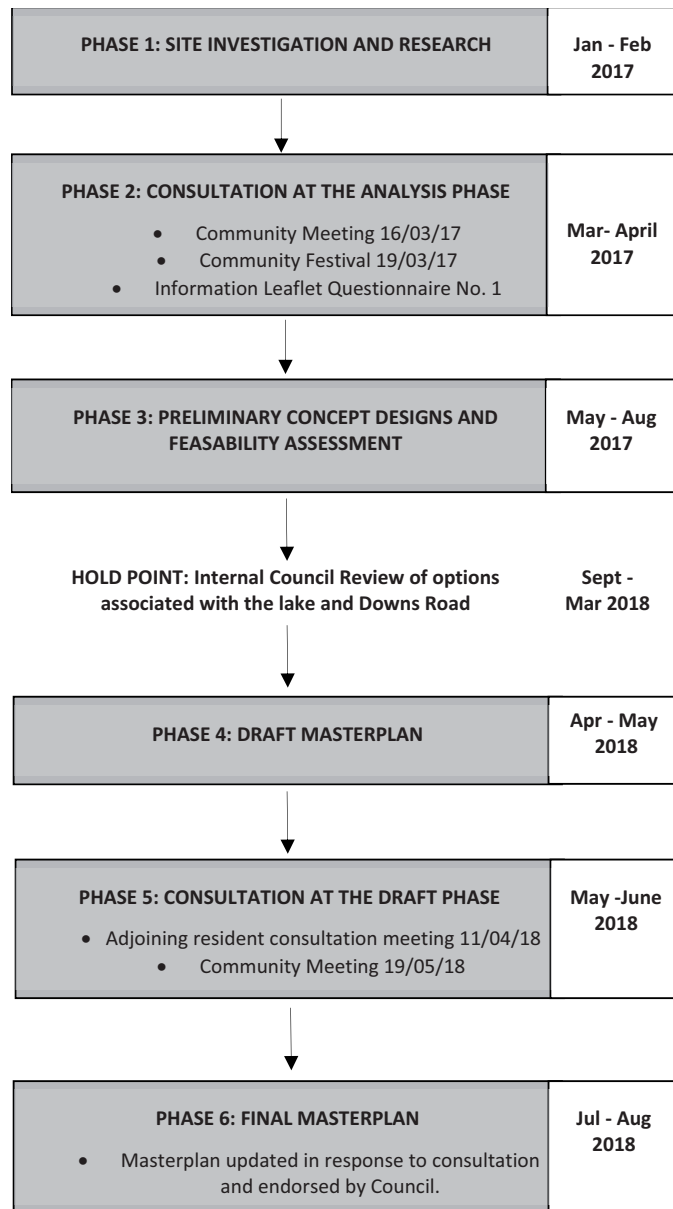


Figure 2: Project Process Flowchart



Council Strategies and Plans

A number of existing strategic planning documents, policies and strategies have influenced the development of The Whittlesea Public Gardens Master Plan. These have been reviewed and have informed key directions recommendations relevant to the Master Plan Appendix 1.

Melbourne Water

- Shared Pathway Guidelines

Parks Victoria

- Merri Creek Marran Baba Parklands: Strategic Management Plan

City of Whittlesea

- Shaping Our Future Whittlesea 2030 Strategic Community Plan
- Recreation Strategy 2012-2017
- Open Space Strategy 2016
- Playspace Planning Framework and Policy 2013-16
- Spaces 8 to 12+: Creating Engaging Places for Young People
- Dog Off-leash Area Policy and Management Plan 2016-2026
- Multiple Sports Strategy 2017-2026
- Natural and Built Shade Policy/Heatwave Plan

Open Space Context

Merri Creek begins in the foothills of the Great Dividing Range and flows for 60 kilometres to its confluence with the Yarra River at Dights Falls in Abbotsford. Merri Creek *Marran Baba* Parklands extend along a 15 kilometre stretch of Merri Creek south from Craigieburn to Lalor covering an area of approximately 650 hectares of public open space. The parklands fall within two local government areas, City of Whittlesea and City of Hume, with the majority of land under direct management of Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water.

The Hume Fwy Craigieburn Bypass forms a barrier along the eastern boundary of the parklands for residents in Lalor and Thomastown. Whittlesea Public Gardens is the gateway and largest developed open space on the eastern side of the creek with direct access to the parklands and Merri Creek Trail via the concrete shared pedestrian-bicycle bridge over the freeway. Following completion of the final missing link in the Merri Creek Trail between Bolinda Road

and Mahoneys Road the Gardens will become the start-end point for the 21km Merri Creek Trail providing continuous off road shared cycling access right through to the Melbourne CBD.

RGC Cook Reserve has two soccer fields, pavilion, toilets and playground. The reserve is connected to the gardens by an unsealed walking path and is used for overflow public parking during major events such as the Community Festival. Links between the RGC Cook Reserve and the Gardens will eventually be upgraded to a sealed shared trail improving off road access for existing residents in Thomastown and new residential development planned south of Barry Road along the freeway.

Mosaic Recreation Reserve is being upgraded to include two new soccer pitches with associated community pavilion, carparking and sportsground lighting. The reserve is linked to the gardens via Sarissa Street and Rotino Crescent.

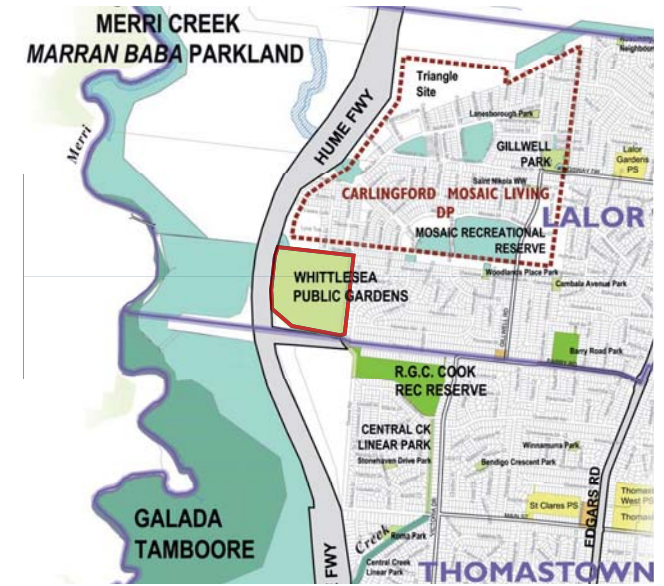


Figure 3: Open Space Context (Whittlesea Open Space Strategy 2016)



Figure 4: Regional Context - Merri Creek Marran Baba Parklands

Community Consultation

Community Consultation at the Analysis Phase included:

Community Stakeholder Workshop#1 Thursday 16/3/17 from 6:00pm – 8:00pm at the Lalor Library.

Community Festival Consultation Information Stall Sunday 19/3/17 from 11:00am – 6:00pm at Whittlesea Public Gardens.

Information leaflet and questionnaire #1 was prepared to seek feedback from the local community to inform preparation of the Draft Whittlesea Public Gardens Master Plan.

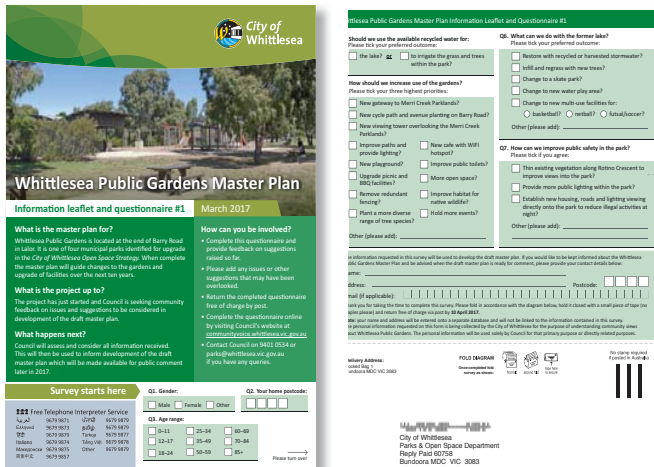


Figure 5: Information leaflet and questionnaire #1 March 2017

A total 214 questionnaires were completed and returned by closing date of 10/4/2017. 45 Questionnaires were completed by visitors to the festival.

Where did respondents come from?

- 43% Lalor
- 26% Thomastown
- 24% Other postcodes
- 7% Not completed

How should we use available recycled water?

- Restore The Lake (48%)
- Irrigate the grass and trees in the park (48%)

Top five responses to how should we increase use of the Gardens?

- Improve paths and lighting (45%)
- Upgrade picnic and BBQ facilities (41%)
- New playground (35%)
- New café with WiFi hotspot (31%)
- Improve public toilets (29%)

What should we do with the former lake?

- Restore with recycled or harvested stormwater (30%)
- Change to a water play area (26%)
- Change to new multi-use facilities for basketball, netball, futsal/soccer (18%)
- Infill and regrass with new trees (16%)
- Change to skate park (4%)
- Other (5%)

What type of multi-use facility would you like to see?

- Futsal/Soccer (58%)
- Basketball (26%)
- Netball (13%)

How can we improve public safety in the park?

- Provide more public lighting (68%)
- Establish new housing, roads and lighting viewing directly onto the park to reduce illegal activities at night (43%)
- Thin existing vegetation along Rotino Crescent to improve views into the park (23%)
- Other (11%)

This feedback was considered by Council in development of the Draft Master Plan.

Community Consultation on the Draft Master Plan included:

Downs Road Local Resident Consultation Wednesday 11/3/18 from 7:30-9:00pm at Barry Road Community Activity Centre. The drop in session was held to notify adjoining residents of the potential for new residential development on Downs Road so they could ask questions and find out more information about the proposed changes from Council Officers prior to the release of the Master Plan.

Following the local resident meeting, the Whittlesea Public Gardens Draft Master Plan was exhibited for public display to obtain wider community comment and feedback on the 20 recommendations during April and May. This included:

- Letter drop including a copy of the draft master plan to 1,400 properties within a 1km radius of The Gardens
- Letter or email including a copy of the Draft Master Plan issued to 55 community groups or organisations
- Social media posts on various platforms
- Inclusion in the weekly Leader Council Column
- Presence on the City of Whittlesea – Have Your Say website
- Interactive map via Social Pin Point to allow specific comments on key recommendations
- A pop-up session with Council Officers on 19th May at the reserve between 11am and 1pm.
- Sign boards erected at the entrances to the reserve.

Community feedback received during the public exhibition phase was considered in finalisation of the Master Plan. The feedback received from the community demonstrated support for the proposed recommendations. There were seven objections to the establishment of a new road and residential housing along Downs Road Road Reserve. This is however a key strategy for improving safety in the Gardens and other respondents demonstrated their understanding of this both at the analysis and Draft Master Plan phases.

Land Management and Planning Controls

Whittlesea Public Gardens is owned and managed by Whittlesea City Council. The site is zoned Public Use Zone - Local Government (PUZ6) in the Whittlesea Planning Scheme. The undeveloped Downs Road Reserve on the eastern boundary of the gardens is zoned General Residential (GRZ1).

The Hume Freeway and undeveloped section of Barry Road are owned and managed by VicRoads. The wide Barry Road Reserve allows for potential future duplication and connection to the Hume Freeway.

Council manage two parcels of undeveloped Crown Land as committee of management on either side of the Barry Road Reserve along the freeway. The Merri Creek *Marram Baba* Parklands is managed predominantly by Parks Victoria. Melbourne Water manage Merri Creek and Galada Tamboore.

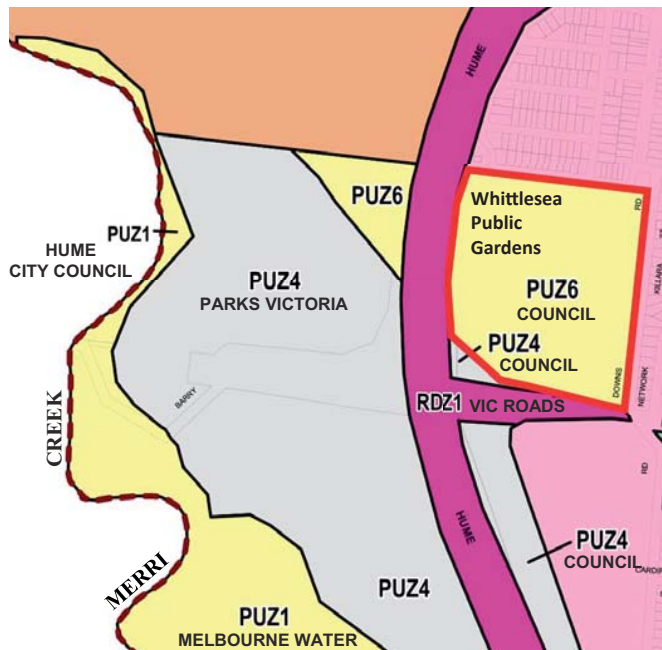


Figure 6: Existing Land Management (Whittlesea Planning Scheme)

Design and Development Overlay (DDO):

The Design and Development Overlay (DD02) applies to 135-161 Barry Road and the former Downs Road Reserve. The overlay is to ensure the development of the land establishes high quality housing with density and lot sizes that are generally compatible with the predominant residential character in the surrounding area, has proper regard to the Downs Road reserve and high-pressure gas easement, and provides high quality native vegetation and environmental conservation outcomes.

Melbourne Airport Environs Overlay (MAEO2)

Whittlesea Public Gardens and Downs Road are included in the Melbourne Airport Environs Overlay (MAEO2). This overlay indicates areas subject to moderate levels of aircraft noise. A permit is required to construct a building or construct or carry out works for a use in this area.

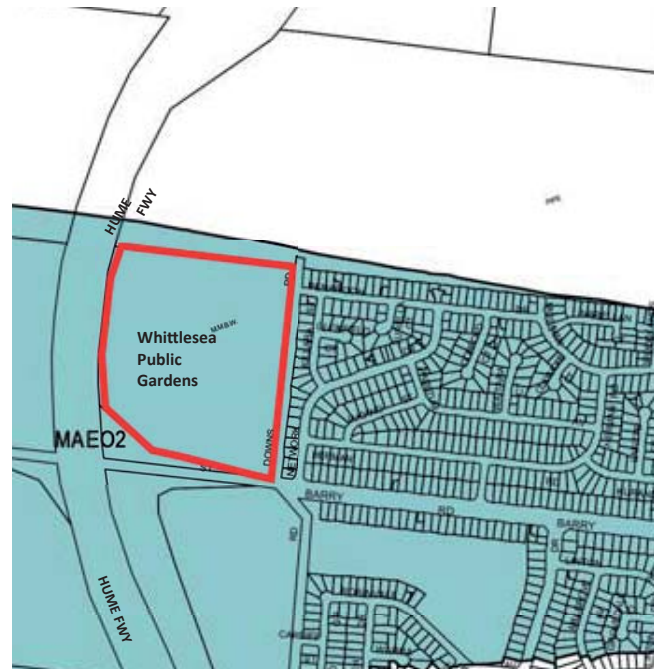


Figure 7: Melbourne Airport Environs Overlay (Whittlesea Planning Scheme)



Photo 1: Downs Road Reserve

Existing Services

There is a high-pressure gas pipeline and easement located along the Downs Road Reserve and eastern boundary of the Gardens.

The pipeline is managed by the APA Group and future development of Downs Road will require changes to this easement.

There are high voltage electricity transmission lines located along Barry Road and the southern boundary of the gardens. Vegetation below the lines is actively maintained to minimize fire risk.

There is a Telstra Mobile phone tower located in the north west corner of the Gardens at the end of Rotino Crescent.



Photo 2: Existing High Voltage Transmission Lines

Existing Conditions



Photo 3: Former Lake



Photo 4: Existing Picnic Area and Playground



Photo 5: Existing Car park

Figure 8: Existing Conditions Plan

Site Access and Parking

CAR PARKING

The main car park is accessed from Barry Road. The car park is sealed with lighting and has 58 line marked spaces with one disabled car parking space. It allows for long vehicle and coach access but does not have dedicated long vehicle parking spaces.

The car park is not visible from adjoining roads or properties. Gates have been used to restrict after hour access however these are frequently left open and have proven ineffective in controlling vandalism and anti-social behaviour within the reserve.

During major events such as the Whittlesea Festival open grass areas along east of the wetlands and at RGC Cook Reserve are used for overflow parking. Downs Road is fenced off and not used during events.



Photo 6: Main car park



Photo 7: Community festival overflow parking at RGC Cook Reserve

BARRY ROAD MAIN ENTRY

The main entry into the Gardens is from Barry Road. There is no signage identifying the gardens and extensive security fencing and the off set alignment creates a poor sense of arrival for visitors.

The western end of Barry Road Reserve is owned and managed by VicRoads. It is unlikely that an on/off link to the Hume Freeway will be provided in this location and therefore Barry Road is also unlikely to be duplicated.

There is no shared trail link in to the park and only an unsealed walking path connection through the RGC Cook Reserve.



Photo 8: Barry Road Main Entry

ROTINO CRESCENT

Rotino Crescent is located along the northern boundary of Whittlesea Public Gardens.

Approximately 13-15 on street parking spaces are available along Rotino Crescent however parking on the Gardens side of the street can restrict access for through traffic.



Photo 9: Rotino Crescent

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The closest train station to Whittlesea public gardens is Lalor station, located 3.5km east along Barry Road. There is a public bus service connecting to the station.

The closest bus stop for bus services 554 and 557 is the corner of Barry Road and Victoria Drive, approximately 800m from the Gardens main entry.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Upgrade the popular path link from Sarissa to Barry Road to concrete and install new lighting and seating. Safety and security on this path will be improved by thinning of vegetation and establishment of the new residential housing facing onto the Gardens along Downs Road. Refer page 16.
- Realign the entry road to provide access to new residential development and to improve passive surveillance into the Gardens from passing vehicles. Remove redundant fencing and improve path links through to RGC Cook Reserve and along Barry Road.
- Establish an off road shared trail/cycle path and avenue tree planting along Barry Road to improve links and entry to the Gardens.
- In partnership with Parks Victoria and the Wurrundjeri seek to commission a new gateway/entry sculpture at the end of Barry Road as the main entry to the Merri Creek Parklands.
- Establish a small off street public car park (3-5 spaces) with access from Rotino Crescent.
- Advocate for re-routing of the 554 or 557 bus service on Barry Road to include the Gardens to improve links to Thomastown and Lalor Railway Stations.
- Liaise with VicRoads to confirm future management of the Barry Road Reserve at the Freeway.

Lake and Wetlands

FORMER LAKE

The existing lake is located in the middle of Whittlesea Public Gardens. It has an estimated area of 5,500m² and a capacity of 1.65ML with a continuous concrete wall to all sides. The lake has two inlet connections to the west and an outlet connection to the stormwater drainage system to the east, it receives inflow from only a small catchment area within the Gardens west of the lake.

Average inflow from the lake catchment is approximately only 1.05ML/year and with evaporation the lake is expected to be dry for 50% of the time without the use of potable water. The lake is oversized compared to its catchment and during water restrictions of the early 2000 period, without access to potable water, the lake dried out and the clay liner became compromised. This means the lake does not successfully hold water for long periods even when there is inflow from the catchment after rainfall.

The existing lake design also does not meet contemporary standards for sustainable water quality. The turnover of water in the lake is poor and risk of algal blooms high with no wetland recirculation system and limited area for aquatic planting to improve and manage water quality.

WATER TANKS

The Gardens have access to harvested stormwater from the Melbourne Markets Stormwater Harvesting and Reuse system. The stormwater is pumped from a large underground concrete storage tank (3ML) at the Mosaic

Recreational Reserve to three above ground 85KL storage tanks located at the southern entry of the Gardens, near the Barry Road entry. Two pumps installed in the Mosaic Recreational Reserve wet well pump water via a rising main to the above ground tanks within the Gardens. They are filled slowly during the day and can store several days of irrigation supply for sports fields. The tanks can be topped up with potable water from the local main water supply when needed.

The tanks could provide irrigation water for the Gardens as well as the two sports fields at RGC Cook Reserve however there is no irrigation system currently operation and there is no current allocation of this water to the lake or to the Gardens.

WETLANDS

The constructed wetlands located along the eastern boundary form the upper catchment of Central Creek and treat urban stormwater runoff from the Mosaic Estate, located north of Rotino Crescent.



Photo 10: Existing Water Tanks



Photo 11: Former Lake

The wetlands are not connected to the lake and existing levels mean a gravity feed connection is not possible. Pumping water from the wetlands at the southern end after treatment could be used to restore the lake however modelling indicates the lake will still be too big in its current form to establish a healthy ecosystem.



Photo 12: Existing Wetlands

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Reinststate only the southern end of the lake (smaller in size with stormwater harvesting/recirculation system utilising the existing wetlands to ensure all year round sustainability.
- Infill the central section of the former lake to provide a direct land bridge between the playground and open grass areas west of the lake with additional seating areas overlooking water
- Establish two new multi-use hard courts with night lighting within the northern section of the former lake. Retain the existing lake concrete edging to enclose the courts and act as a low seating wall and provide an additional picnic shelter overlooking the courts. Refer page 19.
- Longer term, as visitation increases investigate establishment of a new café/community facility at the southern end of the lake and free WiFi in the park (subject to a detailed business case).

Park Infrastructure

To promote and encourage use of open space Whittlesea Public Gardens is one four key existing open space reserves selected to become destination community parks. The upgrade will focus on providing facilities that encourage informal and unstructured recreation activities and increased use of open space. Key requirements include a regional playground, multiuse courts, fitness stations, picnic/barbecue facilities, public toilets and car parking. The works must incorporate universal access and design principles and cater to and promote contemporary events and celebrations that target all age groups in a high quality and distinctive landscape setting. The majority of existing facilities at the Gardens were established almost 20 years ago and will need to be upgraded/replaced to meet this requirement.

PLAYGROUND

The existing playground area at Whittlesea Public Gardens is ideally suited for upgrade to a regional playspace. The site adjoins existing picnic, toilet and car parking facilities and can be expanded north and west to increase the footprint and incorporate established mature trees and opportunities for more diverse play equipment utilising grade changes adjoining the former lake embankment. Redevelopment of the lake to establish the proposed land bridge and multiuse courts will also provide a more direct connection from the playspace to large open grass areas west of the lake.

Regional playspaces are large, signature playspace that have



Photo 13: Existing Playground

special physical and natural qualities that will attract users from all parts of the municipality and beyond and provide facilities that allow for stays of a half to a full day. Generally regional playspaces have a theme or features that makes the playspace unique, not just within the municipality but within the region. They provide a broad range of play opportunities through a diverse selection of activities catering for all ages and abilities providing universal access for all. They are designed to cater for all of the four main play types: physical, social, creative and cognitive with a specific focus on natural and landscaped elements.

Concept development for a new nature based regional playground at the Gardens will incorporate cultural and environmental themes/elements associated with the adjoining Merri Creek *Marran Baba* Parklands.

However, new play equipment is expensive to install and maintain and the current lack of passive surveillance of the playground, picnic and toilets will likely result in higher levels of vandalism and cost. These issues should be addressed prior to redevelopment of the playground. Refer page 16.

TOILET FACILITY

There is an existing toilet facility located between the playground and carpark. It includes separate male and female toilets and accessible facilities. The building is twenty years old and has suffered significant wear and tear and needs upgrade/replacement.



Photo 14: Existing Toilet block

There is significant amount of timber in the structure and complete replacement may be more cost effective than attempting to refurbish the existing facilities.

PICNIC SHELTER

The large existing timber picnic shelter is constructed in timber and matches the distinctive architectural style of the toilet block and playground. The electric BBQ and adjoining playground make this a popular facility for larger group and family gatherings.

The establishment of a new regional playground and future completion of the Merri Creek Trail will significantly increase use of the Gardens and additional picnic and BBQ facilities will be required.



Photo 15: Existing Picnic Shelter and BBQ

FITNESS STATION

The fitness station is located at the southern end of the park next to the basketball half court. It is a full gym consisting of stretch station (step up, push up, stretch post), rowing machine, cycle seat, dip bars, cross trainer, stepper and ab cruncher. There is no path connection or shade at this area.

Park Infrastructure



Photo 16: Existing Fitness Station

BASKETBALL HALF COURT

The basketball half court is located next to the fitness station. This is the only available equipment for teenagers and young adults in the park. There is no seating or path connection.



Photo 17: Existing Basketball half court

DRINKING FOUNTAIN

There are new stainless steel drinking fountains located at the playground and dog off leash area.



Photo 18: Existing Drinking Fountain

WALKING PATHS

There are a range of unsealed circuit walking paths within the Whittlesea public gardens. The north south walking path link from Sarissa Street to Barry Road is the most popular path within the Gardens and connects into the playground. A lack of lights and dense vegetation in close proximity to the path and playground contribute to public perceptions of a lack of safety on this path.



Photo 19: Existing Walking Paths

OFF LEASH DOG AREA

The large dog off-leash area is located at the southern end of the park adjoining the unused Barry Road Reserve. The fenced area is over 8,000sqm with a single entry/exit gate system to enforce control and management of the area.

This popular fenced off leash dog area enables dogs and their owners to walk/run within a controlled and safe environment, providing important healthy and social interaction for owners and dogs alike. This can potentially reduce behavioral problems such as nuisance barking and roaming around the Gardens.



Photo 20: Existing Off Leash Dog Area

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Upgrade the popular path link from Sarissa Street to Barry Road to concrete and install new lighting and seating.
- Support continued use of the Gardens for festival and major events.
- Replace and expand the existing playground to a regional park standard.
- Provide direct land bridge between the playground and open grass areas west of the lake to maximise available space and connectivity within the park.
- Replace the existing public toilets with a new all abilities public toilet and a Changing Places facility to meet current standards.
- Retain and resurface existing unsealed walking path network to improve all weather access.
- Add new seats and another dog water bowl to the dog off lead area
- Establish two new multi-use hard courts with night lighting within the northern section of the existing lake. Retain the existing lake concrete edging to enclose the courts and act as a low seating wall and provide an additional picnic shelter overlooking the courts for spectators.
- Provide new picnic facilities including additional shelters and BBQs for large family and community groups.
- Upgrade existing signage and consider renaming of the reserve to Lalor Public Gardens.

Community Festival and Events

COMMUNITY FESTIVAL

The Whittlesea Community Festival was held at the Gardens in March/April for twenty years until 2017. At its peak the festival attracted up to 15,000 people annually, with visitors attending from all parts of Melbourne.

Established overstorey trees, large areas of open space and expansive overflow parking at RGC Cook Reserve mean the Gardens will continue to be an important site for community events. However the following issues have been identified with major events at the Gardens:

- Melbourne Airport flight path restrict use of fireworks during evening events.
- Lack of connection to public transport.
- Existing dry lake reduces amenity and restricts connection to larger open grass areas on the western side or the Gardens.
- Area can be exposed to the elements with a lack of shelter for larger and smaller events.

The Master Plan recommendations seeks to address these issues and the Gardens will continue to be the main event space for the south west section of the City of Whittlesea.

PARK RUN

Parkrun is held every Saturday in the Gardens from 8.00am. A free event organised by volunteers runners start/end at the Gardens and complete a 5km circuit along the freeway shared trail. Proposed upgrades to the path network in Merri Creek Parklands will also enable extension of the run into more natural areas. Increased use of the Gardens as the start/end point for organised running and fitness groups including local schools is expected following completion of the 4km off road circuit around Galada tamboore. Refer Figure 4.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support continued use of the Gardens for festivals and major events.
- Provide new picnic facilities including additional shelters and BBQs for large family and community groups.
- Advocate for improved access to public transport via extension of bus routes (554 and 557 bus service).
- Extend off road pedestrian cycle links along Barry Road.
- Improve direct pedestrian connection between the picnic area and open grass areas by infilling the central area of the lake to improve connection to other open grass areas.
- As part of new public toilet/changing place development review and upgrade provision of event power supply.



Photo 22: Lalor Park Run



Photo 23: Community Festival 1998



Photo 21: Connection to overflow parking at RGC Cook Reserve



Photo 24: Community Festival 2017

Environmental and Cultural Heritage Values

ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The Merri Creek corridor provides important habitat and connectivity for a range of flora and fauna species. Merri Creek *Marran Baba* Parklands contain some of the best and largest remaining examples of grasslands that once covered the plains to the north of Melbourne. This vegetation community is protected under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (FFG Act) as Western (Basalt) Plains Grassland and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act) as Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plains. Establishment of the Hume Freeway separated Whittlesea Public Gardens from the Merri Creek corridor however remnant areas of grassland can be found within the north western section of the gardens and south along the eastern edge of the freeway.



Photo 25: Existing Shared Trail Link over Hume Fwy

The Galada Tamboore Gorge is regarded as one of the most distinctive topographical features of the Merri Creek catchment and a major landscape feature within northern Melbourne. It is a site of State significance for its geology and geomorphology. It is an example of exposed unconformity between basalt and Silurian bedrock. The vegetation, geology and aquatic values of the parkland provide a diversity of habitats for numerous fauna species, ranging from common species to critically endangered species. The wide expanses of grassland support a large population of Eastern Grey Kangaroos. These can be viewed roaming freely within 25km of the Melbourne CBD less than a 5 minute walk from the Gardens.

The proposed completion of a second bridge across the Merri Creek by Parks Victoria near Horne Street will enable visitors to the Whittlesea Public Gardens to complete extended walking loop and immersive environmental experience of just over 4km (1hr) through the remnant grasslands and around the Galada Tamboore basin via the gorge.



Photo 26: Barry Road Gorge



Photo 27: Merri Creek Grasslands



Photo 28: Merri Creek Grasslands

CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Whittlesea Public Gardens are located within the traditional 'Country' of the Wurundjeri Willum clan, part of the Woiwurung language group. The Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council is the Registered Aboriginal Party for the area including the Merri Creek *Marran Baba* Parklands. Whilst much of the Gardens has been subject to significant ground disturbance with past establishment of the Hume Freeway, constructed wetlands and ornamental lake the Merri Creek Parklands contains numerous cultural heritage places as well as scar trees, stone artefacts and fragments or debris which are evidence of toolmaking processes registered with the Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (OAAV). This connection of place, spirit and history continues for the Wurundjeri community today and the Gardens, as the main eastern entry and to the Merri Creek *Marran Baba* Parklands and start/end point of the Merri Creek Trail, provide an opportunity to acknowledge this ongoing connection and provide further information to visitors regarding cultural heritage values of Wurundjeri.

Other sites of cultural significance within walking distance of Whittlesea Public Gardens include the ruins of the Barber & Son Flour Mill (c1849), located near Merri Creek just north of Mahoneys Road, and the remains of dry stone walls, a cobbled road and pipe crossing at the termination of Barry Road on the Merri Creek.



Photo 29: Native grassland areas at west end of Rotino Crescent

Gardens Vegetation Management

There has been extensive indigenous revegetation undertaken at the Gardens since the mid 1990's. Planting includes a mix of Yellow Gum *Eucalyptus leucoxylon*, Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora*, River Red Gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon*, Lightwood *Acacia implexa* and Sheoak *Allocasuarina verticillata* and the Gardens has an established framework of overstorey trees. However infill shrub planting to the park perimeter including Hedge Wattle *Acacia paradoxa*, Sweet Bursaria *Bursaria spinosa*, Tree Violet *Melicytus dentata*, Bottlebrush *Callistemon sp.* and Swamp Paperbark *Melaleuca ericifolia* around the wetlands and adjoining the playground has in some areas become very dense, limiting views into and along paths within the Gardens impacting on passive surveillance and perceptions of public safety within the reserve.

The constructed wetlands, form the upper catchment of Central Creek and have become well established with a diverse mix of indigenous sedge, rush and aquatic marsh species. The wetlands perform both a water quality treatment function and provide important habitat for wildlife including a range of frogs and birdlife. Other grass areas within the gardens become extremely dry over summer. This has enabled protection and recovery of some native grassland patches however in high use recreational areas in and around the picnic area the lack of sustainable grass cover reduces public amenity and useability of these areas.

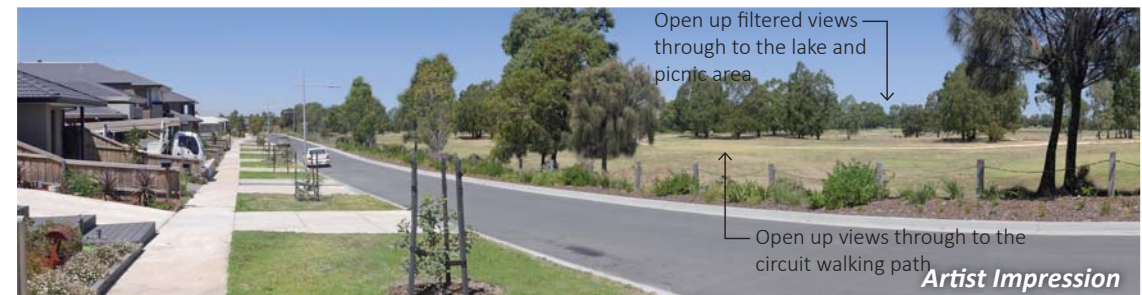
RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Thin and selectively remove existing thick shrub vegetation to improve sightlines and passive surveillance throughout the entire reserve.
- Protect existing grassland conservation areas and improve habitat links.
- Establish new recycled water irrigation system for selected open grass areas and to enable establishment of more diverse tree planting within the gardens.



Existing Conditions

Existing view from Rotino Crescent



Artist Impression

Rotino Crescent proposed vegetation thinning



Existing Conditions

Existing views to playground from Downs Road



Artist Impression

Proposed vegetation thinning at playground

Passive Surveillance and Public Safety

Initial establishment of Whittlesea Public Gardens required use of continuous chainmesh fencing around the perimeter to protect the park from illegal motorbike and other off road vehicle use. The Hume Freeway sound walls mean there are no direct views into the Gardens on the west side. Motorbikes continue to use the bridge and completed sections of the Merri Creek Trail to access the Gardens from Campbellfield and there are several well-worn tracks indicating a high frequency of use. Motorbikes can access the same areas as bicycles so there is no method to restrict motorbike access without disadvantaging genuine users of the Gardens and path network.

The alignment of the entry from Barry Road and dense planting means that there are no views into the main car park from adjoining roads or houses. Gates are used to restrict after-hours access however rates of vandalism and other illegal activities are far higher at Whittlesea Public Gardens than at other similar sized reserves across the city. Community consultation indicates that the impact of these activities on facilities and a general perception that the area is unsafe prevent many residents and other visitors from coming to the Gardens.

DOWNNS ROAD

The unused Downs Road reserve forms the eastern boundary of the Gardens. This grass area extending from Sarissa Street right through to Barry Road is fenced and not currently zoned or used as public open space. Removal of the fencing and thick perimeter vegetation to establish a new road and residential development facing onto the Gardens along Downs Road will improve passive surveillance and public safety at key areas around the toilet block, car park and playground. The use of double storey housing is preferred with views focused west out over the adjoining wetlands and further into the Gardens with restricted views from the second storey east into the backyards of existing adjoining properties along Network Drive and Kilara Street. Revenue generated by Council from sale of the road reserve as housing can be reinvested in the new facilities proposed for the Gardens.

ROTINO CRESCENT

Recent completion of new residential development along Rotino Crescent has established some houses facing directly onto the Gardens. However views from these houses into the Gardens are obstructed by dense perimeter planting. Thinning vegetation along Rotino Crescent will improve views to the northern path network there is no view through to the more vulnerable areas of the Gardens around the toilet block, car park and playground from this side.



Photo 30: Existing Downs Road Reserve



Existing Conditions

View A: Views to wetlands north along Downs Road



Artist Impression

View A: New path, lighting and residential development along Downs Road

Passive Surveillance and Public Safety



View B: Views to wetlands south along Downs Road



View B: View south to new path, lighting and residential development along Downs Road



View B: Evening view south to new path and lighting along Downs Road

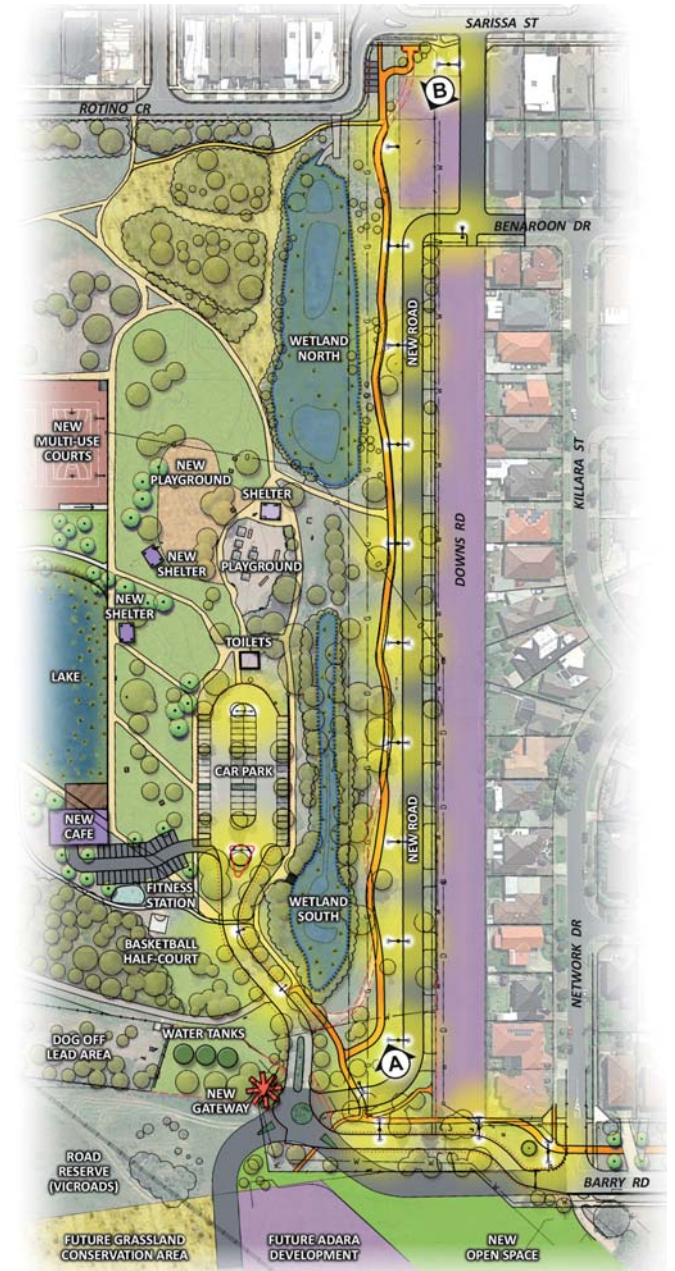


Figure 9: Proposed Lighting Improvements

OVERALL OBJECTIVES

Whittlesea Public Gardens is one of four major community parks identified for upgrade and renewal in the City of Whittlesea Open Space Strategy (2016). The Gardens are located in Lalor at the western end of Barry Road and comprises an area of approximately 14.78 hectares. When complete, the master plan will guide and provide direction on how the public gardens will be upgraded in the short term and into the future. Key master plan objectives include:

- Improvement to the landscape character and quality to broaden the appeal and use of the public gardens
- Create safe, connected and well maintained public open space
- Aid in seeking State Government or external funding for facilities of regional context and significance
- Promote environmental sustainability practices through well considered landscapes and water sensitive urban design
- Improvement to the visibility and safety by the way of upgrading the eastern interface to the park

IMPLEMENTATION

The large number of facilities and complexity of replacing older asset at Whittlesea Public Gardens mean that staging of works will be required. The staging and timing for delivery of the works is subject to external agency funding and implementation of some works may need to be delayed or bought forward, i.e due to the need for urgent maintenance or as part of cost-effective delivery of other projects. In all cases priorities should be viewed as a guide only.

- (H) High (1-3 years)
- (M) Medium (4-6 years)
- (L) Low (7-10 years)

DRAWING KEY

	EXISTING TREE		EXISTING UNSEALED PATH
	NEW TREE		EXISTING PLAYGROUND
	SHRUBS		EXPANDED PLAY AREA
	GRASS		TIMBER POST AND WIRE FENCE
	GRASSLAND CONSERVATION AREA		CHAIN MESH FENCE
	NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT		POST AND CABLE FENCE
	WETLAND PLANTING		PICNIC TABLE
	NEW ROAD		SEAT
	NEW 2.5m CONCRETE PATH		BBQ
	EXISTING CONCRETE PATH		DRINKING FOUNTAIN
			NEW PUBLIC ARTWORK

OVERALL MASTERPLAN
DWG NO. PWG_MP_01
JULY 2018



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Upgrade the popular path link from Sarissa to Barry Road to concrete and install new lighting and seating. (H)
- 2 Thin and selectively remove existing thick vegetation to improve sightlines and passive surveillance throughout the entire reserve. (H)
- 3 Realign the entry road, remove redundant fencing and improve path links through to RGC Cook Reserve. (H)
- 4 Replace the existing public toilets to an all abilities public toilet and a Changing Places facility. (H)
- 5 Retain and resurface existing unsealed walking paths to improve all weather access. (H)
- 6 Add new seats and dog water bowl to the dog off lead area. (H)
- 7 Protect existing grassland conservation areas and improve habitat links. (H)
- 8 Reinstate the southern end of the lake (smaller size with stormwater harvesting/recirculation system utilising the existing wetlands) including circuit walking path, new direct link between the playground and open grass areas west of the lake and additional seating areas overlooking water. (M)
- 9 Establish two new multi-use hard courts with night lighting within the northern section of the existing lake. Retain the existing lake concrete edging to enclose the courts and act as a low seating wall and provide an additional picnic shelter overlooking the courts. (M)
- 10 Establish new recycled water irrigation system for selected open grass areas and to enable establishment of more diverse tree planting within the gardens. (M)
- 11 Establish new road and residential housing facing onto the gardens along Downs Road to improve passive surveillance and public safety in the reserve. (M)
- 12 Replace and expand the existing playground to a regional park standard. (M)
- 13 Provide new picnic facilities including additional shelters and BBQs for large family and community groups. (M)
- 14 Upgrade existing signage and consider renaming of the reserve to Lalor Public Gardens. (M)
- 15 Establish shared trail/cycle path and avenue tree planting along Barry Road. (L)
- 16 In partnership with Parks Victoria and the Wurrundjeri seek to commission a new gateway/entry sculpture at the end of Barry Road as the main entry to the Merri Creek Parklands. (L)
- 17 Establish a small off street public car park (3-5 spaces) with access from Rotino Crescent. (L)
- 18 Investigate establishment of a new café/community facility at the southern end of the lake and free WiFi in the park (subject to a detailed business case). (L)
- 19 Support continued use of the gardens for festivals and major events. (H)
- 20 Advocate for re-routing of the 554 or 557 bus service on Barry Road to include the Gardens to improve links to Thomastown and Lalor Railway Stations. (L)

Figure 10: Master Plan

MASTER PLAN IMAGES



Example of multi-use hard courts with night lighting



Example of accessible toilets with change facilities



Example of Park Shelters (Landmark Pro Longreach)



Examples of regional park standard playground



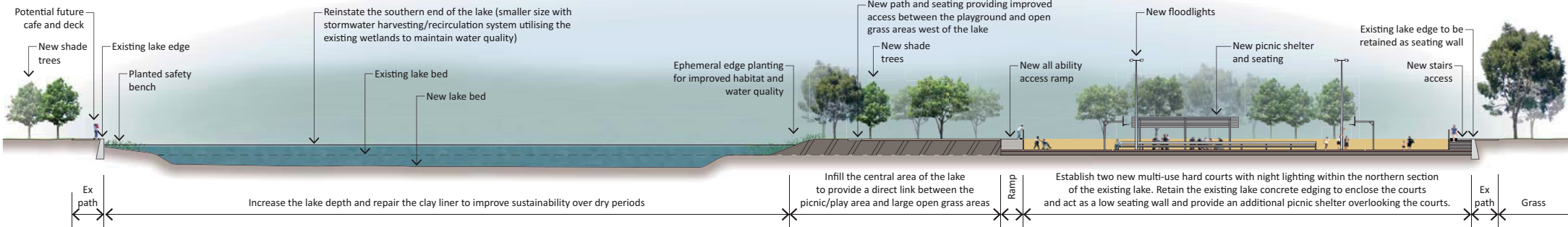
(A) Artist's impression of wetland south path and lighting upgrade



(B) Artist's impression of wetland north path and lighting upgrade



(B2) Artist's impression of wetland north path and lighting upgrade - night time



(C) Sketch cross-section through lake and new multi-use courts

Figure 11: Master Plan Images

Master Plan Implementation Works

The adoption of the Whittlesea Public Gardens Master Plan by Council does not constitute a decision to proceed with any identified opportunities. It provides a long-term concept to guide decision making and will be subject to future decisions and funding considerations by Council.

STAGE 1 WORKS (1-3 years)

The three year plan for Whittlesea Public Gardens aims to improve park facilities and safety for existing and future users. There will be a mixture of maintenance and capital works improvements including thinning of existing vegetation, new paths and toilet facilities to improve facilities for existing residents and community groups who already use the reserve.

Stage 1 Actions:

- Upgrade the popular path link from Sarissa to Barry Road to concrete and install new lighting and seating.
- Thin and selectively remove existing thick vegetation to improve sightlines and passive surveillance throughout the entire reserve.
- Remove redundant fencing and improve path links through to RGC Cook Reserve.
- Replace the existing public toilets.
- Retain and resurface existing unsealed walking paths to improve all weather access.
- Protect existing grassland conservation areas and improve habitat links.
- Complete detailed design for redevelopment of the lake.
- Complete detailed design for the new regional playground.
- Commence planning process for rezoning and redevelopment of Downs Road (road reserve) as residential housing to improve passive surveillance and security within the park.
- Support continued use of the Gardens for festivals and major events.

STAGE 2 WORKS (4-6 years)

The second phase of works will seek to increase use of the gardens focusing on-ground delivery of Stage 1 design and planning including the lake reinstatement, new hard courts, irrigation system and planting works. Timing for installation of new expensive and high maintenance items such as the new playground and picnic facilities will be dependent on the improvement in surveillance and security to be provided by establishment of new residential development along the Downs Road reserve.

Stage 2 Actions:

- Reinstatement of the southern end of the lake (smaller size with stormwater harvesting/recirculation system utilising the existing wetlands) including circuit walking path, new land bridge linking the playground and open grass areas west of the lake and additional seating areas overlooking water.
- Establish two new multi-use hard courts with night lighting within the northern section of the existing lake. Retain the existing lake concrete edging to enclose the courts and act as a low seating wall and provide an additional picnic shelter overlooking the courts.
- Establish new recycled water irrigation system for selected open grass areas and to enable establishment of more diverse tree planting within the gardens.
- Realign the entry road and establish new residential housing overlooking the gardens along Downs Road to improve passive surveillance and public safety in the reserve.
- Replace and expand the existing playground to a regional park standard.
- Provide new picnic facilities including additional shelters and BBQs for large family groups.
- Upgrade existing signage and consider renaming of the reserve Lalor Public Gardens.

STAGE 3 WORKS (7-10 years)

The third phase of works for Whittlesea Public Gardens will seek to upgrade facilities at the gardens consistent with its status as one of the four Major Community Parks. Upgrade of facilities will aim to cater for existing and new residents and the completion of missing links in the Merri Creek Trail (north of Mahoneys Rd to Bolinda Rd by Hume City Council/Parks Victoria) is expected to also substantially increase regional visitation to the gardens, which will become the start/end points for recreational trail users and visitors to the Merri Creek Parklands.

Stage 3 Actions:

- In partnership with Parks Victoria and the Wurrundjeri seek to commission a new gateway/entry sculpture at the end of Barry Road as the main entry to the Merri Creek Marram Baba Parklands.
- Establish shared trail/cycle path and avenue tree planting along Barry Road.
- Liaise with VicRoads to confirm the future use of the Barry Road Reserve.
- Liaise with Transport for Victoria to advocate for re-routing of the 554 or 557 bus service on Barry Road to include the Gardens to provide direct links to Thomastown and Lalor Railway Stations.
- Establish a small off street public car park (3-5 spaces) with access from Rotino Crescent.
- Investigate establishment of a new café/community facility at the southern end of the lake and free WiFi in the park (subject to a detailed business case).

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