# OUR OPEN SPACES

Mornington Peninsula Shire
Open Space Strategy 2025 - 2040

# Use and Trends

**Appendix 2**

MORNINGTON PENINSULA
Shire

# Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Bunurong people, who have been the custodians of this land for many thousands of years; and pay respect to their elders past and present. We acknowledge that the land on which we live and work is the place of age-old ceremonies, celebrations, initiation and renewal; and that the Bunurong peoples' living culture continues to have a unique role in the life of this region.

We also acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who now call the Mornington Peninsula home, their rich cultural heritage, and their connection to Country of their homelands. We understand that healing Country through truth-telling, traditional knowledge, and reconciliation will also start to heal cultural divides between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Cultural tradition and knowledge are intrinsic parts of valuing and connecting with the landscape (open space); this knowledge is a gift to be embraced by all.



emerge ASSOCIATES

MORNINGTON PENINSULA Shire

# What is this Document?

The aim of this document is to highlight the current tensions and future changes that are likely to influence open space.
This document builds on the Discussion Paper and supports further conversations which help to resolve tensions and set directions for the future of service delivery.

# INTRODUCTION

Situated between Port Phillip Bay and Western Port Bay, Mornington Peninsula Shire is located 40-80 kilometres south-east of the Melbourne central business district.

Mornington Peninsula has a unique open space network with a particularly high percentage of natural areas including two national parks: Mornington Peninsula National Park and Pont Nepean National Park; and, one state park, Arthurs Seat.

The Shire has 192km of unique and dynamic coastline. Distinct landforms and ecosystems define the different coastal regions providing diverse open spaces and trails which are among the Peninsula's most popular tourist destinations.

## MORNINGTON PENINSULA'S NEW OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

Our aim is to set a clear direction for achieving an open space network that meets the wide-ranging needs of a growing and diverse community.

The purpose of the Open Space Strategy (the Strategy) is to guide the future planning, provision, design, and management of existing and future open space for a 15-year period up until 2040.

The Strategy will seek to protect and enhance the Peninsula's distinctive and unique open space values as the Shire responds to increasing pressures including climate change, population increase, residential expansion, changing recreation needs, greater reflection of culture, history and stories, vegetation clearing and increasing levels of tourism.

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# OVERVIEW

The way that open space is used throughout the Peninsula, and how that is changing, is largely driven by demographics, population growth and community priorities.

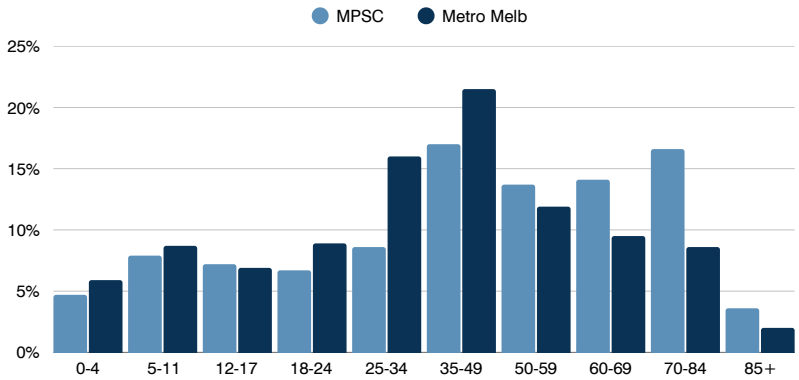
This section describes Shire-wide factors which are likely to influence open space provision, design and management.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Age

46 Median age of residents

Compared to median age of 37 across Greater Melbourne. In 2021, Mornington Peninsula Shire had a lower proportion of children (under 18) and a higher proportion of persons aged 60 or older compared to Greater Melbourne.




Age of residents compared with greater Melbourne, 2021
(Source: ABS)

### Culture

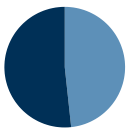
0.9% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (1,720 people in 867 households)

45% People with English ancestry, the highest proportion of the population. Compared to 26% in greater Melbourne.

7.8% Speak a language other than English at home, meaning about 92% of people speak English at home.
Italian, Greek, German and Mandarin are the next most commonly spoken languages, at a rate lower than the greater Melbourne average.

### Households

Female 51.7%



Male 48.3%

9.8% Single parent households, about the same as the greater Melbourne average

2.4 Average number of people per household

30% Couples without children, the dominant household structure, which is higher than the greater Melbourne average (23.5%)

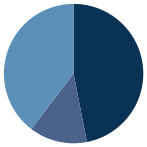
1.8 Average number of children per family for households with children

36% Households with children, lower than the greater Melbourne average (43.3%)

59% Households with access to two or more motor vehicles

H…

Of households with children;
47% have young children (under 15yrs)
13% have mixed aged children
40% have older children (over 15yrs)



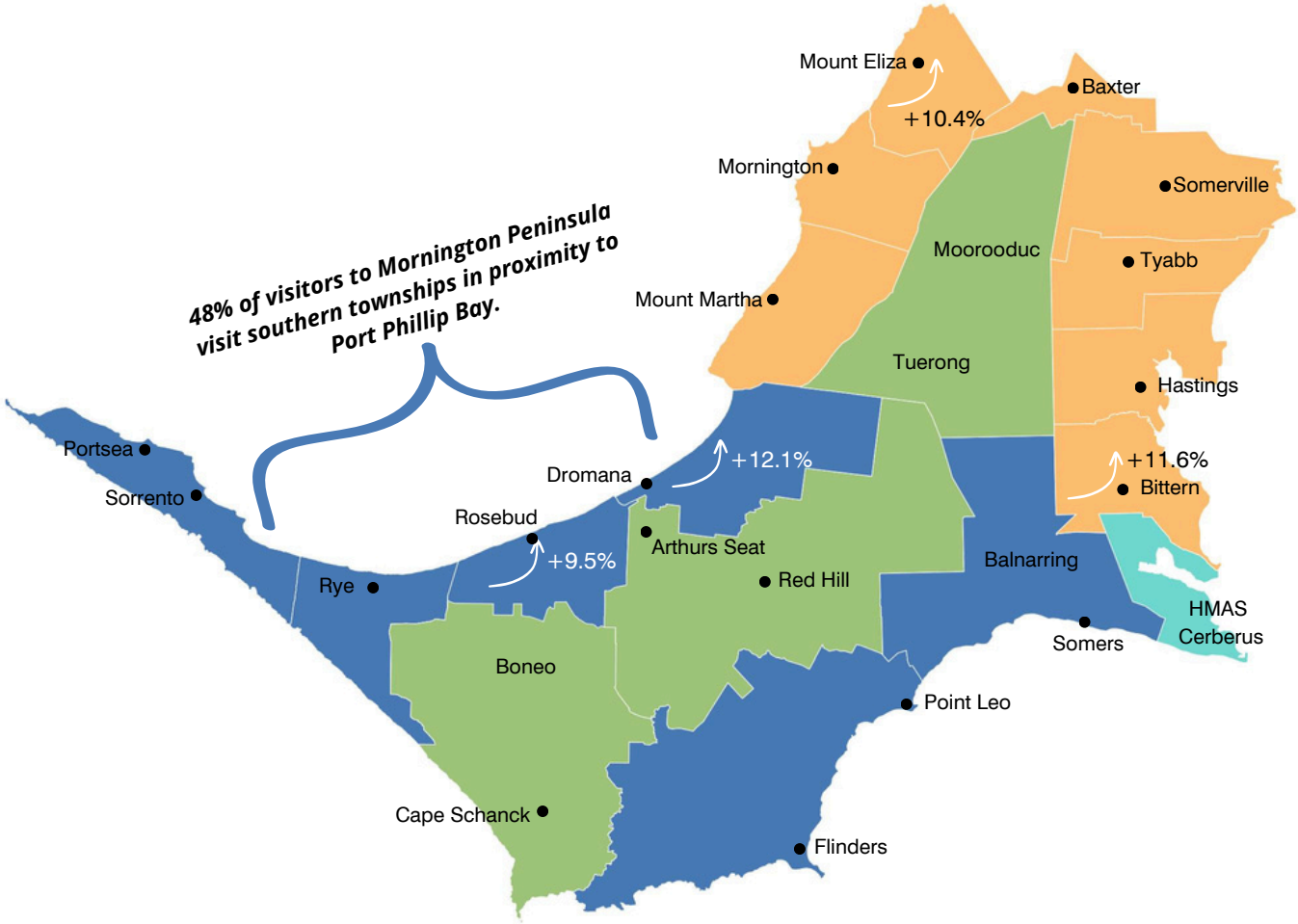
Sources: Council Health and Wellbeing Plan, ID Community (ABS Census). Victoria in Future, DTP.

## POPULATION

The population of Mornington Peninsula Shire in 2021 was 168,862, it's expected to grow to 187,540 by 2036, by approximately 10%

**Predicted Population Growth**

Projected population growth is lower in Mornington than Metropolitan Melbourne as a whole (which is expected to be approximately 30%).




| Key | |
|---|---|
| | Holiday/tourism areas with a higher proportion of unoccupied dwellings |
| | Residential areas with a higher proportion of children and medium density housing |
| | Green Wedge areas with agricultural/rural residential |
| | HMAS Cerberus (excluded from analysis) |
| ↗ | Areas with highest projected growth between 2021-2036 (% increase) |

Sources: Council Health and Wellbeing Plan, ID Community (ABS Census). Victoria in Future, DTP.

### Holiday/Tourism Areas

The percentage of unoccupied dwellings stood at 26% on census night (2021) compared to 9% in Greater Melbourne. This number has been more consistently closer to 30% in past years likely due to the presence of Covid-19 in 2021 and the trend to move to the regions to work from home.

In general, this reflects the ephemeral nature of the Mornington Peninsula population. However, this trend is weighted more strongly to the areas highlighted in blue (to the right and on map above) which receive higher levels of tourism in general compared to the areas in orange which have very low levels of unoccupancy and more stable year round populations.

Areas with a higher proportion of unoccupied dwellings compared to the Shire-wide average:

| Area | % dwellings unoccupied |
|---|---|
| Portsea, Sorrento, Blairgowrie | 63.9% |
| Rye, Tootgarook, St Andrews Beach | 50.4% |
| Flinders, Shoreham, Point Leo | 45.6% |
| Dromana, Safety Beach | 34.9% |
| Balnarring, Merricks | 31.7% |
| Rosebud, Capel Sound | 29.3% |
| **Shire Average** | **26.2%** |
| **Metropolitan Melbourne** | **9.6%** |

### Suburban Areas

Dwellings in Mornington Peninsula are less likely to be medium density compared to Greater Melbourne as a whole.

Households are also less likely to have children, pointing to the popularity of the area for retirement and higher median age.

Some areas buck this trend coming closer to the Melbourne average making them more similar in character to suburban areas across Greater Melbourne.

Areas with a higher proportion of households with children and medium density housing compared to the Shire-wide average:

| Area | Households with children | % medium density |
|---|---|---|
| Mount Eliza | 50.3% | 8.4% |
| Tyabb | 46.8% | 11% |
| Somerville | 45.1% | 18.3% |
| Mornington | 34.8% | 21.7% |
| Mount Martha | 44.8% | 14.8% |
| Baxter | 36.4% | 13.1% |
| Hastings | 35.3% | 26.8% |
| Bittern, Crib Point | 40.6% | 12.1% |
| **Shire Average** | **36%** | **12.3%** |
| **Metropolitan Melbourne** | **43%** | **21.6%** |

Sources: Council Health and Wellbeing Plan, ID Community (ABS Census). Victoria in Future, DTP.

## COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

In early 2024, initial consultation was undertaken to raise awareness of the project, drive participation, understand what prevents people from accessing open space, understand how people use open space, obtain ideas with respect to open space improvements and to determine if there are any gaps in open space provision. The results of this engagement are considered throughout this report in relation to each theme's uses and trends.

**Priorities for the Future**

Top priorities for investment in open spaces are:

- More nature and environmental conservation areas
- Better maintenance of parks
- More dog off leash areas
- More space for physical activity/ informal sport
- More facilities (toilets, BBQs, bins, and accessible equipment)

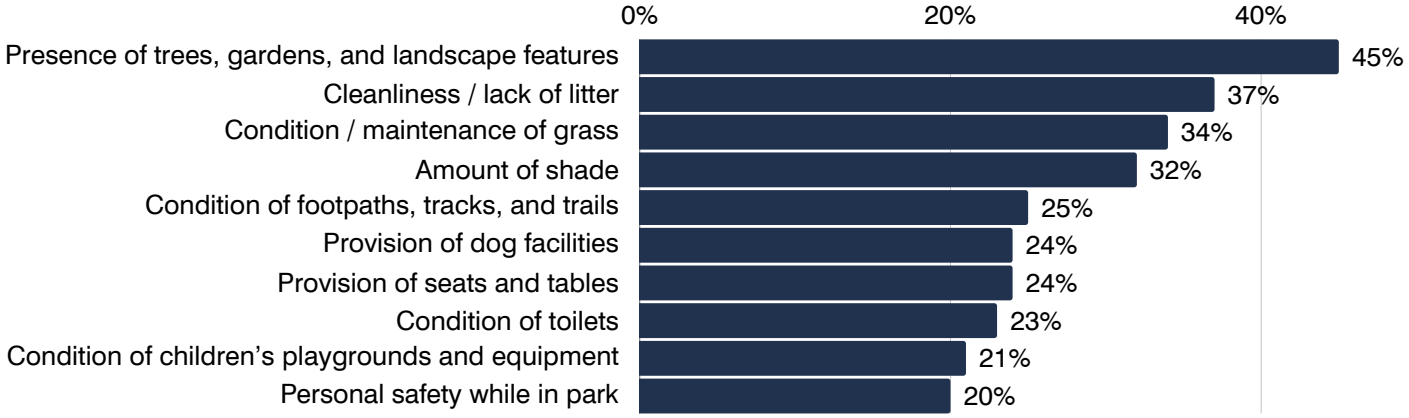
**Barriers to Use**

The most recently cited factors which stop people from using open spaces are:

- **Personal safety**
  Largely related to lack of lighting and concerns around anti-social behaviour
- **Unsafe walking and cycling**
  Including lack of paths, uneven paths and sand build up near the beach that impacts mobility
- **Dogs in parks**
  In parks and on beaches, off-lead where they shouldn't be, need for more enforcement

**Values**

The most commonly citied features that people like or consider important are:



# USES AND TRENDS

## Theme 1

Biodiversity and ecosystem health

## Theme 2

Physical Activity and Play

## Theme 3

Uniqueness and sense of place

## Theme 4

Comfortable & accessible

# USE AND TRENDS

The following section describes the current uses or functions of open space, and future trends.

Under each theme, implications of the following trends are considered:

**Increased use or demand**
Implications of increasing population and use of open spaces due to population growth, associated increased densities, tourism and increased demand

**Environmental changes**
Implications which are due to changes in the environment such as climate changes, environmental management approaches and other conditions

**Preference and need changes**
Implications of the changing use of open space such as preferences, needs and expectations

# BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

## Use

**Open space plays a critical role in providing habitat and preserving ecosystem biodiversity**

**Trend**
Incremental removal of vegetation for development causes fragmentation of natural areas and continued loss threatens habitat and biodiversity.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
Establishing additional native vegetation in open space could help to reduce this loss over time. For example, traditionally turf landscapes, like golf courses, can accommodate significant native vegetation and waterways which would contribute to ecosystem connectivity and carbon sequestration.

Residential, agricultural, and commercial development results in vegetation removal to accommodate infrastructure and facilities. This can sometimes also happen to build community facilities or infrastructure on open space.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Retaining and increasing bushland in open space.

"Less than one third of the original extent of native vegetation cover on the Mornington Peninsula remains, of which, 27% occurs within parks and reserves, and 57% of which is on private land, the remainder being on other land types."
(Biodiversity and Conservation Plan, 2019)

**Trend**
Increased heat, decreased rainfall, intense downpours, changing seasonal patterns and increased fire danger are all likely to lead to a loss of habitat.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
The Mornington Peninsula has a range of different natural landscapes some of which are more resilient to the increasing periods of climate change induced drought.

Fire management in natural areas to reduce fuel load will become increasingly important and regularly required as the environment gets drier.

The design, planting and management of open spaces can help to ensure that natural areas can better survive extreme heat and help to manage extreme weather events. For example:

- integrating green blue infrastructure to provide a resilience buffer to sensitive landscapes (for example: Water Sensitive Urban Design, tree and shrub buffer plantings)
- collaboration with Tradition Owners to implement ecological and cultural burning regimes
- increasing land management budgets to allow for fire reduction fuel load management.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Adapting management approaches for natural areas to support resilience to changing climate conditions.

"An increase in the frequency and intensity of bushfire is predicted for the Greater Melbourne area, with a 42% increase in high fire danger days projected by 2050. This will increase year on year, leading to a new standard of long and dangerous fire seasons."
(Climate Emergency Plan, 2020)

Climate change is an immediate threat to natural remnant ecologies of the Peninsula. Even a small (1–2°C) rise in temperature can have a significant impact on biodiversity and natural systems. This may place additional stresses on ecosystems as competition between plant species changes.

Established ecosystems will need to adapt to these new conditions – some species will be lost to the Peninsula; others will become more dominant creating a new ecological system.
(Climate Emergency Plan, 2020)

**Trend**
Conservation sites are increasingly popular as places for learning, recreation and interacting with nature and wildlife.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
This increased interest is putting pressure on sensitive ecosystems. For example, some bushland reserves are being degraded due to high visitation or increasing popularity of mountain bike riding and the construction of informal dirt jumps.

Open space management must balance the costs and benefits of access to open space to encourage visitation and ensure protection of sensitive environments. For example, identifying less sensitive natural areas as appropriate for increased recreation use could help to manage demand or the installation of paths and boardwalks in sensitive areas may help to protect the environment from overuse.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Facilitating access to natural areas for people to experience without causing damage to sensitive ecosystems.

19% of online and intercept survey respondents said that they use open space to "Experience nature or wildlife (e.g. natural areas, trees, wetlands, bushland)" and 19% said it was to "take in the scenery".
(Community Engagement Finding - Phase #1 OSS)

Visitation to Parks Victoria's national and state parks has increased steadily year on year from 2010 to 2019 (from 40 million to 79 million visitors).
(Parks Victoria, 2022)

Community engagement and participation in the Shire's conservation and education programs is up 11% from 3,461 participants in 2022 to 3,874 in 2023.
(Annual Report, 2023)

**Trend**
Traditional Owner knowledge and custodianship increasingly valued and sought as a part of Council's commitment to reconciliation and protection of cultural heritage.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
Aboriginal perspectives of biodiversity in urban areas have much to offer as holistic approaches to sustainability, custodianship and resource management. Therefore, working with Aboriginal peoples requires a shift in thinking around how open space is managed.

Traditional Owners have a deep awareness of the type and timing of management interventions required to "heal Country". For example, bush fire and weed management though cultural burning practices provides an alternate strategy to manage areas of biodiversity within remnant bush urban park land through a combination of traditional knowledge and contemporary science.

Co-management of open spaces is an important action in advancing trusting relationships and knowledge reciprocity. Open space plays a critical role in protection of culturally significant sites and space for traditional practices.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Advocating for strong and meaningful partnerships with Traditional Owners to support the planning, management and protection of natural areas.

The Traditional Custodians of the Mornington Peninsula are the Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation.

"Government and agencies will seek out, value and embed Aboriginal culture, knowledge, expertise and diverse perspectives in policies and practice."
(Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021-2026)

Our Reconciliation Action Plan 2020 – 22 Includes actions to:

- Develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations to support positive outcomes
- Consult with Traditional Owner groups about all policy matters, projects and decisions that may affect Traditional Owners

# Best Practice

**Mornington Peninsula Biolinks Support Grant 2023-2024**

This program provides funding for community groups to identify revegetation projects on private or public land. These projects have the potential to connect with open space biolinks and enrich habitat and local biodiversity.

**Managing Country Together Framework 2019: Parks Victoria**

"The Framework represents a broad agenda that focusses on Traditional Owners as land owners and managers. It enables our organisation to become a better partner in park management and meet our obligations under the Parks Victoria Act 2018."
(Parks Victoria, 2019)

**The Shire nursery provides and promotes indigenous plants for community projects.**

The nursery grows local indigenous species for revegetation projects for community groups, schools, and local residents. The nursery also runs educational workshops and a volunteer program.

# Further Information

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council documents:

- Our Coast Our Future Strategy (in development)
- Urban Forest Strategy (in development)
- Climate Emergency Response Plan (2020)
- Reconciliation Action Plan (2020)
- Recreational Facilities for Mountain Bike and BMX Strategy (2023)
- Beyond Zero Waste Strategy (2020)
- Biodiversity Conservation Plan (2019)
- Integrated Water Management Plan (2021)
- Flood and Stormwater Strategy (2022)
- Environmental Reserve Management Plans
- Green Wedge Management Plan (2019)

Managing Country Together Framework, (Parks Victoria, 2019)
Cultural Heritage Management Plan information and resources, (First Peoples State Relations Victoria)
Protecting Victoria's Environment Biodiversity 2037, (DEECA, 2017)

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PLAY

*Use* **Open spaces provide space for a wide range of opportunities for play and physical activity.**

**Trend**
Higher than average participation in organised sport, increasingly by women and girls, has created hot spots of high demand for accessible and welcoming facilities

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
Although the Shire has a reasonable supply of sporting fields in general, there are hot spots where supply does not meet demand (source: Sports Capacity Plan). For example, the northern suburbs of the Shire have a higher proportion of young people and families and therefore the highest demand for sporting facilities.

Where open space is not available, innovation such as considering upgrading fields to synthetic surfaces which provide hard wearing, multi-use, all weather venues that can be programmed intensively to help meet demand without additional space. Formalising public use of school sporting grounds through Joint Use Agreements is also a method for increasing access to open space.

Recently the number of women and girls playing traditionally male-dominated sports, such as Australian Rules Football and Cricket has rapidly increased, putting pressure on facilities, spaces and clubs to respond to better accommodate demand.

This is likely due to increased efforts to make sport more welcoming and flexible. For example popular sporting codes have developed more accessible 'short-forms' of traditional games – such as AFLX and 20-20 cricket – to appeal to potential participants who cannot commit the time needed to take part in conventional competitions.

To cater for this growth, existing facilities need to be retrofitted to provide suitable amenities for all genders and new facilities need to be designed with this in mind. Retrofitting existing facilities can be expensive and difficult to achieve ideal results, although, state government grants are available for Councils to prioritise gender equity.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Investment in new/upgraded open spaces and facilities for organised sport, particularly in areas with young people and families.

Mornington Peninsula residents participate in organised sport at a higher rate than the Victorian average, ranking 4th of all Melbourne Metropolitan LGA's in participation by residents in physical activity organised by a club or association (20.7%)
(VicHealth Sport Participation Research Project, 2022)

38 respondents (21%) to the online survey said that they are a playing member of a sporting club.
(Community Engagement Finding - Phase #1 OSS)

The percentage of females playing Australian Rules Football has doubled, from approx. 12% in 2015 to approx. 23% in 2022.
(AusPlay Survey, 2022)

The most popular sport related activities for adult females are swimming, running and cycling with netball and tennis being the most popular team sports
(AusPlay Survey, 2022)

**Trend**
There is increasing interest in informal physical activity and towards independent activities, predominantly walking, especially with dogs.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
Although Australians are generally more health conscious, they are also more time poor. This phenomenon is thought to be contributing to a trend away from traditional organised sports towards less formal recreational activities that do not require participants to attend weekly training sessions or fixed match times.

Activities that you can participate in at your own convenience, such as walking, scooting and bike riding, and 'pop-up' events like Park Run, are more popular than ever.

Communities are consistently advocating for better connections to improve walking and cycling opportunities around the Shire whether it be within townships encouraging active travel or in natural areas as destination trips.
Off-road trails provide an opportunity to meet the high and growing demand for walking, cycling and mountain bike riding (MTB) and to motivate people to undertake regular physical activity that is convenient and affordable.

There is increasing demand for off/on leash areas, trails, and dog parks. Accommodating safe and sustainable use of open spaces by off-leash dogs can be a challenge, for example; sporting fields are sometimes impacted by irresponsible dog owners using the space. However, proactive and consistent approaches to providing options for dog walking can reduce conflict.

Investment in open space infrastructure should consider this shift from organised sport to better accommodate casual, informal use and programming (events, fitness classes, fun runs etc.)

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Opportunities for walking, rolling and other informal physical activities.

The most popular active recreational activities in Victoria are recreational walking, workouts at a gym, running, swimming, cycling.
(AusPlay Survey, 2022)

35.8% of residents participate in 'organised' physical activity, while 76.9% participated in 'non-organised physical activity'
(MPSC Health & Wellbeing Profile)

97 people (52%) of respondents to the online survey said they visit the park with a dog.
The most commonly reported active recreation activities are:

- Walk 60%
- Walk the dog (37%)
- Run/Jog (10%)
- Water based activities (10%)
- Recreate on grass (9%)

(Community Engagement Finding - Phase #1 OSS)

Parks with walking loops have been found to have 80% more users, and facilitate 90% higher levels of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity than parks without looped paths.
(Cohen, D. A., et al., 2017)

**Trend**
The community are increasingly expecting high quality, innovative play spaces for all ages.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
Play is for everyone and is an activity for all open spaces and not only designated "playgrounds". Everyone benefits physically and mentally from spending time playing in open spaces.

Popular requests include facilities such as splash parks (water play), nature play, fitness equipment, pickle ball, and play/fitness activities for all ages (intergenerational play).

There is also a trend towards active lifestyle activities like adventure or alternative sports, some of which require complex/advanced skills with an element of danger and/or thrill-seeking. In addition, there is demand for spaces which are desirable for young people such as pump tracks, parkour, skate parks, social spaces and sport courts.

There is an opportunity to rethink play spaces, especially those that are currently underutilised, to provide opportunities for use by people of all ages, especially older adults.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
New and renewed play spaces with innovative options for all ages.

74% of people said that they are either neutral, unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with playgrounds.
(Source: Community Engagement Finding - Phase #1 OSS)

Mornington Peninsula Shire has a high percentage of people aged over 65 years; 27% compared with 15% in the Greater Melbourne area.

Mornington, Mount Eliza, and Rosebud, Capel Sound and Somerville are expected to have more children under 16 years in the future.

Mount Martha, Bittern - Crib Point, Dromana, and Safety Beach are expected to have more people over the age of 65.
(Source: ID Community/ABS, 2021)

**Trend**
Multifunctional open spaces can increase options for physical activity, play, and events and are becoming increasingly important to meet rising demand for space.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
To cater for more people at once, with finite open space available, multifunctional spaces offer the greatest opportunity.

Multifunctional spaces can offer ‘something for everyone’ and attract a variety of users at different times of the day and night, with different interests and can result in vibrant places.

Multifunctional spaces, inherently come with potential for conflict. Feeling unsafe due to other park users being antisocial, and concern about off leash dogs, for example, are barriers for some and can prevent people feeling safe in open spaces (Source: Community Engagement Finding Phase #1 OSS).

Not all spaces can be multifunctional, and care must be taken to ensure interactions between different cohorts are positive. However, creating functional welcoming spaces with flexible open space areas can provide good community value for money.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Creating more multifunctional community hub open spaces that accommodate a wide variety of uses.

For males, the most important factors when choosing a park are:
- cleanliness and lack of litter (41%)
- the presence of trees, gardens, and landscape features (44%),
- amount of shade (27%),
- condition of toilets (22%),
- provision of dog facilities (24%).

The most important decision-making factors for females when choosing a park are:
- presence of trees, gardens, and landscape features (46%),
- cleanliness and lack of litter (34%),
- amount of shade (36%),
- condition of children's playgrounds and equipment (23%),
- condition of toilets (23%).

(Source: Community Engagement Finding - Phase #1 OSS)

# Best Practice

**Emil Madsen Reserve Master Plan**

The 2020 masterplan for Emil Madsen Reserve seeks to build upon the existing sporting and recreational infrastructure and further enhance opportunities for passive and independent activities at the site.

The plan will create a new destination for non-sporting uses, opening up the space for a wider diversity of people.

**Carrum Downs Reserve synthetic pitch (Frankston City Council)**

Synthetic surface with a soccer pitch, overlaid AFL line marking, practice soccer goalbox, three futsal/training pitches, and a cricket pitch.

This multipurpose pitch provides an illuminated all-weather alternative that can absorb the extra hours of usage the community generates.

**Dirt Jump community building**

Through the Mornington Peninsula dirt jumps pilot program, a group of keen young local riders and experienced trail educators built bike jumps, table tops, gap jumps, whale tails and berms in Mount Martha (Citation Reserve)

# Further Information

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council documents:

- Recreational Facilities for Mountain Bike and BMX Strategy (2023)
- Play Strategy (2015, due to be revised)
- Sport Capacity Plan (2019)
- Asset Management Strategy and Plan (2020)
- Community Satisfaction Survey (2023)

The Good Play Space Guide: “I Can Play Too” (Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2007)
Everyone Can Play - A Guideline to Create Inclusive Playspaces (New South Wales Government, 2019)
Fencing and Public Playspaces, Play Australia Website
Victorian Government's Gender Impact Assessment Toolkit (Gender Equality Commission, 2021)
Creating Safe and Inclusive Public Spaces for Women (Women's Health East, 2021)

# UNIQUENESS AND SENSE OF PLACE

## Use

**Open spaces showcase the unique qualities, features and character of the Mornington Peninsula**

**Trend**
Popular parks and coastal areas are becoming degraded or less accessible due to high levels of use during peak seasons and environmental impacts such as storm surge and erosion.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
Use patterns are seasonal and often correlate with high numbers of day visitors or holiday makers during peak season. Keeping up with operational demand at beaches and meeting the expectations of visitors for high quality, diverse experiences (amenities, services and by accommodating events) are both challenges to open space management.

The popular beachside townships require open spaces that suit an intermittent visitor community, whilst the more suburban areas i.e. Somerville have a consistent all year-round residential population. Some townships, especially along Port Phillip Bay, have both a significant resident population along with an influx of holiday makers.

Upgrading the quality of parks by using more durable path and furniture materials may be necessary to combat increased use in popular foreshore parks which are reaching capacity. Another option may be to upgrade existing less utilised parks to attract more events and visitation, relieving some pressure from the more popular and already overused foreshore parks.

Open space trails along the coast are well loved and used by the community but are increasingly affected by storms and weather events leading to closures. As foreshore areas are eroded the open space inland and in other areas of the Peninsula will need to accommodate the key functions of the foreshore reserve including access to nature, gathering, social gatherings, and walking/riding along trails.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Spaces and amenities for gathering, picnicking, events and enjoying scenic settings, to respond to high levels of use in peak periods.

Population in some areas rises significantly over holiday periods. In the peak of summer the population increases from 170,000 to over 250,000 people each year becoming the most populous coastal holiday area in Victoria (a 70% increase).
(Tourism.vic Research and Insights, 2023)

Outside of metro Melbourne Mornington Peninsula has the highest visitor numbers out of the tourism regions. In terms of spend, Mornington peninsula was lower than other regions partly due to a lower overall quantity of nights spent. This suggests a high number of day visitors who are more likely to make use of recreation facilities such as beaches and open space rather than spending time in accommodation.
(Tourism.vic Research and Insights, 2023)

Climate change adaption measures such as temporary seawalls or sandbags are necessary measures but can negatively impact the use and visual aesthetic of foreshore areas.
(Community engagement for the Coastal Strategy, 2023)

**Trend**
Traditional Owner values and protection of invaluable cultural heritage is increasingly expected by the wider community and Council.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
Open space presents opportunities to represent and celebrate Indigenous values and history.

Increasing the use of Bunurong/Boon Wurrung language names is identified in the Reconciliation Action Plan as a key path for better Indigenous recognition and open spaces present a simple way of achieving this. Examples of traditional names used on the Peninsula include: Arthurs Seat – Wonga, Point Nepean – Monmar. Commissioning art and storytelling in parks is another way of increasing representation.

Collaboration with Traditional Owners is valuable, yet project planning/budgets don't always reflect the additional resources required to allow for meaningful collaboration to comply with important legislation. Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMP) require respectful and ongoing engagement with Traditional Owners and requires additional investment in time and costs. Costs associated with protection and rehabilitation include revegetation as a key conservation tool, protection of cultural heritage sites and biodiversity within the urban fabric.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Recognition of values and protection of Aboriginal heritage sites in collaboration with Traditional Owners.

"It is our commitment to strong, meaningful partnerships with Traditional Owners. It is about understanding and respecting Traditional Owner rights and values, taking responsibility for protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage on the parks estate and offering the best support we can to Aboriginal people working in the park management sector."
(Parks Victoria Managing Country Together Framework, 2019)

81% agree that First Nations arts are an important part of Australia's culture
(Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey Residents of Outer Metropolitan Victoria value the arts, 2017)

**Trend**
Parks are increasingly popular event venues which add significantly to the vibrancy of the Peninsula, however, they can take their toll on parks and reserves.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
Events such as concerts and markets in parks and on foreshores are important drawcards for towns across the Peninsula. Events can increase access to parks through activation, investment, and as an invitation for those who might not make use of parks usually.

However, most parks have not been designed or developed to cater for major events which can cause issues such as damage to the park and overflow of visitor traffic into more vulnerable landscapes causing reactive maintenance, major reconstruction work required more frequently, reduced access by the community or negative impacts for neighbours.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Multifunctional spaces with suitable infrastructure and design to accommodate community events (e.g. concerts, markets).

Mornington Peninsula has approximately 17 outdoor markets across the shire selling local produce throughout the year.

Events were highlighted as the number one activity to feel a sense of belonging in the community.
(We All Belong Together Strategy Engagement, 2024)

The Mornington Peninsula hosts major festivals and events including –

- Music in the Park (Mornington Park)
- LOOKOUT (Mornington Racecourse)
- Mornington Running festival (Mornington Park)
- Coastrek Hiking Challenge (Cape Schanck to Port Nepean)
- Winery Walks

**Trend**
Increasing prolonged drought and inconsistent rain mean that non native species which are not suited to the climate are more likely to struggle to survive.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
Green lawn is often an expectation for a healthy and attractive park environment, but these expectations may have to change along with this aesthetic being less achievable.

Planting and landscape management that reflects the uniqueness of the site conditions will result in more resilient vegetation and a stronger sense of place. This includes choosing plantings which will remain climate resilient well into the future according to modeling around predicted temperature changes.

Council's integrated Water Management Plan identifies the need for water efficiency in open space irrigation through the use of water efficient turf, water saving sensors, installation of flow meters and irrigating sports fields with alternative water sources.

A biodiverse, drought resistant public realm is a more climate resilient landscape.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Planting species that are reflective of the Mornington Peninsula landscape and resilient to changing climate.

The diverse natural assets of the Peninsula, including beaches and coastline, natural parks, rural landscape and clean, green environment rated extremely high as the most liked element about the Peninsula, mentioned three times more than any other factor.
(Community Survey for Council Plan, 2021)

Grass condition and maintenance ranked 3rd highest as a factor in influencing people's decision to visit the park at 34% of residents (online and intercept survey).

Satisfaction with grass maintenance was higher than average at 3.27 ranking 4th highest (online survey).
(Community Engagement Finding - Phase #1 OSS)

# Best Practice

**Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association Gathering Place**

Mornington Peninsula Shire support the Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association Gathering Place as a safe place to practice and learn culture as well as educate the public on traditional knowledge though story telling.

**R Penman Reserve Playground - Mornington Peninsula Shire**

Council R Penman Reserve Playground is a unique play space showcasing an ocean theme and depicting the surrounding coastal elements of Blairgowrie township. The play space was not only initiated by local residents, but also boasts 120 community contributors to the works, each with their names on the pickets around the playground.

**Interpretive signage for connecting Bunurong stories**

In 2022 Rye Group Alliance were awarded Excellence in interpretive signage for connecting Bunurong stories and language to meaningful and engaging signage.

# Further Information

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council documents:

- Mornington Peninsula Localised Planning Statement (2014)
- Event Planning Guide (2017)
- Asset Management Strategy and Plan (2020)
- Council and Wellbeing Plan (2021)
- Community Satisfaction Survey (2023)
- Reconciliation Action Plan (2020)
- Neighbourhood Character Study and Guidelines (2019)
- Arts and Culture Plan (2020)

Port Phillip Bay Coastal Hazard Assessment, CoastKit Victoria, (DEECA, 2022)
Victoria Resilient Coast - Adapting for 2100+, (DEECA)

# COMFORTABLE AND ACCESSIBLE

*Use* **Open spaces provide space for physical activity, community events, connection with nature and social opportunities.**

**Trend**
Residents of the Peninsula are older, on average, than the Victorian average which also means a higher proportion of people with disabilities.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
Designing accessible places which adhere to universal design principles is becoming increasingly important, especially in areas of the Shire with higher proportion of older adults.

Shade trees, peaceful setting, safe secure setting, bathrooms, walking paths, seating are commonly cited as park amenities desired by older adults. The design and provision of these amenities is critical to ensuring spaces are accessible to all ages and abilities, and will facilitate improved health and wellbeing of older adults.
(Sources: Veitch, Ball, & Rivera, 2022: Loukaitou-Sideris et al., 2016: Perry, et al., 2021)

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Physical accessibility for older people, and those with disabilities and mobility restrictions.

The Mornington Peninsula is a popular area for retirement (in 2021 approximately 34.3% of the population was aged 60 years or older) and the median age was ten years higher than Victoria. This number is predicted to rise steadily over the next 20 years to 46.1% with the largest increase in numbers occurring in the age range of 70 – 84.
(I.D profile/ABS, 2021)

Studies have found that bathrooms, accessible seating and shelter were critical for park choice and enjoyment for older park users with disabilities.
"When these needs were unmet, the emotional and physical cost of going to a park outweighs the benefits."
(Perry, M.,et al. (2021) "Enticing" but Not Necessarily a "Space Designed for Me": Experiences of Urban Park Use by Older Adults with Disability.)

**Trend**
Increasing residential populations in town centres is putting pressure on existing open spaces in these areas that were not necessarily designed for such intense use.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
An open space in an area with many people living in apartments or townhouses with limited private open space will be used differently to a park of the same size in a low-density suburban area. In a higher density area people may value spaces to host a BBQ picnic with friends very close to home, and be willing to travel further to access a park to play sport
(source: Currie, 2017).

It's helpful to know how many people live within walking distance of a park to predict the likely amount of use the park will see on a daily basis. The number of people within catchments is critical to understanding what the park needs, to predict maintenance requirements and to choose appropriate materials. embellishments and infrastructure.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Flexible and multi-functional open spaces in town centres for use by people who live in apartments and townhouses.

12% of housing in Mornington Peninsula Shire is medium density which is lower than Greater Melbourne (22%).
However, some areas have density similar to the Melbourne average, while others have almost no medium density.

Top 3 areas with highest amount of medium density housing:
- Hastings (26%)
- Mornington (21%)
- Somerville (18%)

Areas with lowest amount of medium density housing:
- Red Hill, Arthurs Seat (0.8%)
- Moorooduc (0.8%)
- Flinders, Shoreham, Point Leo (1.2%)

(Source: I.D Profile/ABS, 2021)

**Trend**
Increased heatwaves and instances of flooding puts into focus the critical role of open spaces as infrastructure for water management and to provide respite from the heat for human health.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
Lush cool, shady parks will become increasingly critical to community health and wellbeing. As temperatures rise it will become increasingly uncomfortable to be physically active outside.

Identifying areas of heat vulnerability can assist in ensuring that increased efforts to reduce the urban heat island effect through planting of vegetation in open space, reducing impermeable surfaces (like concrete) and ensuring all areas have access to green open spaces.

The community will also value opportunities to visit parks and be physically active during cooler times of the day. Demand for lighting of sports fields is expected to increase to allow for use in the cooler hours of the morning or evening. The ability to use open space in the dark requires consideration of lighting and design for participants to feel safe.

Flooding presents a significant risk to communities across our Shire. Although flooding is a natural phenomenon, the probability of extreme events can be exacerbated by human influences such as climate change, urbanisation, the creation of impermeable surfaces, and drainage design.

Open space plays a critical role in managing and treating stormwater. This, when well managed and designed, can maintain and even enhance open space for sport and recreation during heat waves. For example, at some sport sites it is possible to irrigate the turf grass with stormwater with on site “bio-swales” that improve the water quality as the water infiltrates through vegetated areas.

**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Recognition of the role of open spaces and green infrastructure to adapt to extreme heating and flooding.

Heatwaves and hot days are projected to double in frequency by 2050.
(Climate Emergency Plan, 2020)

Shade was the most important factor in choosing to visit a park for 36% of people who took the intercept survey, and the third most important factor for online survey respondents (39%).
(Community Engagement Finding - Phase #1 OSS)

“While annual average rainfall is dropping, high intensity rainfall events are anticipated to occur more frequently. This means that the Peninsula will receive less rain each year on average, and what does fall will be in heavy downpours rather than over a sustained wet season.
This is likely to lead to serious inundation risks, especially during high tides and aggressive storm surges. These effects may be compounded by soil compaction and depletion.”
(Source: Climate Emergency Plan, 2020)

“Provision of regularly distributed green open spaces across built up areas that are designed with appropriate green infrastructure and permeable surfaces to hold moisture which then allows effective evapotranspiration to cool the local microclimate. This is particularly important during extended periods of heat.
Deciduous trees with a larger leaf surface area are more effective at evapotranspiration.
In the Melbourne climate, they also have the benefit of allowing winter sunlight to penetrate and deliver warmth to the open space during the colder months while providing much needed shade during summer.”
(Tapper, N. (2021). Creating Cooler, Healthier and More Liveable Australian Cities Using Irrigated Green Infrastructure.)

**Trend**
Existing assets are ageing and renewal/maintenance costs are increasing resulting in significant financial constraints for Council, all while community expectations are rising.

**Implication for the Open Space Strategy**
The condition of open spaces, especially of grass and trails, is important to the community and is a major contributor to overall satisfaction with parks.

Council has a backlog of undelivered park masterplans which are awaiting funding to be built. With rapidly increasing costs it is becoming more difficult to deliver new infrastructure.

Additionally, it is not possible to provide equal investment across all geographic areas, instead the Shire needs to prioritise investment in assets that provide the most benefit to the greatest numbers of people. For example, open spaces within areas with permanent residents might be prioritised for sporting upgrades and open spaces within tourist hotspots may be prioritised for upgrades to make them more resilient to high visitation.

Strategic resource managements is critical to ensure that the open space network can be sustained over time to meet the needs of current and future residents and visitors.

In many cases open spaces do not require significant infrastructure to be functional, safe, fun and welcoming. Tree planting, for example, can make an open space comfortable.

Consideration of the whole life cycle of asset management is critical to providing good value for money and quality service provision. Utilising more resilient materials and those from sustainable sources and materials with longevity and durability can also help to minimise ongoing maintenance and replacement costs.

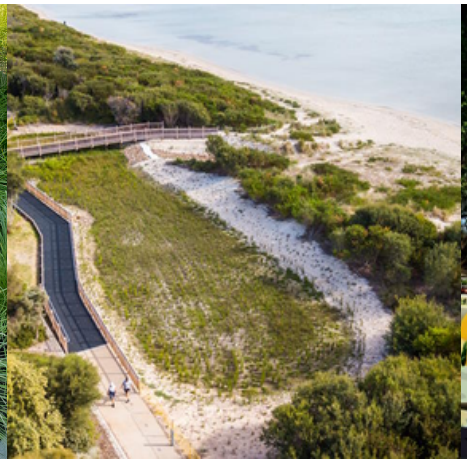
**To respond, the strategy could prioritise:**
Equitable and sustainable asset provision/maintenance with greater investment in areas which need it most.

"There is a current underspending in the majority of asset types for open space. Adopting the required funding will see an improvement in service levels."
(Asset Plan Guidance 2022, Local Government Victoria)

The condition of paths and trails was the second most raised issue in engagement for the Coastal Strategy, and via the 2023/24 Council Budget submissions.

# Best Practice

**Intergrated Water Management**
Water sensitive urban design (WSUD)/Integrated water management (IWM) provide strategy and design frameworks to integrate natural flows into the design of the urban fabric. WSUD and IWM when implemented reduce reliance of potable water, reduce flooding risk, increase soil and plant health, mitigates drought, reduces ambient heat and reduces erosion.



**Rye Bioinfiltration Basin**
The Rye Coastal Wetland has been awarded the Stormwater Victoria Industry Award 2022 for 'Infrastructure Excellence'. This award recognises this project for improving the health of the bay, connectivity to the beach and the overall aesthetic of the area. This is an outstanding example of the integration of stormwater management and placemaking.

**Hastings Foreshore Masterplan**
The Masterplan addresses some challenges, such as the foreshore is a low-lying coastal area, and much of it could flood during bad storms and king tides, making it vulnerable to coastal hazards such as rising sea levels and erosion.

# Further Information

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council documents:

- Climate Emergency Response Plan (2020)
- Disability Inclusion Plan (2018)
- Flood and Stormwater Strategy (2022)
- Integrated Water Management Plan (2021)
- Public Toilet Strategy (to be revised)
- Sustainable Transport Strategy (2015)
- Universal Design Policy (2022)
- Positive Aging Strategy (2020)
- We All Belong: A Strategy for an Inclusive Mornington Peninsula Community (in development)

Environmentally Sustainable Design Factsheet (Sports and Recreation Victoria, 2017)
Victorian Planning Authority Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines
Plan Melbourne 2017–2050
Design Everyone Guide (Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2017)
Urban Design Guidelines for Victoria (Department of Transport and Planning, 2017)
Creating Safe and Inclusive Public Spaces for Women (Women's Health East, 2021)

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