



9.3 **ADVENTURE PLAYGROUNDS EXTENDED OPENING HOURS TRIAL FINDINGS**

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: **TONY KEENAN, GENERAL MANAGER, COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND INCLUSION**

PREPARED BY: **FELICITY LEAHY, EXECUTIVE MANAGER FAMILY, YOUTH & CHILDREN AND DIVISIONAL PERFORMANCE**

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide an update on the consultation and engagement findings from the Adventure Playground Extended Opening Hours Trial, conducted between 26 September 2021 and 30 January 2022.
- 1.2 To outline the planned actions to be taken in light of the consultation and engagement findings.
- 1.3 To outline the planned actions to be taken in light of the current end of life condition of equipment at Skinners and the planned upgrades for both Skinners and St Kilda as budgeted for in the 10-year financial plan.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 There are two Adventure Playgrounds in the City of Port Phillip, St Kilda and Skinners Reserve. When Covid-19 restrictions meant that staff could not be on site to run the usual programs, Council decided to trial extending their opening hours to cover daylight hours, in line with other play spaces across the City. Both playgrounds reverted to their regular operating model after 30 January 2022.
- 2.2 Two key strategies were used to collect data on the Extended Opening Hours Trial: general feedback was sought via submissions through Council's Have Your Say online engagement platform and onsite fieldwork research was undertaken.
- 2.3 Have Your Say submissions were invited from 17 January to 13 February 2022 on the following themes: accessibility, amenity, safety, benefits, issues and other. Forty submissions were received. The Adventure Playgrounds Trial of Extended Opening Hours Engagement Summary Report can be found at Attachment one.
- 2.4 Onsite fieldwork research was undertaken for two-weeks from 18 to 30 January 2022, comprising of intercept surveys and observations to record how many and when people used the sites. 160 intercept surveys were completed. Observations were focussed on recording the visitation at St Kilda due to low use at Skinners during the fieldwork period. The Field Work Findings: City of Port Phillip Adventure Playgrounds Research report can be found at Attachment two.
- 2.5 Key findings from the 40 Submissions received include:



- 2.5.1 The Adventure playgrounds are much loved and highly valued pieces of community infrastructure.
 - 2.5.2 There was some support for extended hours, but several comments referenced the need for corresponding supervised hours and supervised programs and to keep staffing during opening hours.
 - 2.5.3 Improved physical access (e.g., wheelchair access) identified by some respondents as a need and the deteriorating amenity was also noted by several respondents.
 - 2.5.4 Several respondents directly linked their reduced sense of / or perception of safety with lack of staff presence. In general, there was a theme throughout submissions that supported the staffed programs as they provide respite and free child supervision and a perception that staffing was needed to supervise risky play and mitigate risk from antisocial behaviours.
 - 2.5.5 Benefits noted included increased access, flexibility to accommodate use by different age groups and the provision of a different play experience to standard playgrounds.
 - 2.5.6 Further issues and additional feedback included: suggesting the inclusion of adult exercise equipment, the option of a hybrid model (having both supervised and non-supervised opening hours), concern regarding the data collection methodology and the impact of increased noise levels on surrounding residents.
- 2.6 Key findings from the 160 intercept surveys and 2 weeks of observation data collected during the onsite fieldwork include:
- 2.6.1 The most common reported reason for visiting was the play equipment (being different to other playgrounds) and the trampoline.
 - 2.6.2 Most visitors felt either “very safe” or “safe” when visiting (75% of adults and 92% of children) and there was no significant difference in perceptions of safety when comparing data collected when staff were or weren’t present.
 - 2.6.3 41% of visitors indicated they preferred to visit the playground when staff were there, 32% said that they preferred to come when it is quiet, while 26% indicated that they had no preference and would come to the playground at any time.
 - 2.6.4 The majority of adults surveyed (44%) indicated that this was their first time visiting.
 - 2.6.5 The busiest time for visitors was 12.00pm on both weekdays and weekends. However, visitors with young children prefer to visit in the morning.
 - 2.6.6 Support for the extended opening hours was “strongly supported” or “supported” by 45% and 42% respectively (a total of 87%) and “opposed” or “strongly opposed” by a total of 4% (or 2% for each category).
 - 2.6.7 In summary, the trial resulted in greater site use, including from many first-time users. It also highlighted the need for site improvements for safety and accessibility (particularly at Skinners).



- 2.7 The two research methodologies each tell a slightly different story. In particular there is a difference in the perceptions of safety with the Submissions attributing safety to being reliant / dependant in having staff on site. While the intercept surveys found no significant difference in perceptions of safety when comparing data collected when staff were or weren't present.
- 2.8 The similar findings from the two methodologies include that the playgrounds are highly valued for their unique play equipment that has a different and natural aesthetic, the trampolines and the opportunities provided for play that is risky and has a connection to the natural world.
- 2.9 Limitations of the two methodologies are included in the Consultation and Stakeholders section of this report.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Notes the findings of the Adventure Playground Extended Open Hours Trial.
- 3.2 Recognises that the Skinners Reserve and St Kilda Adventure Playgrounds are much loved, respected, and valued community resources.
- 3.3 Notes that immediate work has commenced on addressing safety issues at Skinners Playground and that the trampolines that had to be removed from both playgrounds for safety reasons will shortly be replaced.
- 3.4 Notes that the draft budget 2022-23 includes an allocation of \$300,000 for rectification work at Skinners in 2022-23.
- 3.5 Reaffirms Council's Commitment to the Adventure Playgrounds, as noted in the Council Plan and 10-year financial plan that allocates \$3,445 million to invest in upgrading the Adventure Playgrounds at St Kilda and Skinners Reserve.
- 3.6 Adopts the following vision and design principles to frame and guide the upgrades, program review and consultation for the Playground upgrades.
- 3.7 The CoPP vision for Adventure Playgrounds is that they provide safe and welcoming spaces that honour diversity, build resilience and creativity, provide social connections, and encourage all children and families to maximise their development outcomes.
- 3.8 Endorses the following CoPP design principles to guide the consultation and planning for the upgrades. Adventure Playgrounds will:
 - 3.8.1 Facilitate risky (but safe) play
 - 3.8.2 Be accessible, safe and welcoming for all: meeting DDA compliance and CEPTED best practice
 - 3.8.3 Provide a connection to nature and the natural environment
 - 3.8.4 Place children and young people at the heart of design



- 3.8.5 Provide a unique aesthetic that recognises the past and is delivered for the future
- 3.9 Directs officers to commence consultation and engagement over 2022/23 on the planned upgrades informed by the above vision and principles, with a particular focus on hearing from children and young people.
- 3.10 Directs officers to also review the operations and program models for the Adventure Playgrounds over 2022 /23 to:
 - 3.10.1 Ensure programs and operations best deliver on the above vision for Adventure Playgrounds.
 - 3.10.2 Identify strategies and opportunities to increase the use of and participation at the Adventure Programs which considers the feedback from stakeholders regarding the extended opening hours trial.
- 3.11 Notes that the planned upgrades will cause disruptions and commits to relocate services to alternative facilities wherever possible for the duration of upgrade works.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

- 4.1 Two Adventure Playgrounds were established over 40 years ago. St Kilda Adventure Playground at Neptune Street, St Kilda and Skinners Adventure Playground at Dorcas Street South Melbourne.
- 4.2 These playgrounds were established to promote risky (but safe) and imaginative play and social connection for children.
- 4.3 There is evidence of the benefits of risky play and the development of children.
- 4.4 These much-loved community assets are at their end of life and require significant investment to upgrade the space and equipment.
- 4.5 Council has provided \$3.445 million for Adventure Playgrounds upgrades in the 10-year financial plan.
- 4.6 A recent safety audit of the facilities in December 2021 identified several risks which resulted in the in-ground trampolines at both sites being removed and made safe with wooden decking built over the spaces. Several of the larger infrastructure pieces at Skinners were also identified as unsafe and they have been sectioned off to prevent access. These trampolines will shortly be replaced.
- 4.7 Planned future upgrades at both sites will ensure the Adventure Playgrounds are available for use for generations to come, additionally short term works at Skinners are planned to make the site more usable prior to the upgrades occurring.



- 4.8 Both Adventure Playgrounds are open to the public when staffed programs or “drop-in” supervised play sessions occur. This means that normal opening hours for the playgrounds are:
- 4.8.1 20 hours per week at St Kilda
 - 4.8.2 34 hours per week at Skinners
- 4.9 Some community members have requested longer opening hours and access to the playgrounds.
- 4.10 During COVID restrictions, Council was able to open the Playgrounds for community use but were unable to operate programs. Council used this as an opportunity to conduct a trial of longer, unstaffed opening hours.
- 4.11 This trial ran from September 2021 to 30 January 2022, with the facilities opened during daylight hours for general community use. This meant that staff were on site with programs running for some of the time and at other times the playgrounds were open for general play and were unstaffed.
- 4.12 The Playgrounds returned to the previous operating model of only being open when staff were present from 31 January 2022.
- 4.13 Two key strategies were used to collect data on the Extended Opening Hours Trial: general feedback was sought via submissions through Council’s *Have Your Say* online engagement platform and onsite fieldwork research was undertaken.
- 4.14 Have Your Say submissions were invited from 17 January to 13 February 2022 on the following themes: accessibility, amenity, safety, benefits, issues and other. Forty submissions were received. The Adventure Playgrounds Trial of Extended Opening Hours Engagement Summary Report can be found at Attachment one.
- 4.15 Onsite fieldwork research was undertaken for two-weeks from 18 to 30 January 2022, comprising of intercept surveys and observations to record how many and when people used the sites. 160 intercept surveys were completed. Observations were focussed on recording the visitation at St Kilda due to low use at Skinners during the fieldwork period. The Field Work Findings: City of Port Phillip Adventure Playgrounds Research report can be found at Attachment two.
- 4.16 Key findings from the 40 Submissions received include:
- 4.16.1 The Adventure playgrounds are much loved and highly valued pieces of community infrastructure.
 - 4.16.2 There was some support for extended hours, but several comments referenced the need for corresponding supervised hours and supervised programs and to keep staffing during opening hours.
 - 4.16.3 Improved physical access (e.g., wheelchair access) identified by some respondents as a need and the deteriorating amenity was also noted by several respondents.
 - 4.16.4 Several respondents directly linked their reduced sense of / or perception of safety with lack of staff presence. In general, there was a theme throughout submissions that supported the staffed programs as they provide respite and



- free child supervision and a perception that staffing was needed to supervise risky play and mitigate risk from antisocial behaviours.
- 4.16.5 Benefits noted included increased access, flexibility to accommodate use by different age groups and the provision of a different play experience to standard playgrounds.
 - 4.16.6 Further issues and additional feedback included: suggesting the inclusion of adult exercise equipment, the option of a hybrid model (having both supervised and non-supervised opening hours), concern regarding the data collection methodology and the impact of increased noise levels on surrounding residents.
- 4.17 Key findings from the 160 intercept surveys and 2 weeks of observation data collected during the onsite fieldwork include:
- 4.17.1 The most common reported reason for visiting was the play equipment (being different to other playgrounds) and the trampoline.
 - 4.17.2 Most visitors felt either “very safe” or “safe” when visiting (75% of adults and 92% of children) and there was no significant difference in perceptions of safety when comparing data collected when staff were or weren’t present.
 - 4.17.3 41% of visitors indicated they preferred to visit the playground when staff were there, 32% said that they preferred to come when it is quiet, while 26% indicated that they had no preference and would come to the playground at any time.
 - 4.17.4 The majority of adults surveyed (44%) indicated that this was their first time visiting.
 - 4.17.5 The busiest time for visitors was 12.00pm on both weekdays and weekends. However, visitors with young children prefer to visit in the morning.
 - 4.17.6 Support for the extended opening hours was “strongly supported” or “supported” by 45% and 42% respectively (a total of 87%) and “opposed” or “strongly opposed” by a total of 4% (or 2% for each category).
- 4.18 In summary, the trial resulted in greater site use, including from many first-time users. It also highlighted the need for site improvements for safety and accessibility (particularly at Skinners).
- 4.19 The two research methodologies each tell a slightly different story. In particular there is a difference in the perceptions of safety with the *Have Your Say* Submissions attributing safety to being reliant / dependant in having staff on site. While the intercept surveys found no significant difference in perceptions of safety when comparing data collected when staff were or weren’t present.
- 4.20 The similar findings from the two methodologies include that the playgrounds are highly valued for their unique play equipment that has a different and natural aesthetic, the trampolines and the opportunities provided for play that is risky and has a connection to the natural world.



- 4.21 Limitations of the two methodologies are included in the Consultation and Stakeholders section of this report below.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 The consultation was promoted via Council's *Have Your Say* website and newsletter. Emails were distributed to the *Have Your Say* database and information about the trial and opportunity to provide feedback was shared with surrounding residents via a mailout. Posters were also available at both sites.
- 5.2 Demographic data collected from submission participants found that:
- 5.2.1 Over 50% (24 of 40) of respondents were from St Kilda
 - 5.2.2 80% (32 of 40) of respondents were residents
 - 5.2.3 65% (26 of 40) of respondents were from households that had couples with children
 - 5.2.4 60% (24 of 40) of respondents were women or female identifying.
- 5.3 Demographic data collected from the intercept surveys found that:
- 5.3.1 Most users (57%) reside in CoPP
 - 5.3.2 57% of users were 5-11-year olds
 - 5.3.3 40% of users were 5-year olds and under
 - 5.3.4 Almost half of the St Kilda site users had access to a backyard.
- 5.4 Limitations and considerations of the consultation methodologies include:
- 5.4.1 There is a bias in the age of consultation participants being predominately adults rather than children and young people.
 - 5.4.2 The submission process does not necessarily constitute a representative snapshot of the community, as people self-selected to participate.
 - 5.4.3 The trial took place during school holidays after long periods of Covid-19 lockdowns, which is likely to have increased use of the sites. Alternatively, during the 2-week intercept surveys and observations, there were some days of extreme heat which is likely to have decreased site use.
 - 5.4.4 In December 2021 fencing was erected at Skinners to prevent access to unsafe equipment, making much of the play equipment inaccessible. Site visitation was also low and so data collection focussed mainly at the St Kilda site.
 - 5.4.5 This consultation was specifically on the extended opening hours trial and is separate to future engagement that will be undertaken on upgrades to the adventure playgrounds.

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no legal or risk impacts arising directly from this report.



7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

7.1 There is no financial impact arising from this report.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

8.1 There are no environmental impacts to arise from this report.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

9.1 The extended opening hours trial provided an opportunity for community members to access and utilise the Adventure Playgrounds from dawn to sunset from 26 September 2021 to 30 January 2022, providing a safe and free play environment at a time when Melbourne was emerging from extended Covid restrictions.

9.2 The trial did result in greater site use at St Kilda but not at Skinners due to a large proportion of the Skinners site being out of action due to equipment condition.

10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

10.1 The Adventure Playgrounds and their planned upgrades aligns with:

10.1.1 The 2021-31 community Vision: *Proudly Port Phillip: a liveable and vibrant City that enhances the wellbeing our community.*

10.1.2 Council Plan Strategic Direction: Inclusive Port Phillip: A City that is a place for all members of our community, where people feel supported and comfortable being themselves and expressing their identities.

11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

11.1.1 Outreach programming, aiming to increase use and participation by children and young people of the available services in the City of Port Phillip (including but not limited to the Adventure Playgrounds) is already occurring and will continue to connect young people to each other and to appropriate services.

11.1.2 During 2022-2023 the following actions are planned:

- Conduct upgrade consultations with a focus on engaging with children and young people. Outcomes of consultation to be reported back to Council to confirm the upgrade scope and any service model considerations.
- Complete short-term improvements, including removal and replacement of end of life equipment at Skinners to allow use prior to upgrades occurring.

11.1.3 During 2023 – 2024 and 2024 - 2025 the upgrades will be completed (assumes one each year), service disruption management plans to be developed to support service delivery at alternative locations where possible.

11.2 COMMUNICATION

11.2.1 A communication plan to advise users and nearby residents of disruptions for future planned maintenance or upgrade works will be developed to ensure site



users are aware of the impacts and the alternative services and facilities they can access while works take place.

11.2.2 Extensive consultation and engagement will take place with the community, in particular children over 2022/23 on the planned upgrades.

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

12.1 No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any material or general interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

- 1. Adventure Playgrounds Trial of Extended Opening Hours Engagement Summary Report**
- 2. Field Work Findings: City of Port Phillip Adventure Playgrounds Research**