

**Thomas Street All Abilities and Ages Playground  
Community Engagement Summary:  
Gathering Ideas Phase**



*Community Information and Ideas Day, Sunday 31 March 2019*

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### The girl who outgrew the swing but not her disability

Posted by Jo Levett | 6 months ago

Abigail is looking forward to assisting in the design of the new All Abilites playground. Swings and Spinners, slopes not stairs on soft but firm surfaces.

♥ 3 Likes 💬 0 Comments

*Posted on Have Your Say*

## Background

### Community Playground

This document provides a summary of stakeholder and community feedback on the “Gathering Ideas” stage of developing a plan for a new All Abilities Playground at Thomas Street Reserve in Hampton. Bayside City Council’s Playground Improvement Plan 2015 - 2025 identifies the opportunity to create a regional-scale all-abilities playspace at Thomas Street (south) Reserve in Hampton.

The park is home to a much-loved wooden fort playground, which was developed via a community initiative in the late 1980s. The project used a model developed by American Robert Lethers, and was ground-breaking at the time in the capacity for residents to be actively involved in the funding and construction. Led by local mother Bridie Murphy, the project involved many local people coming together over a three day period to construct the playground. The playground opened in November 1989.

The playground has reached the end of its useable life. The play structure was built with a 20 year life span, and in November 2019 will be 30 years old, which is a great community achievement. However it has aged and has become difficult to maintain to contemporary Australian safety standards, with hand and head entrapments now appearing. The playground condition has declined to a point where repairs will soon outweigh the cost of a new playground. Issues with visibility, accessibility and character do not meet contemporary community needs and expectations.

### Inclusive Playground

The need for renewal raises the exciting opportunity to develop a new regional-scale playspace that can be enjoyed by all, including children with a disability. Bayside City Council is committed to being an accessible and inclusive community, where everyone can feel welcome and valued and where children of all different abilities can play together. Bayside currently has very little accessible play, but has a number of local schools catering for children with a disability. Play is a critical part of any child’s development. Accessible playgrounds draw people from a wide radius and become a source of community pride.

Replacement also raises an opportunity to introduce some age-appropriate exercise equipment to encourage seniors to be active at the park. Bayside has an ageing community, above the metropolitan average, and active ageing is particularly relevant to our community. The playspace will include opportunities to extend the socialisation in the park, by improving picnic and barbeque facilities. The overall playspace setting will be an appealing place for families of all configurations to enjoy gathering and being active outdoors.

### Concept Plan

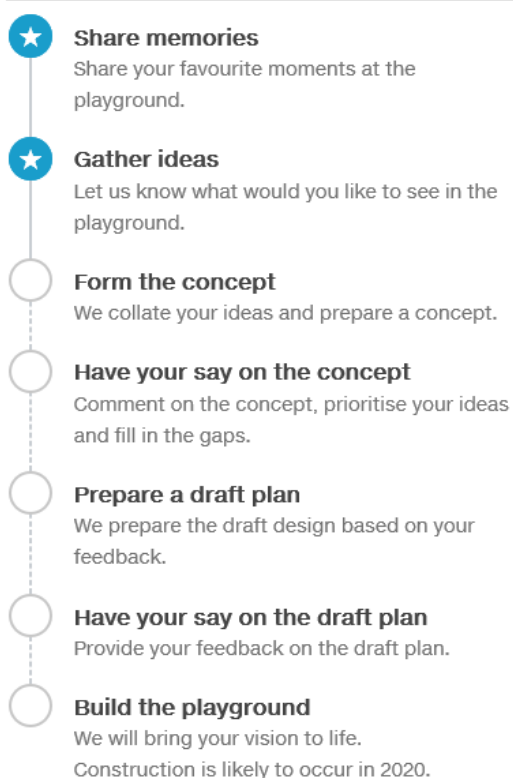
The information gained in this phase has been used to develop a Concept Plan, which shows a broad layout for the playground in the context of the park. The Concept Plan will then be further developed to form the draft playground plan, which will be the subject of the next major phase of consultation.

## Consultation process

### Consultation purpose

The overall consultation has been designed to provide local residents, park visitors and the broader community with the opportunity to provide input at a number of stages in the design, in particular at the **Gather Ideas** stage and the **Draft Plan** stage. This report summarises what we heard in the Gather Ideas phase.

### Timeline



### Acknowledging the past

In late 2018 there was an invitation to **share memories** on Bayside City Council's Have Your Say web platform and 16 people contributed, with memories of building the playground; or playing there as children, and subsequently bringing their own children. Examples of contributions:

#### my childhood and my children

Posted by [Renee Roszbach](#) | 3 months ago

I remember this being my favourite park as a child of the 80s/90s and loving all the different tunnels or hiding spots. I'm now a mother of two boys and we go to the reserve to play every week or two. My older son gets very excited whenever he sees the park.

♥ 1 Likes    💬 0 Comments

#### 3 generations have been involved

Posted by [Jenny](#) | 5 months ago

Father and two sons helped build it and now grandsons Henry 5 and Louis 3 love it. It is great to see kids develop skills and confidence. It was a great community activity. Bit tired now admittedly

♥ 2 Likes    💬 0 Comments



## Consultation methodology – what we did

Details	Activity
<b>8 members</b>	<b>Community Reference Group</b> - through a call for expressions of interest, run from November 2018 to January 2019, advertised through The Leader and Facebook, an eight member Community Reference Group has been established. The group provides advice to the project, and helps to spread the word about engagement and consultation opportunities through their community networks. A field trip was held to view accessible playgrounds around Melbourne on Sunday 24 March 2019.
<b>18 March – 28 Apr 2019</b> <b>60 contributions</b>	<b>Have Your Say</b> – a project page was established on Council's website in November 2018. The initial phase outlined the redevelopment project and was an invitation to post memories of the existing playground. The "gathering ideas" phase ran from Monday 18 March to Sunday 28 April and over 60 contributions were received.
<b>Sun 31 March 2019</b>	<b>Community Information and Ideas Day</b> – held at the park on Sunday 31 March 2019; advertised through Leader, Facebook, website and letterbox drop to neighbours.
<b>28, 29 March</b>	<b>School workshops</b> – held at: Hampton Primary School (3) Fri 29 March Berendale School Thursday 28 March Bayside Special Developmental School Thurs 28 March
<b>March, April 2019</b> <b>3 contributors</b>	<b>Playground Testers</b> – this project asks Bayside kids to tell us what they like about some existing playgrounds and what their ideal playground would look like. The playground testers program ran within the Have Your Say page on Council's website.
<b>Mar 2019</b>	<b>Bush Kinder</b> - An engagement session was held at Thomas Street playground with 16 four year olds from Bambini Kindergarten and three of their Educators.

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## Communications - how we spread the word

The opportunities to be involved have been widely promoted, through local traditional and social media. A sign on site has been effective in raising awareness of the project for visitors to the playground, in particular those living outside the municipality.

- **Let's Talk Bayside** - Article introducing the project in Council's quarterly newsletter, which is distributed to all Bayside households, in February 2019
- **On site signs** outlining the project and Have Your Say website, installed in the park December 2018
- **Facebook posts**
- **Advertisements** in the Leader
- **Articles in the Leader** – March 2019
- **Included on Bayside kindergarten open day flyer**
- **Letterboxing** - Residents of the surrounding streets were letterboxed to advised of the project and opportunity to nominate for Community Reference Group in Wed 12 Dec 2018; and were letterboxed to advise of the Community Information and Ideas Day on Wed 13 March 2019



*Examples of communications*

## Consultation findings – what we heard

### Workshops

In workshops in three schools and at the on-site consultation participants had the opportunity to “vote” on the types of activities they want to enjoy in a new playground. Participants were allocated sticky dots to place on a poster showing pictures of various types of activities.

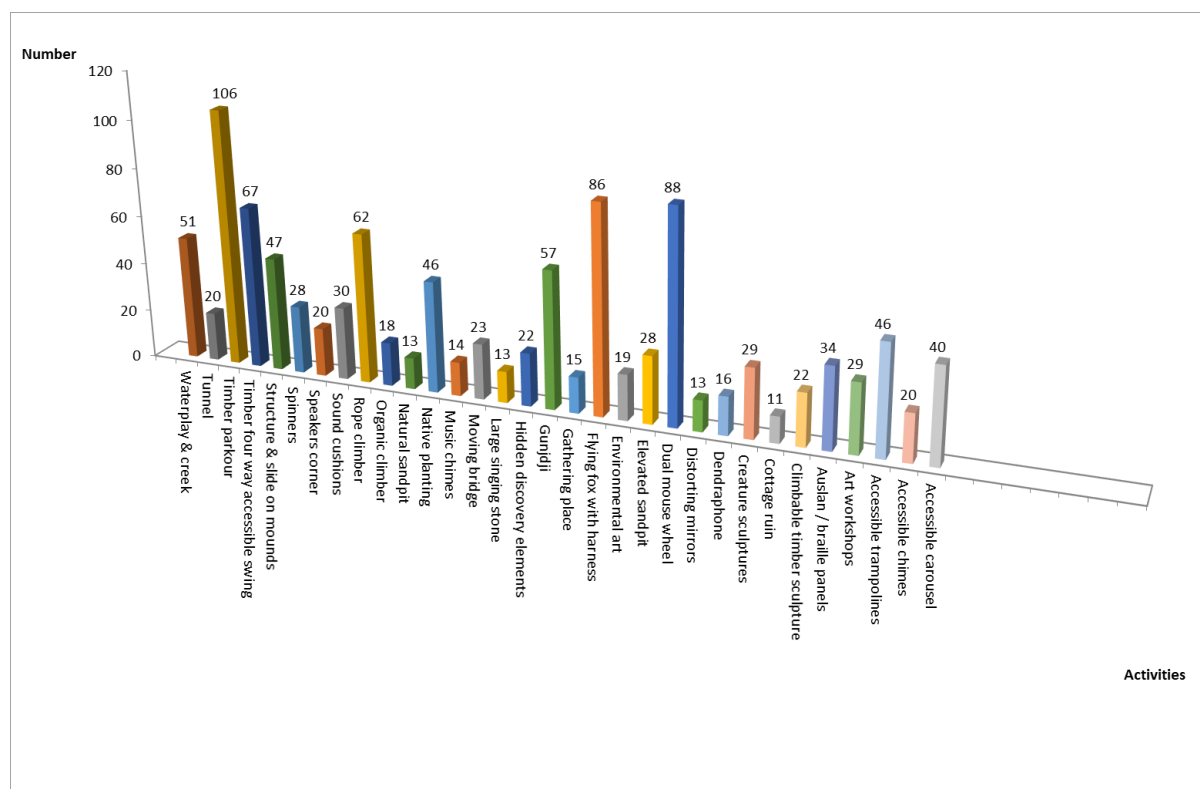


Diagram shows the combined scores from workshops held at Bayside special developmental School, Berendale School, Hampton Primary School, and an onsite information day.

After engaging with primary school children and staff and students from two special needs schools there is a clear picture of Thomas Street Reserve having a strong place in the consciousness of the children in the Bayside community. It is loved for its open spaces, shady trees, the fort, and a sense that it is unique in relation to other playgrounds in Bayside and nearby areas. There is a strong sense of wanting to maintain the “natural” feel both in terms of materials, planting and arrangement. The words that often popped up included exploration, adventure, imagination and storytelling.

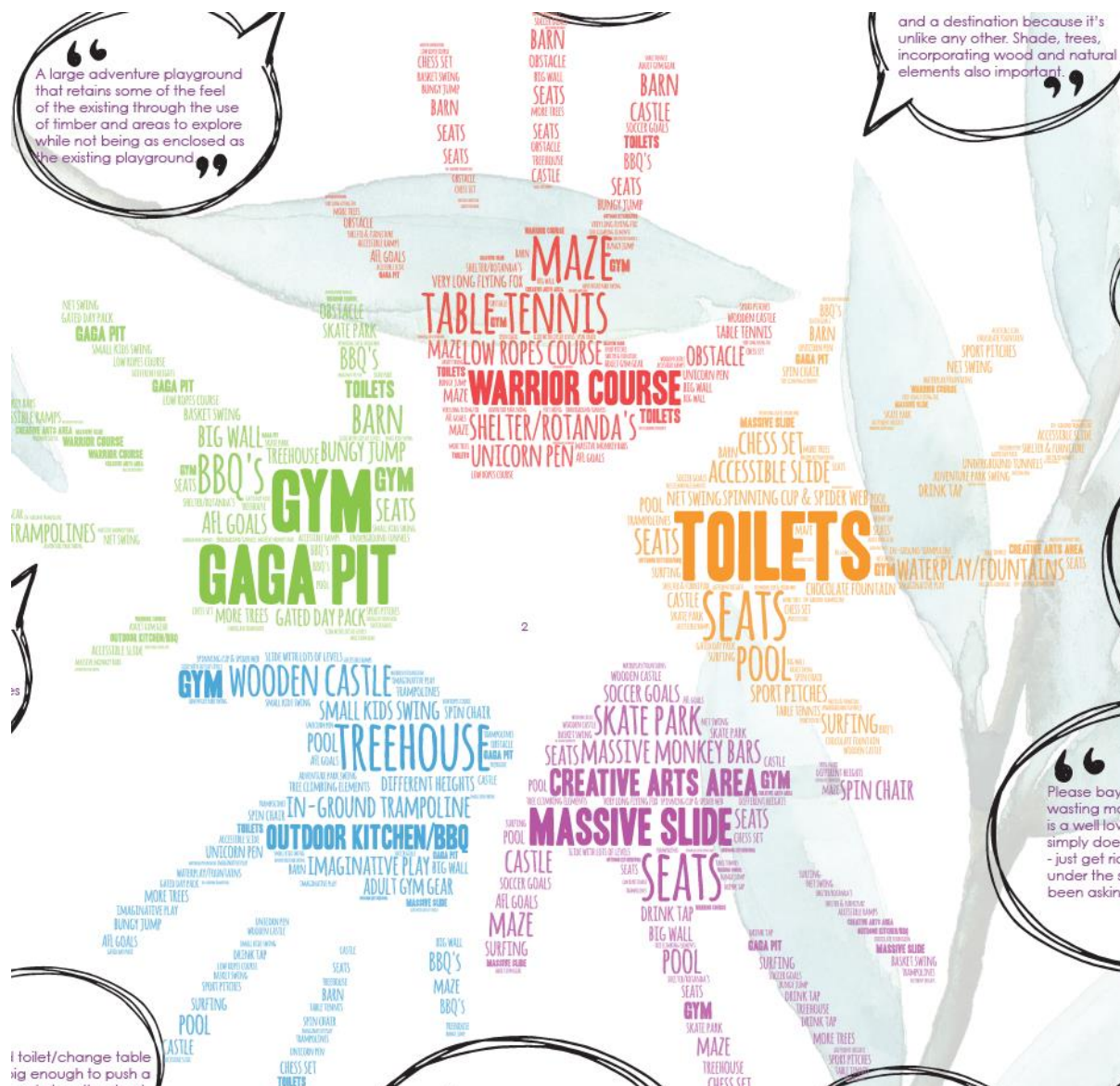
There is a great sense of wanting to have physical challenges where they can take risks, to have excitement, and to have some new experiences they cannot get in current local parks (mousewheel, parkour, range of climbing). This is balanced by a sense of wanting quiet spaces, shady areas and places just to gather or hang out. This was further complemented by need for open areas for informal games, tiggy, hide’n’sseek and even scope for bikes/trikes/scooters.

The elements identified as substantially lacking in the current provision included better toilet facilities, better access to the play experiences, and more shade and even shelter for inclement weather.

## Online feedback – Have Your Say

Over 60 contributions were received to Council's Have Your Say page to the question: *What would you like to see and do in a new all-abilities and multi-age playground here at Thomas Street Reserve?*

The graphic below is generated from the words received.



Key words received in contributions to Have Your Say page



Examples of comments received

## Online feedback – Have Your Say (cont.)



The landscape, natural feel and unique style of the existing provision were a common theme. Many loved not only the fort but the way it included and encouraged imaginative and explorative play. The desire to expand the provision to be more inclusive to those with a disability and for youth was prominent so that it becomes a better destination for whole of family groups.

In terms of equipment it was hoped for some retention of, or at least to be inspired by, the fort. There is a need for more accessible opportunities and for more challenging stuff for bigger kids. There was a desire for keeping it natural, and with natural materials, though there were a range of comments regarding rubber surfacing and organic materials like chip bark.

There were suggestions about “sport play” such as basketball rings, areas to kick a footy, skate/scooters and even tennis walls. The scooters will be accommodated by the proposed network path, and the sport opportunities can be included in provision in the re-imagined netball precinct, across Thomas Street. There was also some discussion about waterplay, but more as a cool destination in summer rather than a full on splash park.

There was a balance of comments regarding visibility with some loving the hidey place, and others concerned about the difficulty of supervising from one fixed vantage point. There was consensus that a fence is needed to the road and whilst some suggested a fully fenced toddler area others felt a dedicated space that was easier to supervise would suffice.

Shade and shelter are a priority so that inclement or hot weather does not unduly interfere with pre-arranged gatherings. It was also suggested these should be spread out so that there were vantage points around the playspace from which to supervise and that they could not be “claimed” by just one group.

And there was acknowledgement that the destination was also great for dogs but that a degree of better signage, waste bin provision and management (by both Council and dog owners) would be required. Many people spoke of using the path on the western side of the park to learn to cycle or to teach their children to cycle.

### **On-site drop in session**

The park is clearly well loved, and the original project to build the fort, and the memories of its use since, are held with some reverence. There is an acknowledgement that the playspace needs an upgrade, though there was hope some elements or aspects of it could be retained/re-used.

The natural feel and shady trees are loved, as is the sense of openness and expansive boundaries. There was a hope expressed that the playground development retained a natural feel, though there was some debate about the types of impact attenuation materials (rubber, wood chips) that could be used.

Local residents loved the idea of improvements but also wanted to be assured some form of natural buffer to the properties that back onto the park would be included/retained. There was a desire to see better connectivity with an expansion of the existing pathways to accommodate all the access points to the park.

### **Thomas Street Playground Community Reference Group**

The Community Reference Group includes local parents, including parents of children with a disability, neighbours to the park, and a member of the Bayside Healthy Ageing Reference Group. The parents of children with a disability have extensive experience and knowledge of the opportunities and barriers that children with additional needs face in being able to join in play with their friends. The group identified the following issues as essential:

- A range of activities of varying levels of challenge, where children of varying abilities can play side by side
- The group stressed the importance of accessible equipment being spatially integrated in a continuum of play, not isolated in a separate area
- Paths that are easily accessible by wheelchair and pram
- Supporting facilities including accessible car parking, accessible change facilities, and supportive seating
- Reiterated the “Can I get there? Can I play? Can I stay?” approach articulated in the NSW Government’s “Everyone Can Play” accessible play guidelines

### **Bayside Healthy Ageing Reference Group**

BHARG members are volunteers who provide Council with feedback on a range of issues including services, events, strategic plans and programs specifically to engage and promote healthy ageing in our community.

- A field trip to an existing senior play area in Hoppers Crossing confirmed that the type of equipment and activities, which focus on balance and flexibility, are of interest to local seniors
- Seniors are keen to ensure some functional separation of the seniors adults and childrens play areas to avoid children accidentally running onto older adults, who are more at risk of falls, without being in a separate corner



*Bayside Healthy Aging Reference Group members inspect a seniors playground at Central Park, Hoppers Crossing*

### **Summary of Feedback Received**

- There’s a strong attachment to the wooden character of the current play structure and a wish to see this character taken forward
- The explorative nature of the current fort structure is really valued, though there are concerns from parents about sightlines
- Kids want to climb and bounce
- Activities for older kids and teenagers are needed

- There's a wish for more unstructured nature play to compliment the structured playground
- Shade and shelter are highly valued
- The open, natural character of the park is a great compliment to the playground and is used in many ways
- There is interest in creating a circuit walking path around the park from older adults, from people whose main form of exercise is walking, and from parents with children learning to cycle.

## Conclusion - What this means for designing the new playground

### Imagination and exploration

Within the feedback, common reference is made to Thomas Street being a place for imagination and exploration. The castle/fort evokes an other-worldly sense of storytelling play, the clustered trees around the site offer destination for nature play and shady retreat, and the wide open spaces allow for all sorts of open ended activities. The opportunities are broad and not too overdeveloped, maintaining a natural feel in an increasingly densely urbanized area. The intent is to broaden the range of explorative and imaginative play and recreation opportunities, whilst maintaining and further complementing the natural feel.

### Unique and diverse

The playspace will exhibit both natural and built form and within that there are many opportunities for a diversity of play experiences. It is intended to explore the feasibility to retain actual elements of the existing castle/fort. Whilst maintenance has become a big issue (as is lack of accessibility) there are some elements of the fort that could be salvaged and re-used as complements to the new facilities.

### Graded challenges

Those new facilities will include a diverse range of physical challenges. Rather than age specific (as there is no such thing as a universal six-year-old) these opportunities will be presented as graded challenges so that users can approach at a level they feel comfortable with and then progress to more challenging options as they feel comfortable, inspired and able.

When we are intending to create a playspace that is inclusive the aspiration of trying to satisfy everyone is genuinely challenging. Every aspect within one playspace, no matter how aspirational, may not please everyone. The critical thing to remain committed to, regardless of the physical provision, is that everyone can get there if they want to, everyone has the associated amenities they need, and everyone can engage in a range of activities... and that ultimately everyone feels a sense of belonging and welcome.

## Engagement Evaluation – improving how we engage

The amount of response to the “gather ideas” phase of consultation indicates strong interest in the playground project, and provides some clues as to how to most effectively engage on the next major stage of consultation, the draft playground plan. The Community Reference Group meetings, and the onsite information and ideas day provided rich information and the opportunity for the project team to “dig a bit deeper” and gain a greater understanding of the aspirations and concerns. Workshops within the schools allowed children to voice and explore their own ideas. Follow-up with the participating schools with the draft playground plan will provide further information to the project and will confirm the value of participation to the students. Sandringham Secondary College will be approached for involvement in the

next round of consultation. The current playground has a wide catchment of visitors, and ensuring that information continues to be provided through onsite signs and via social media, including pages which focus on young families, will be vital.

In future communications, emphasising that the whole of the playground is to be rebuilt will be essential, to ensure that community members and playground users understand the scale of the change, the opportunities it brings and the opportunities to help shape the playground plan.

