



MANAGING OUR URBAN OPEN SPACES

REPORT ON WHAT WE HEARD

The ACT Government is committed to maintaining, protecting and enhancing our urban open space network.

It is responsible for over 6,800 hectares of public urban open space and adjoining facilities, including urban parks, sportsgrounds, public cemeteries, dog parks, play spaces, skateparks, outdoor exercise equipment, street and park furniture, paths and green infrastructure such as trees, shrubs and grasses.

Feedback was sought on the draft Urban Open Space Land Management Plan from 24 May to 15 August 2023.

The draft Plan sets out the ACT Government's vision for sustainable urban open spaces that enrich the lives of our community, improve the amenities of our urban environment, and provide a range of social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits.

It provides an overarching framework and consistent direction for managing Canberra's urban open spaces and replaces five existing and outdated plans:

- Woden and Weston Creek's Urban Parks and Sportsgrounds
- Belconnen's Urban Parks, Sportsgrounds and Lake Ginninderra
- Inner Canberra's Urban Parks and Sportsgrounds
- Tuggeranong's Urban Parks and Sportsgrounds
- Urban Open Space and Public Access Sportsgrounds in the Gungahlin Region.

The community was invited to have their say on the draft Plan to help shape the future management and use of our public open spaces and to ensure the plan reflects the needs of a growing and diverse community.

THE CONVERSATION

Online Survey

An online survey was opened during the consultation period on the YourSay Conversations website for the community to provide feedback on the draft Plan. A total of 112 surveys were completed. Members of the community and stakeholders were also invited to provide feedback via written submission, email and social media. A total of 26 written submissions were received.

Community pop-up session

Five community pop-up sessions were held in Belconnen, Tuggeranong, the City, Woden and Gungahlin to promote the consultation and allow the community to ask questions on the draft Plan and share their thoughts.

We spoke to approximately 225 people across the five sessions.



WHO WE ENGAGED

As the draft Urban Open Space Land Management Plan covers the entirety of the urban footprint of Canberra, the consultation targeted the broader Canberra community, including residents and groups representing community, volunteers, sporting, environment and conservation.

The ACT Government's YourSay Conversations website was used for the consultation.

The consultation was promoted via temporary signage and pop-ups, the ACT Government's Our Canberra newsletter, social media, the City Services website, and an email to key stakeholders. The email went to groups such as local residents' groups, Community Councils, community associations, sporting groups, disability sector groups, multicultural and women's groups, elderly groups and environmental groups.

Over 85% of respondents described their relationship with our urban open spaces as a local resident, while only 8% identified as volunteers. The top five places of residence for respondents were Belconnen (23%), Tuggeranong (17%), Inner North (16%), Woden (13%) and Gungahlin (7%).

A variety of community stakeholders were engaged and presentations were provided during the consultation to:

- Transport Canberra and City Services Accessibility Reference Group
- Gungahlin Community Council
- Belconnen Community Council
- Inner South Canberra Community Council
- Woden Valley Community Council
- Weston Creek Community Council
- Molonglo Valley Community Council
- Tuggeranong Community Council
- LandCare ACT
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Elected Body

Given the close relationship between urban open space management and planning outcomes, the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (including the Office of the Conservator of Flora and Fauna), and National Capital Authority were consulted on the draft Plan.



WHAT WE HEARD

Feedback from the survey and the submissions indicate that the draft Urban Open Space Land Management Plan is well supported and underscores the need for significant improvements in land management in Canberra's urban open spaces.

The 26 written submissions received recognise the challenges and opportunities associated with ongoing planning, management and maintenance of urban open spaces. They highlight that densification, Canberra's growing population and climate change require further planning to find a balance between the social, environmental and environmental needs of the community.

The feedback confirms that the community supports the vision, objectives and key focus areas with:

- **broad support for the strategy** – 69% either fully or mostly support the draft Plan
- **broad support for the vision** – over 70% either fully support or mostly support the draft Plan's vision
- **the twelve key principles are on the right track** – 65% either fully support or mostly support the principles
- **strong support for the key focus areas** – respondents rated their full support for the four key areas as:



While there was strong support for the creation of a single plan, and a welcome focus on protecting and enhancing urban spaces and the twelve key principles, feedback suggested the Plan needed a range of improvements and several key insight themes were consistently raised throughout the consultation process. These are outlined below and in further in the following pages.

- **Changes to mowing practices for weed management and native grassland conservation.**
- **Volunteer and community contribution and improving the Plan's approach to "shared stewardship" and collaboration.**
- **Improving the Plan's approach of using differing types of urban open space to identify values.**
- **Giving greater emphasis to the role of urban open spaces for community wellbeing and resilience and responding to climate change.**
- **Ensuring greater focus on ecology and biodiversity in the Plan.**
- **Increasing the emphasis on culture and heritage in the Plan.**



Key insights from the community

While there was strong support for the creation of a single plan, and a welcome focus on protecting and enhancing urban spaces and the twelve principles, feedback suggested the Plan needs to:

- address the Land Management Plan requirements as outlined in the *Planning and Development Act 2007*
- clarify links between the ACT's Planning Reform and the District Strategies
- outline practical strategies for achieving the objectives including timeframes and defining responsibilities in a transparent format that promotes accountability to the community
- clarify within the management services section on relevant agency responsibilities for areas covered in the Plan
- include monitoring and evaluation frameworks, as well as clearer and more detailed maps
- include more detail on the governance, compliance and enforcement processes
- demonstrate how Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) principles will be integrated into land management to enhance water quality, as urban stormwater management holds a significant place in the broader landscape of urban planning.

There was considerable feedback on changes to mowing practices for weed management and native grassland conservation.

- A decrease in mowing activity could be achieved by planting endemic grasses, trees and shrubs, which would also benefit the volunteer groups trying to regenerate local open spaces.
- Review mowing guidelines and management controls to ensure stricter adherence to mowing maps to mitigate impact to no-mow areas, improved mowing equipment hygiene to reduce cross-contamination and enhanced training for staff.
- The Plan should include a section on grassland management as well as detailed action plans for particularly sensitive reserves, as preserving and restoring grasslands are integral to promoting and maintaining biodiversity
- Provide further information on weed management strategies, including prioritisation, identification, treatment, monitoring, follow-up activities, and coordination with other agencies.
- Provide guidance for volunteer use of chemical and mechanical weed management strategies within the urban open space including a review into alternatives instead of chemicals for weed control.

Another key theme focused on recognising volunteer and community contribution to the management of our urban open spaces and improvements were suggested to the Plan's approach to "shared stewardship" and collaboration.

- Greater funding and support are required to sustainably manage the Urban Parks and Places volunteering program to undertake meaningful and timely engagement with the 89 groups registered under the program and encourage more people to become involved in volunteering.
- Involve volunteers in developing site management plans to leverage their local knowledge and provide them with clear communication as well as support mechanisms and strategies for working in the urban open space.
- List the various volunteer groups involved in caring for Canberra's urban open spaces to recognise their contribution and make it easier to join a volunteer group.



- Explore a bush etiquette campaign to educate the community on ecological values and expected behaviours to engage all users to become carers and stewards of our urban open spaces.
- Reduce or remove the effort needed for volunteers to apply for a land use permit for regular community events that have already received approval for an activity.

Feedback recognised the approach of using differing types of urban open space to identify values, however, suggested some improvements.

- The use of core values has simplified and diminished the individual values of each site by referring to them only in general terms.
- Provide greater clarity on what management services will be provided, as current definitions are open to interpretation.
- Undertake a review of the ecological / environmental core value of some of the urban open space typologies.
- Add in a climate change / adaption core value to mitigate impacts and guide positive action for design and maintenance planning.
- Give more attention to the valuable role of verges and medians as their street trees contribute to the urban open space. Implement enforcement related to parking on verges.

There were numerous comments on giving greater emphasis to the role of urban open spaces for community wellbeing and resilience and responding to climate change.

- Incorporate a heat management strategy and heat maps to show the increasing importance of urban open spaces in managing rising temperatures and identify where shade opportunities are needed by suitable trees or shade structures.
- The use of public spaces to promote people's health and wellbeing should be an objective rather than a strategy.

It also was acknowledged that urban open spaces offer potential habitat that contributes to the rich biodiversity of the city and as such ecology and biodiversity should have a greater focus in the Plan.

- List "biodiverse" as a key principle for managing urban open spaces and add protecting and enhancing critically endangered ecological communities as a management service.
- Strengthen the recognition of the existing role urban open space areas play in protecting critically endangered species and ecosystems, as well as other rare or threatened flora and fauna within the ACT.
- Include up-to-date data on protected and threatened species in the ACT.
- Improved alignment between Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate and Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate to consolidate and strategically target resources for ecological restoration in urban open spaces.



Increase the emphasis on culture and heritage in the Plan recognising that many sites within areas designated as urban open spaces contain significant value.

- Identify areas within urban open spaces where restoration of Aboriginal cultural and ecological values should be prioritised and detail the management approach to protect and restore these sites, given the significant overlap between these values.
- Include mechanisms that incorporate the traditional ecological knowledge of the Ngunnawal people, which can provide valuable insights into sustainable land management practices.
- Incorporate practices such as controlled burns and sustainable resource utilisation which can contribute to ecological health and preservation of Ngunnawal heritage values.
- Educate volunteer groups on the cultural value of their areas to support ongoing management.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Feedback from this engagement was used to refine the draft plan which is currently being reviewed by the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services prior to being finalised.

Key Timings

24 May 2023 – Consultation begins on the draft plan

16 June 2023 – Belconnen pop-up outside Belconnen Arts Centre

22 June 2023 – Tuggeranong pop-up at Anketell Street (Laneway to Lake Tuggeranong)

23 June 2023 – City pop-up at Garema Place

1 July 2023 – Woden pop-up at Southlands in Mawson

6 July 2023 – Gungahlin pop-up at Gungahlin Place Playground/Hibberson Street

15 August 2023 – Consultation closed

Spring 2023 – Feedback from consultation reviewed and draft plan revised

December 2023 – Draft plan referred to Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services for review

14 February 2024 – What We Heard report released [We are here]

Early 2024 – Begin developing Implementation Plan for Urban Open Space Land Management Plan

Mid 2024 – Final Urban Open Space Land Management Plan released and implementation of the plan begins

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK****130+**

we received 138 items of feedback in total via YourSay and email

112

a total of 112 people completed the YourSay survey

26

a total of 26 submissions were received via email from organisations and individuals

300

we spoke to around 300 people at our five pop-up information sessions and via 10 stakeholder presentations

2,700+

we received 2,736 page views on YourSay

1,180+

a total of 1,187 people visited the YourSay page

8,000+

we reached 8,965 people via ACT Government Facebook and Twitter

69%

people engaged were supportive of the engagement process