The background image is a photograph of an outdoor swimming pool area. In the foreground, the edge of a swimming pool with blue lane lines is visible. To the left, there is a concrete bench. In the middle ground, a large, open-sided gazebo with a dark roof and blue interior panels stands on a paved area. Behind the gazebo, there are several large, mature trees with dense green foliage. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

# DICKSON SWIMMING POOL FORECOURT TEMPORARY UPGRADE

## MID-PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT

FEBRUARY 2020

### Acknowledgment of Country

The land on which we live and work is aboriginal land. Aboriginal people have lived on the Australian continent for at least 65,000 years. Non-aboriginal people have lived in Australia for just 230 years.

As a practice, we are working towards an understanding of that fact, and how it might inform our relationship to the land, its original people, and the work that we do. We acknowledge that we have a long way to go. Our studios are located on Ngunnawal and Whadjuk country in Canberra and Perth respectively.



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### DOCUMENT CONTROL

Revision	Description	Date of Issue
1	Mid-project Evaluation Report Draft	24.01.2020
2	Mid-project Evaluation Report	6.02.2020
3	Mid-project Evaluation Report (revised)	12.02.2020

# CONTENTS

1. PROJECT BACKGROUND	4
2. METHODOLOGY	7
3. KEY FINDINGS	8
4. PROGRESSIVE ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS	9
5. SITE PHOTOS & OBSERVATIONS	14
6. RECOMMENDATIONS	18

# 1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

## INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) ACT Government initiated a temporary upgrade project of the Dickson swimming pool forecourt. The upgrade follows community engagement undertaken as part of the urban renewal of Dickson Section 72, which identified the improvement of the pool forecourt as a top priority. The improvements respond to requests for new landscaping, shade, seating, bike parking and pavement art.

The purpose of the temporary upgrade is to give people a first hand experience of their suggested changes, engage with the community to better understand their needs, and collect feedback about preferred long-term improvements for the forecourt.

EPSDD conducted an initial consultation with the key stakeholders to understand the key issues and needs. Stakeholders included representatives from the Dickson Aquatic Centre, Friends of Dickson Pool, Dickson Town Team, Northside Community Services, Dickson Residents Group, Downer Community Association and North Canberra Community Council.

Messages from the initial stakeholder consultation for how the pool forecourt could be re-imagined, included:

- Installing a water feature, seating and shade.
- Mitigating the urban heat.
- Attracting people to stay and use the space, including catering for younger people.
- Improving the garden beds, which currently provide low amenity.
- Improving safety and movement for pedestrians and cyclists to minimise movement conflicts and reduce accidents occurring at the east of the pool forecourt.

PLACE Laboratory was engaged by EPSDD to develop a landscape concept plan and conduct the post occupancy place audit and user survey.

Project Time Line





## SITE CONTEXT

The forecourt addresses Cowper Street extending east to the pool's main entry. The site is adjacent to two car parking areas, which are heavily used by pool visitors and people visiting the Dickson shops. A main pedestrian crossing connects the forecourt to the Dickson shopping area and a bus stop. The forecourt is not only the arrival point for the swimming pool, but also a node along an important east-west pedestrian and cycle link, facilitating significant pedestrian and bike traffic to and from Dickson shops, schools, surrounding residential area and car parks.

Dickson swimming pool is one of the most popular swimming pools in Canberra. Many people come to use the pool from far northern and southern suburbs. The parkland setting of the pool with ample greenery is a strong draw card for visiting the pool. During the swimming season, the open space within the swimming pool compound is frequently used by family groups for social gatherings, birthday parties, and celebrations.

The forecourt is predominately paved in concrete. Prior to the upgrade, the central garden bed was covered in small shrubs in bad condition. Six Chinese Elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*) trees were severely dwarfed to shrub size and were unable to provide any shade for pedestrians. The lack of shade in combination with the extensive concrete paving made the forecourt almost uninhabitable during hot summer, the peak season for pool usage.

The photos on the right were taken before the upgrade project.



Project Site



Central garden bed



The path is frequently used by cyclists, especially family with young children. The forecourt forms part of this cycle and pedestrian connection.



Main pedestrian link to the Dickson shops with pool entry building in the background.



## SUMMARY OF THE DESIGN INTERVENTION

The forecourt upgrade was opened to the public in November 2019. The key design interventions included:

- Four transplanted mature trees
- Seating deck with synthetic turf
- Lawn
- Landscaped gardens
- Raised planters
- Shade umbrellas
- Moveable tables and chairs
- Hammock chairs
- Bike racks
- Bike pump
- Decorative night lighting
- Street library
- Pavement art
- Skate edge
- Ice cream cones ( traffic cones decorated for children's play)
- Flood night lighting

The photos on the right are taken from the forecourt after the installation.

Dickson swimming pool staff provided daily support by placing the moveable seats, cones, street library and hammocks out each morning and packing them away in the afternoon. They also watered the planters.



Hammock chairs set in the mulched area



Large umbrellas, moveable chairs and decorated traffic cones



Pavement art



Old woman sitting on a chair with her dog



Bike air pump



New bike racks



Ground cover plants



Raised planter

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The Dickson swimming pool forecourt upgrade project is based on Jahn Gehl's action-oriented planning method of delivering change by establishing new behaviours and seeking feedback on users' experience. It uses a 'Test, Measure, Refine' approach to evaluate possible upgrades with maximum effect and lowest risk to the community.

The post occupancy evaluation for Dickson swimming pool forecourt upgrade has been undertaken using a combination of online surveys (ACT Government YourSay website), stakeholder meetings, on-site interviews, photo documentation and on-site observational studies. The aim of the evaluation is to understand the needs, perceptions and behaviours of the users of the forecourt in regards to the temporary interventions. The outcome of the evaluation is to formulate a set of recommendations for the long term improvement based on the findings.

The on-site surveys and observational studies were scheduled in two phases during the school holidays and school terms, and on weekdays and weekends in order to observe different use patterns.

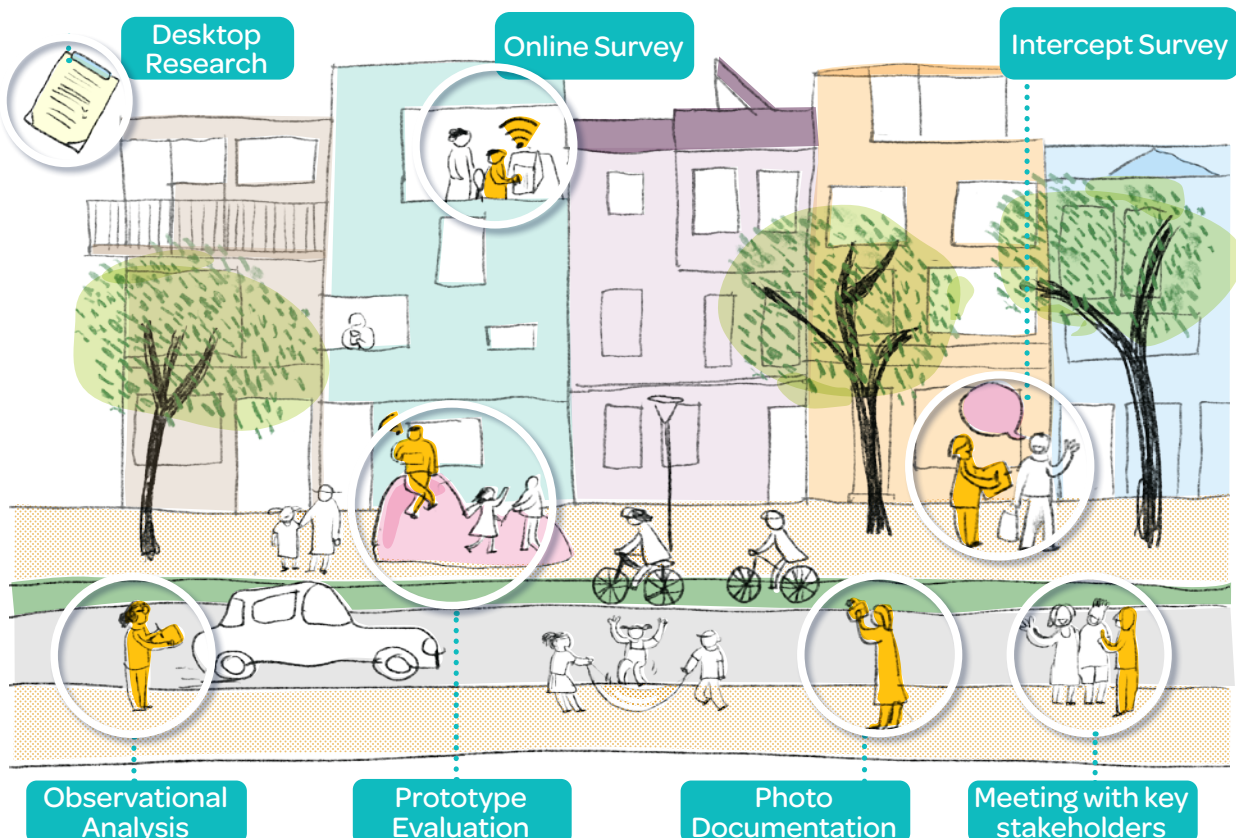
In total, four on-site study sessions were scheduled. The completed sessions were carried out on the 14th and 18th January 2020. A second round will be undertaken on the 22nd and 25th February 2020. Additional short site observations were conducted on various weekdays and weekends.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The evaluation was designed to explore the following specific objectives:

- Understand the users' needs in the forecourt.
- Understand the perception of the project interventions.
- Evaluate the success of the interventions.
- Collect suggestions for long-term improvement.

A suite of study tools were used during the project period to assess the project outcome and obtain community feedback



## 3. KEY FINDINGS

### KEY FINDINGS

- 79% participants supported the upgrade project. Due to lack of the explanation from the participants, there was no specific reason of non-support. However, during the site interviews, it was noticed that some participants chose 'don't support' due to the less finished appearance of the project outcome, rather than against the need to improve the forecourt.
- The user groups of the forecourt were diverse, including pool users from a broad area, car park users, passers-by coming from surrounding neighbourhoods and Dickson shops, students from nearby schools, visitors of adjacent health facility, etc.
- People would travel relatively long distances to use the swimming pool, including from the outer northern and southern suburbs. Many people said the parkland setting of the pool was the draw card for visiting the pool.
- Shade was the determinant factor of the usability of the forecourt. Many participants mentioned the importance of shade either through trees or shade structures.
- Trees and gardens ranked the highest on both project interventions and recommendations for future improvements.
- Large number of pool users were families with young children. Every now and then some family groups were waiting in the forecourt for other members of their group to arrive before entering the pool.
- 65% people showed interest in using the forecourt during non-swimming season. Through the conversations with survey participants, the general impression was people would like to see the forecourt become a proper urban park with ample greenery and opportunities for play, relaxing and eating.
- There was a split view about accessing food and drink in the forecourt. 55% people thought food would benefit the extended use of the space, 45% considered this as unnecessary or concerned about the potential of littering.
- Many people used the seating furniture. The seating deck was mostly used by young people and children, while moveable chairs were used by all age groups. The moveable chairs were more flexible for groups, as people could easily move them into shaded areas and configure them into arrangements that suited them. People often used the big concrete footings as tabletop and seats suggesting a lack of table settings and seats of varied heights.
- One comment suggested the metal skate edge became too hot under the sun and should not be located on the edge of the seating deck.
- Hammock chairs were the most popular furniture, especially among children.
- The provision of play opportunities for children of different ages groups, especially for younger children, was frequently mentioned during the site interviews. Suggestions included natural play, climbing, swing, etc.



## 4. PROGRESSIVE ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

This section summaries the data captured from the online surveys and on-site interviews. The same questionnaire was used for both online and on-site surveys, however, the on-site survey provided opportunities to encourage explanations from the interviewees and verify the online survey results.

From November 2019 to January 2020, 86 survey responses were collected, including 59 online survey results and 27 on-site interviews. The number of surveys collected was influenced by the atypical weather and hazardous air quality conditions experienced this summer due to extreme bushfires surrounding Canberra.

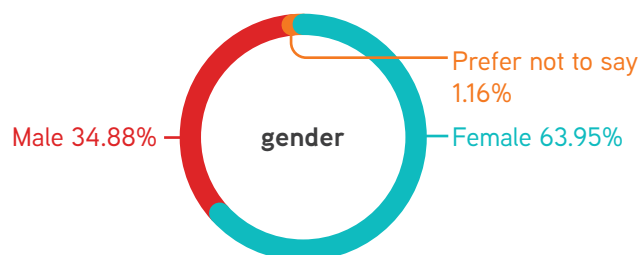
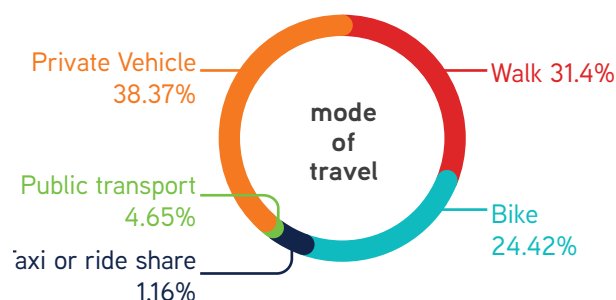
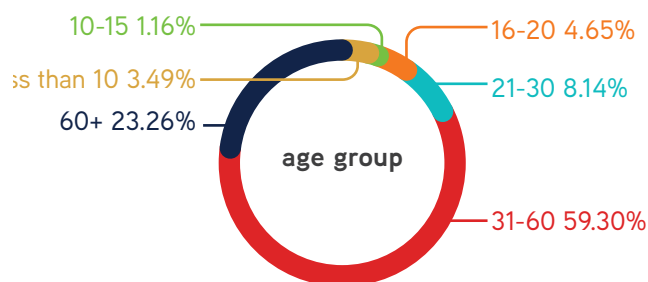
### WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY?

The majority of visitors of the site were pool users who came from the northern suburbs. Although the online survey didn't provide detailed information of the exact area of origin, it was discovered during the on-site interviews that people would travel long distances to use the pool facility from far northern and southern suburbs. The parkland setting with ample greenery is the draw card for people visiting the pool.

The participants were asked to select an age group on the survey form according to the age brackets of less than 10, 16-20, 21-30, 30-60 and 60 plus. The age brackets were determined by the general behaviour patterns associated with different age groups. For example, according to some urban design studies, adolescents and young adults often prefer informal seating arrangements, while people over 60-year-old may need higher seats due to restricted movement in joints.

Most survey participants were in the age brackets of 30-60 and 60 plus, although a significant proportion of pool visitors were families with young children. While it was difficult to engage with children during site interview, some parents provided insights into children's needs during the one-to-one interviews.

Private vehicles were the predominant mode of travel. Perhaps due to the high proportion of family visitors with children and a large amount of swimming gear to carry.



## WHY DID PEOPLE VISIT THE POOL FORECOURT?

49% of participants were visiting the swimming pool. However, a considerable number of participants were passing through the site on the way to other places, such as Dickson shops, nearby residential areas, and other services.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE RECENT IMPROVEMENTS AT THE DICKSON POOL FORECOURT?

79% of participants supported the upgrade works.

It was noticed during the interviews that most people were not aware of the project intention. Some participants thought the project outcome looked very temporary before being informed that the project was a temporary improvement.

## WHICH ELEMENTS WORK WELL FOR YOU & DO NOT WORK FOR YOU?

Participants were asked to choose the design elements that had worked or not worked for them.

The umbrellas, transplanted trees, greenery, hammock chairs and bike facilities ranked the highest. Shade, greenery and playful elements for children were highly valued by the participants from the one-to-one interviews.

Insights into people's preferences and why they liked or disliked certain elements was obtained through conversations during the one-to-one interviews.

Below is a summary of the survey findings with additional information captured through on-site conversations.

### Trees and umbrellas

Shading elements scored the highest on both online and on-site surveys. Trees and umbrellas ranked the highest among all the design interventions, because of the shade they provided. Most people said they would like to have more trees.

### Deck with synthetic grass

There was a split opinion about the deck, which scored high in both liked and disliked questions. Although people generally supported informal seating options, synthetic surface was not preferred by many, due to aesthetics and high temperature under the sun. Through the conversation with interviewees the use of synthetic material was the main reason for dislikes.

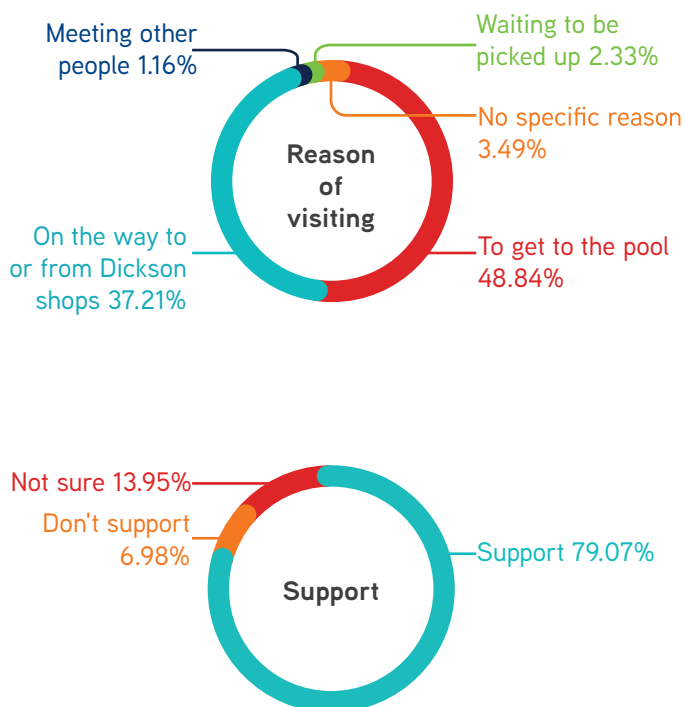
One comment suggested the metal edge along the deck became too hot under the sun and should not be located near an area for seating or play.

### Gardens

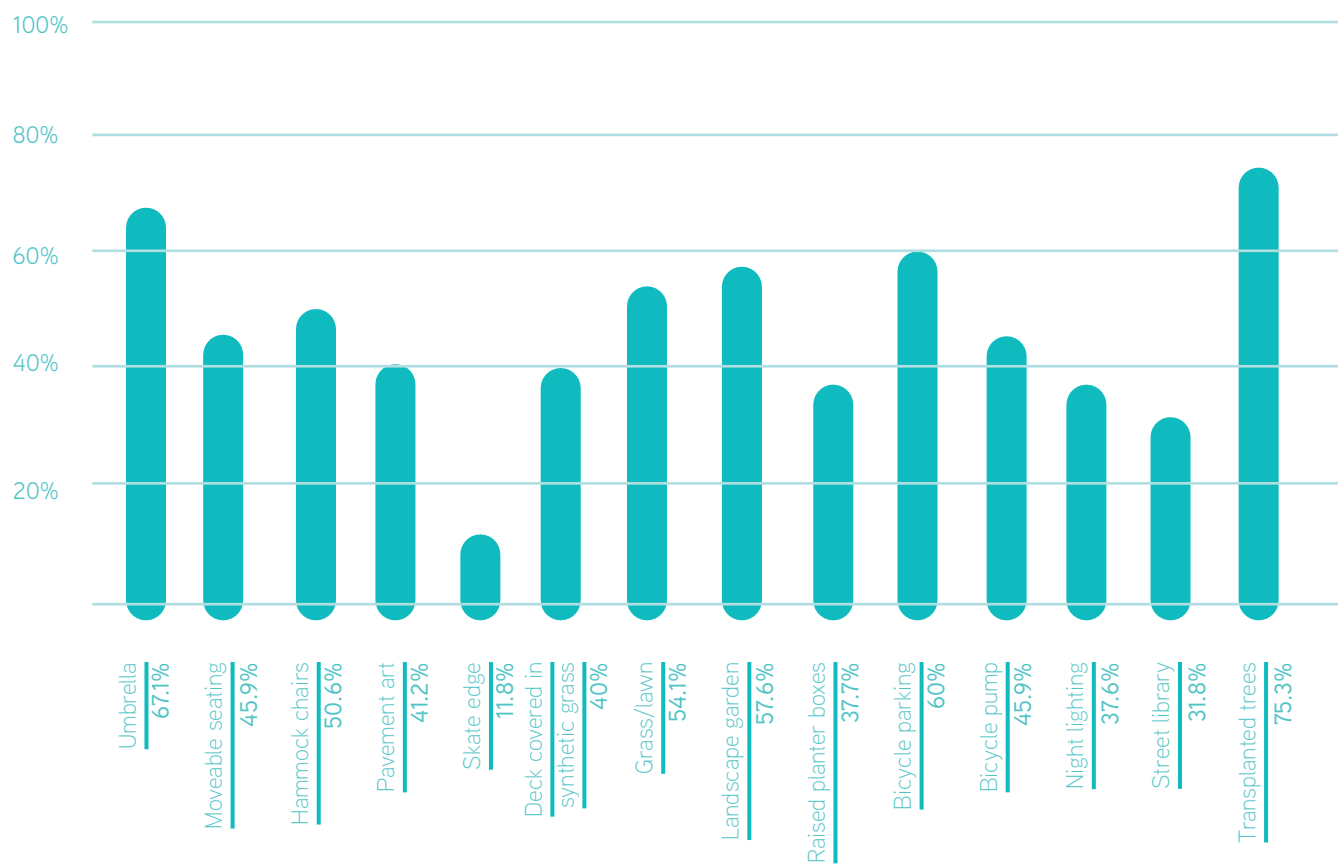
Most people highly supported having more greenery in this area, because of the relaxing effect. However, some concerns were raised regarding long term maintenance commitment from the government.

### Hammock chairs

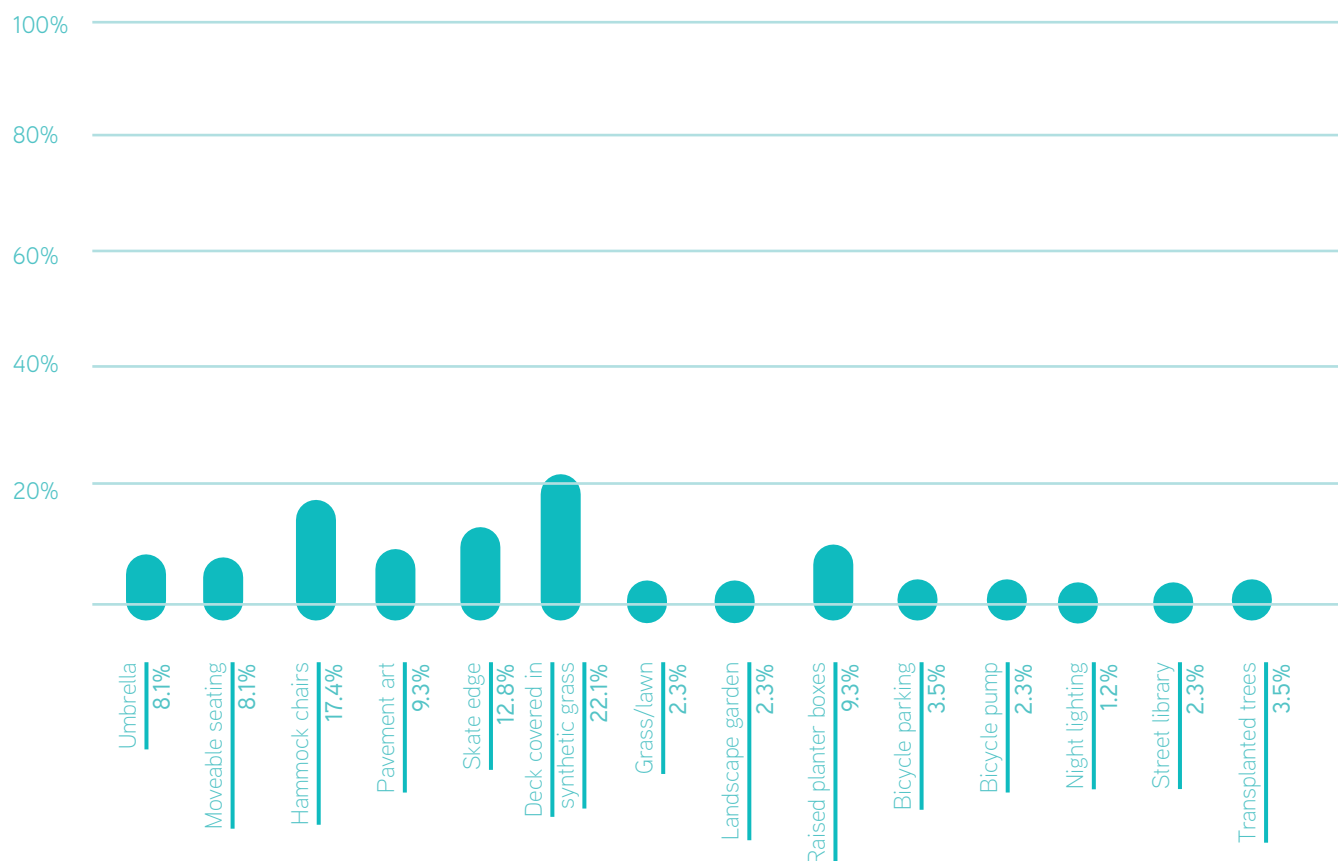
Most people supported the use of hammock chairs as something for children to be engaged with. Many people of various ages said they would like to see more playscape in this area. Concerns about the hammocks included the robustness and maintenance, lack of varied play opportunities for children of different ages, and conflict with the adjacent garden beds contributed to most of the not supported.



## Which elements work well for you?



## Which elements do not work well for you?





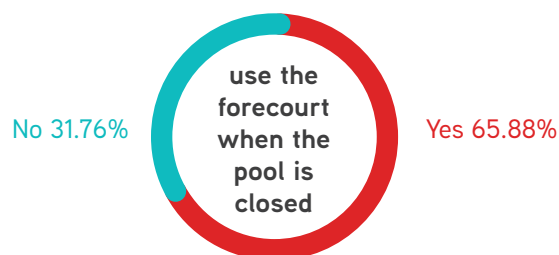
## WOULD YOU LIKE ACCESS TO FOOD AND DRINK FACILITIES IN THE FORECOURT?

54% participants would like to have food and drink available in the forecourt, especially if the forecourt could be used during the non-swimming season. However, some concerns were raised about littering and competing with the food kiosk in the swimming pool.



## WOULD YOU USE THE POOL FORECOURT WHEN THE POOL IS CLOSED?

The opinions splitted on visiting the area outside swimming season. Most people driving from other suburbs to use the swimming pool were not interested in using the forecourt outside the swimming season. A considerable number of people would like to see additional uses if the area was to be upgraded. One parent mentioned her teenage boys liked gathering with friends in the forecourt and using the furniture even when not using the pool.



## DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW ELSE THE POOL FORECOURT COULD BE IMPROVED IN THE FUTURE?

Suggestions collected from the surveys and conversations are summarised in the following key topics:

### Shade and Greenery

- Increase shade during summer through trees and shade structures.
- More greenery, such as trees and gardens.
- Increase the use of natural materials.
- Create a garden-like space.
- Introduce more native and pollinator-friendly plants.
- Implement climate responsive landscape design, such as drought tolerant landscaping.
- Reduce heat island effect by increasing permeable surface and reducing hard paving.

### Play

- Provide more play opportunities for children.
- Designated play area for children and ensure safety.
- Diverse play opportunities for different age groups.
- Playful elements for grown-ups.

### Diverse uses

- Consider the diverse needs of the different people using this area including elderly, children, high school students, cyclists, and pool users.
- Provide more park furniture, such as drinking fountain and benches.
- Create a sociable and appealing place for teenagers.
- Consider alternative uses of the swimming pool during cold seasons, such as yoga centre and indoor pool.
- Provide a variety of furniture to accommodate both grown-ups and children.

- Provide affordable pop up food and drink to enliven the space (but not fast food).

### Car park

- Improve safety of the pedestrian corridor through the carpark by providing a raised pedestrian crossing aligning with the existing footpath in the car park.
- Create visual or physical barriers to ensure safety of the play area in the future.
- Enforce car park management and prioritise the pool users during swimming season.
- Remove car park entirely to create a pedestrian and children friendly space.

### Management

- Commitment to a consistent management and maintenance regime to ensure the long-term success of the space.

### Design Process

- A transparent and genuine engagement with the local community to ensure the success of the long-term improvement.

## 5. SITE PHOTOS & OBSERVATIONS

Multiple site observation sessions were conducted during the first phase of the study, including two-hour-long sessions on the 14th and 18th January 2020, and additional brief site visits. The intention was to record the physical condition of the site and study the patterns of use in the forecourt.

During the site observations, the forecourt was relatively quiet with a steady pedestrian flow arriving to the pool or passing through the site.



Almost every child arriving to the pool played on the hammock chairs.



Families passing the forecourt often stopped by to use the hammock chairs.



Some people used the seating area to wait for someone using the health services nearby. Shade was an important factor influencing people's decisions on where to sit.



The forecourt was kept clean and no fixed or moveable furniture appeared to be vandalised.



People used the concrete umbrella footings as tables and high seats.





Students gathered in the forecourt after school.



The new bike racks were not highly used compared to the existing bike racks. The bike pump is not very visible and needs signage.



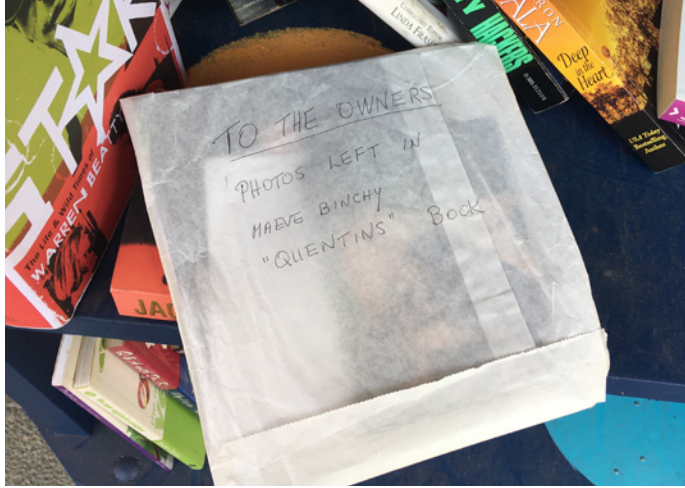
The existing bike racks were well used due to their close proximity to the pool entry, people's historical awareness of them and being located under the shade trees.



Ground cover plants were small and sparse. The transplanted trees and lawn were in good condition.



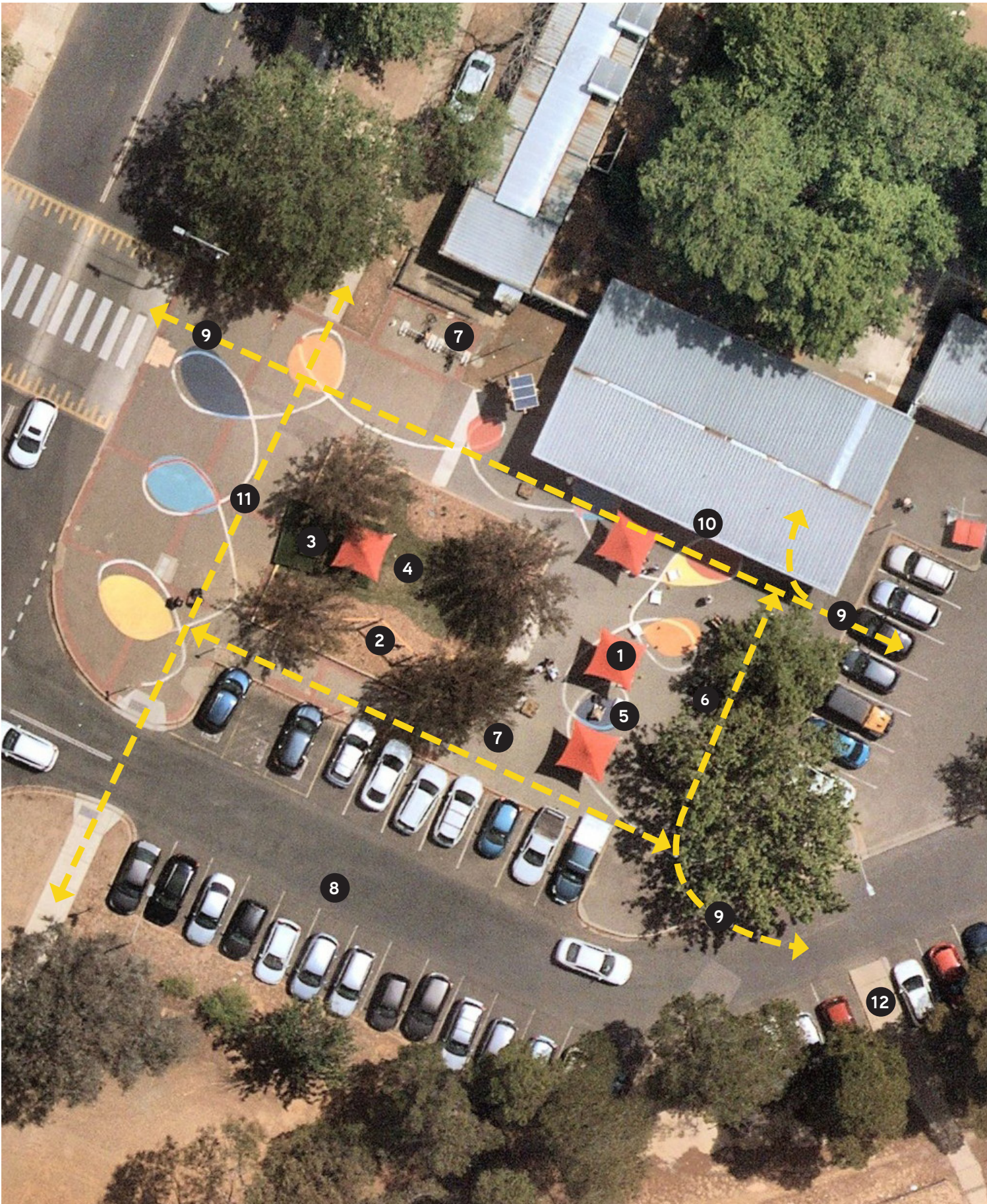
The book cart was well used. Pool users and people passing by stopped to check out books.



A note left by a community members on the book cart indicates a caring community.



Aerial image of the forecourt with annotation







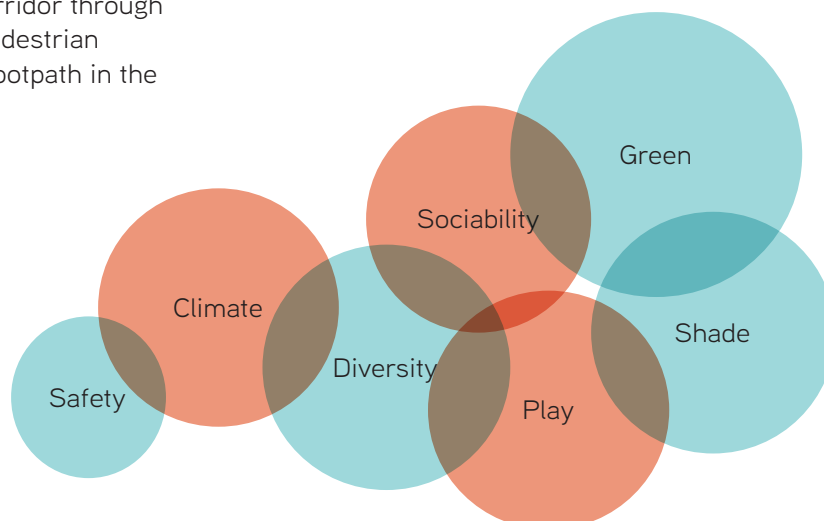
1. **Seating area:** both pool users and people passing by the site used the moveable chairs while waiting for others or to take a rest. Some students also used the chairs for group gathering after school hours. Shade was an important factor for people to decide where to sit. It was noticed that people often use the umbrella footings as tables and high seats, indicating a lack of table sets and seats of varied heights and styles.
2. **Hammock chairs:** the hammock chairs were the most popular furniture especially among children and teenagers. Almost every child arriving at the forecourt used the hammock chairs while parents usually waited nearby. Some young adults also used the hammocks during the site observations. The hammocks had been replaced twice due to damage caused by high usage.
3. **Deck:** deck with synthetic grass was used occasionally by young people and nearby office workers eating lunch.
4. **Lawn:** the lawn was frequently used as a path to access the hammock chairs but rarely used as seating space. The small size of the lawn and conflicting uses may have discouraged people from sitting on it.
5. **Painted traffic cones:** occasionally young children played with the cones to make interesting arrangement. They appeared to be less used during the study sessions.
6. **Existing bike racks:** most cyclists used the shaded bike racks near the pool entry.
7. **New bike racks and air pump:** the new bike racks were underused during the study sessions due to their locations and lack of shade. The bike pump was not very visible from distance.
8. **Car park:** the car park was highly used by both pool users and people visiting Dickson shops.
9. **Arrival point:** the majority of pool users arrived into the forecourt from three entry points connecting to the car park.
10. **Street library:** pool users and passers-bys stopped to checkout out the books. It appeared that community members had been donating books to the library as well as borrowing them.
11. **Main path:** the main circulation routes through the forecourt area shown in the yellow dashed line.
12. **Pedestrian access:** the existing footpath was heavily used by pedestrians and cyclists to access the forecourt.



## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The outcome of the evaluation is to formulate a set of recommendations for the long-term improvement based on the findings. Based on the survey outcomes and site studies, preliminary design recommendations for the future improvement are:

- The forecourt needs to be a high quality public space with good public amenity and a strong green theme, such as a green urban park with opportunities for relaxation, social gatherings and play.
- The forecourt design needs to be underpinned by climate responsive approaches ensuring long-term success of the space. Drought tolerance, urban heat reduction and greater biodiversity needs to be fully addressed.
- Amenities should respond to diverse community needs and be attractive to elderly people, children, teenagers, parents, local residents, pool visitors, and office workers in Dickson. High quality greenery, weather protection, fixed and moveable seats and tables, play elements for children and bike facility are essential for the functionality of the space, especial during non-swimming period.
- Service infrastructure needs to be upgraded to support the function of the forecourt including water (for drink fountains, cleaning and irrigation) and power (for safety and ambient lighting, and external GPO's for pop-ups and events).
- Play opportunities for children need to be incorporated in the landscape design. Nature based play will respond to the aesthetic preference of the local community.
- Perceived safety issues need to be addressed at the interface with the car park.
- Improve safety of the pedestrian corridor through the carpark by providing a raised pedestrian crossing aligning with the existing footpath in the car park.
- Provide playful elements for everyone to enjoy. Playfulness is an effective way to enliven a place.
- Shaded seating and table settings are critical for the usability and success of the forecourt. Style and heights of the seats need to consider different user groups, such as people with reduced mobility, children, and group gathering.
- Moveable seating and tables are more flexible for diverse needs, size of groups and maximising the use of shade throughout the day.
- Improve the visibility, layout and landscape setting of bike racks and air pump. A comfortable and appealing landscape setting will improve the usability of the general public amenities.
- New elements should encourage positive social interactions. Ideas include moveable seating, playful elements, colour, street library, notice board and games.
- Foster a sense of community through a collaborative design process. The local community members frequently use the forecourt and have great attachment to the space. A collaborative design process with the local community members will ensure the design meets the community needs, builds trust between the government and the community, and support the long-term success of the space.
- Providing pop-up food in the forecourt should be considered with impacts on the pool's kiosk business.
- Maintenance is fundamental for the success of the space. A comprehensive maintenance schedule should be developed and followed through.





Artist impression for concept design

