

Social, Picnic and Gathering Spaces

Why This Activity Matters

Social, picnic and gathering spaces support everyday socialising, family and intergenerational gatherings, outdoor cooking, community connection, informal recreation and small community events. In a culturally diverse and increasingly apartment-based city, these spaces extend the role of parks beyond movement and play by providing places to meet, celebrate, rest and spend time together.

Key Needs, Gaps and Pressure

Community engagement identifies shade, seating, toilets, water, safety, lighting and cleanliness as threshold conditions for use. Demand is also increasing for larger-group gathering and outdoor cooking opportunities, particularly in areas where private backyards are limited. Provision is not measured solely by the number of BBQs or shelters. A functional gathering node requires accessible pathways, adequate shade, seating, waste management, supporting amenities and an overall setting that can accommodate use without unreasonable conflict or unsustainable maintenance burden.

Not every local park requires a BBQ, shelter or toilet. These facilities should only be provided where community demand, park function and servicing capacity justify them.

Small or constrained parks may perform better by providing shaded seating, flexible lawn and informal gathering opportunities, while complete and serviced picnic nodes should be concentrated in suitable district and citywide parks.



Council's Strategic Position

Council will provide a hierarchy of social settings, ranging from everyday seating and small gathering nodes in Local Parks to complete, serviced picnic and gathering destinations in District and Citywide Parks, and selected Foreshore Parks where their role, size, access and setting support broader social and gathering functions. Provision will respond to community diversity, group size, expected dwell time, park typology, access, utilities, maintenance capacity and surrounding amenity. Priority should be given to areas experiencing significant population growth, higher-density living and limited access to private outdoor space.

Social spaces will be co-located with complementary uses such as play, walking routes, scenic destinations and flexible lawn where this improves activity, surveillance and shared use. Noise, waste, smoke, crowding and residential impacts will be managed through appropriate siting, design and operational measures while supporting legitimate community use.

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Objectives

Objective	Strategic Intent
Support inclusive social life	Provide welcoming settings for different ages, abilities, cultures and group sizes.
Improve comfort	Prioritise shade, shelter, seating, water and accessible paths at higher-dwell locations.
Match provision to hierarchy	Concentrate serviced picnic infrastructure where demand, utilities and maintenance can support it.
Enable flexible use	Design nodes and lawns for everyday use and temporary activities without compromising core park functions.
Manage impacts	Address waste, noise, crowding, fire and residential interfaces through appropriate placement and operations.
Improve asset performance	Use durable, maintainable infrastructure and cluster services efficiently.

- Technical and Desired Standards of Service Baseline**
- Prioritise substantial shade over major picnic and gathering nodes through canopy and, where necessary, built structures.
 - Provide continuous accessible paths to picnic tables, shelters, BBQs and amenities.
 - Include accessible tables and seating on durable, non-slip surfaces with appropriate clearances.
 - Incorporate BBQ facilities within complete picnic nodes consistent with park typology and where supported by servicing and maintenance capacity.
 - Provide drinking fountains with bottle-refill capability, bins sized to use, and toilets where supported by the hierarchy, dwell time and servicing assessment.
 - Consider temporary power, water and event-supporting infrastructure where intended use, capacity and management requirements justify it.
 - Maintain clear sightlines, CPTED alignment and safe separation from primary movement routes.

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Strategic Priorities

Planning Priorities

Prepare a hierarchy-based social and gathering infrastructure plan incorporating seating, picnic nodes, BBQs, shelters, water, toilets and flexible lawns.

Prioritise complete, shaded and accessible gathering nodes in higher-density and culturally diverse communities with limited access to private outdoor space (including within new parks delivered in growth areas).

Assess the performance of existing gathering destinations and identify priority opportunities to improve shade, accessibility, toilet and water access, waste management, seating diversity, safety and condition.

Apply the park hierarchy and Desired Standards of Service to guide the provision of BBQs, shelters and other higher-order embellishments, ensuring facilities align with the intended function and role of each park.

Incorporate culturally inclusive and intergenerational design that supports a diversity of users, activities, group sizes and gathering styles.

Use operational and performance data to monitor use, waste, noise, surface condition and residential impacts and to guide future investment, design refinements and management responses.

Improve inclusive access through physical or digital methods while ensuring consistency with conservation, cultural, archaeological and operational requirements.

Engage Traditional Custodians and other relevant communities where relevant to interpretation, naming, design and stewardship initiatives.

Measures of Success

- ✓ Increased number of higher-order gathering destinations that provide accessible paths, shade, seating, water and supporting amenities as a complete package.
- ✓ Improved user satisfaction with shade, seating, cleanliness and gathering opportunities.
- ✓ Reduced repeat complaints or operational issues at high-use nodes.
- ✓ Increased diversity of users and group sizes accommodated without displacement of everyday park use.

Action Plan Cross Reference:

Sections 9.1.3, 9.1.5 and 9.1.6, particularly Actions FI3, FI5, FI6, SM1, SM2 and AP1.