



Gasworks Arts Park Upgrade

# Engagement Summary Report

December 2023



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# Introduction

## Project background

Gasworks Arts Park is a walled park bordered by Pickles, Graham, Richardson and Foote Streets in Albert Park. Access gates are located along each street. The gasworks site operated as a gasworks foundry from 1871 until its closure in 1971. The site is contaminated with the by-products of gas manufacture. Contamination management is required to ensure that Gasworks Arts Park can continue as a public park into the future.

South Melbourne City Council purchased a portion of the site in 1979 while the rest of the land remained crown land. In 1982 South Melbourne City Council were appointed Committee of Management over the crown land portion of the park, and in 1984 preparations were commenced to transform the site into a park.

Council is planning upgrades to the park to meet the needs of community while ensuring that this open space retains its unique 'bushland character'.

Upgrading the park will ensure that it can continue to support a diverse range of uses and functions while providing a safe, welcoming environment that supports the physical, social, and mental health of the community.

The design work for the upgrades was split into different processes, outlined below.

### **Draft Park Plan (April 2022)**

Council presented the Gasworks Park Draft Park Plan to the community to explore key themes important to the future concept and playground design work.

### **Draft Playground Design (June 2023)**

Council presented a draft plan for a new playground to the community. The feedback provided by the community helped to inform the design, which now include:

- Fencing to separate the playground from the market plaza.
- Access to the playground via entry gates.
- Large shade umbrellas, positioned over the junior play structure and swings, to address heat emanating from the wall.
- Monkey bars, an additional climbing net, and a shop front to the junior play structure.
- Rocks and logs have been adjusted to create more meaningful play opportunities for children in the nature-play zones.
- Two sculptures, designed by a local Gasworks artists, to be located in the nature-play areas of the playground.

## Draft Concept Plan (August 2023)

The draft concept plan was tested with the community in this engagement process. The design sought to:

- Retain the existing character unique to Gasworks Arts Park.
- Celebrate the cultural and historic setting of the park.
- Retain the bushland character of the park, provide biodiversity and relief from the surrounding urban settings.
- Respond to the Contamination Management Framework by ensuring adequate surface cover to contaminated soils, preventing access to these soils by park users and accommodating ongoing uses of the park.
- Improve how the park functions across its multiple commercial and recreational uses.
- Ensure the park caters for all ages and abilities.
- Celebrate the influence of art and the artist community by retaining existing artwork and providing opportunities for additional local art contributions.

Key features of the draft concept plan included:

- Adjustments to pathways to improve access for all users and maintain the bushland experience.
- Revised plaza layout to activate the space for market and non-market days.
- New 'nature play' sculpture pieces.
- 3,700m<sup>2</sup> of new garden bed and 550 new trees proposed.
- Removal of tree and shrubs that have been identified to be in decline.
- Upgrades to furniture, lighting, signage and drainage.
- Establishing a planted buffer to the new school site.

This report explores how Council engaged the community about this draft concept plan, and the feedback we collected.

## What we set out to achieve

This engagement process was designed to:






- present the draft concept plan, and
- gather both specific and general feedback from the community on the draft design.

# What we did

Between 31 August and 24 September 2023, Council delivered a range of communications activities to let the community know about the draft concept plan and collected feedback via a mix of different activities.

## Communications activities

In order to get the word out about the draft plan, we did the following:

	<b>Project posters in the park</b> x4	Posters promoting the engagement process were placed at strategic locations around the park to inform park users how to have their say.
	<b>Postcards to community</b> x4,000	Postcards were printed and delivered to local area to inform residents and businesses of the engagement process and how to have their say.
	<b>Newsletters</b> x2	Council included information about this project in the monthly 'DiverCity' newsletter, as well as the 'Help Shape our City' newsletter. These newsletters go to subscribers interested in Council news, or people who want to know about current engagement projects, respectively.
	<b>Social media posts</b> x4	Council utilised social media to promote the engagement process as well, with posts on Facebook (posts and stories) and Instagram.
	<b>'Have Your Say' website</b>	Council's dedicated engagement page, 'Have Your Say' had a project page for the Gasworks Arts Park Upgrades, with information on previous engagement, the draft concept plan for feedback, project timelines, contact details, and opportunities to engage.



## Engagement activities

A range of engagement activities were undertaken during this project:



### Online survey (Have Your Say website)

An online survey was available on the 'Have Your Say' engagement website. This survey collected demographic details about participants, and asked for community feedback on:

- What was good about the draft concept plan?
- What was not good in the draft plan?
- What was missing from the draft plan?
- What wall type should be along the western path?



### Interactive mapping (Have Your Say website)

An interactive mapping tool was also available online via the 'Have Your Say' website. The interactive map allowed people to see and vote on other participants' posts, as well as place their own markers on the map indicating where they would like to see the following:

- Bins
- Seating
- Art
- Lighting
- Improved safety



### Pop-ups in the park

Pop-ups were delivered in the park to engage with park users who may not otherwise contribute via the website – particularly dog walkers, and people visiting the farmers market. The pop-ups were delivered on the following days:

- Tuesday 12 September, 4pm to 6pm.
- Saturday 16 September, 9am to 11am (Market Day).

People were invited to hear about the draft plan, complete a paper-based survey, or plot their comments on a printed map.



### Stakeholder Meetings x3

Meetings were held with stakeholders groups who have a strong interest in the draft concept plan. The meetings included time to cover the key feature of the concept plan, and to hear concerns and ideas from the group. Stakeholders included:

- The 'Friends of Gasworks' community group
- Gasworks Arts Park Operations and;
- Local school students.

## Reach and participation

### Reach through communication activities

Activity	Reach	Insights
Social media posts	1,767	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facebook provided nearly twice the reach of Instagram posts (1,107 v 660 respectively).</li> </ul>
Newsletters	2,579	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More than two thirds of recipients opened this newsletter, and almost one in eight recipients clicked through to the 'Have Your Say' website.</li> </ul>
'Have Your Say' website	682 views 374 visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most visitors (78%) came to the website directly, or via a search engine.</li> <li>8.4% of visitors were referred from social media.</li> <li>The draft Concept Plan was downloaded 160 times.</li> </ul>

### Participation by engagement activity

We heard from **more than 180 community members** through this engagement process. A break down of participation by activity is included below:

Activity	Participation	Insights
Online survey (Have Your Say)	36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants identifying as 'woman or female' were twice as likely to complete an online survey than those identifying as male.</li> </ul>
Interactive mapping (Have Your Say)	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All participants identified as 'woman or female'.</li> </ul>
Pop-ups in the park	130	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants engaging in pop-ups were significantly less likely to have engaged with Council in the past 12 months.</li> </ul>
Stakeholder meetings	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A mix of students, teachers, Friend Group members and Gasworks Arts Park staff</li> </ul>

# Who we heard from

## Demographics

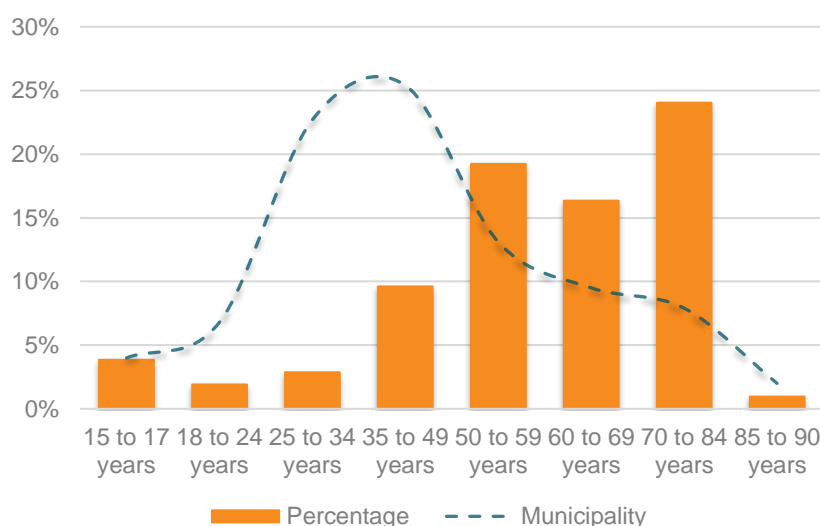
Between 31 August and 24 September 2023, we heard from more than 180 participants about the draft concept plan. Via our online and face-to-face surveys, we collected demographic details about the people we engaged.

### Age

In total, 80 participants provided their age to us through online and face-to-face activities. The ages represented are skewed towards older community members when compared to 2021 census data for the City of Port Phillip.

The highest proportion of participants were aged **70 to 84 years** (24 per cent).

Additional engagement did occur with school-age children, however age was not recorded during these stakeholder meetings.

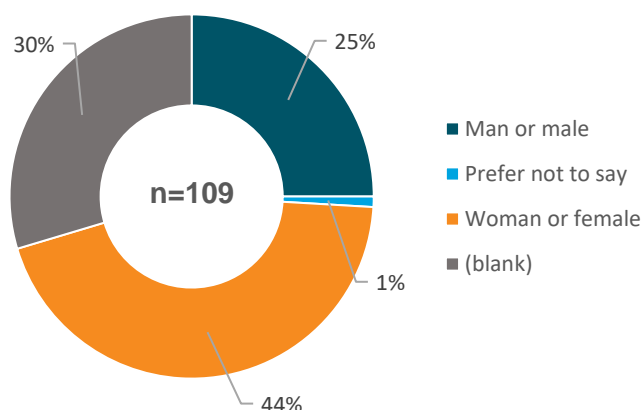




## Gender

**Nearly twice as many participants identified 'female' (44 per cent) compared to 'male' (25 per cent), however, one in three participants did not provide gender information.**

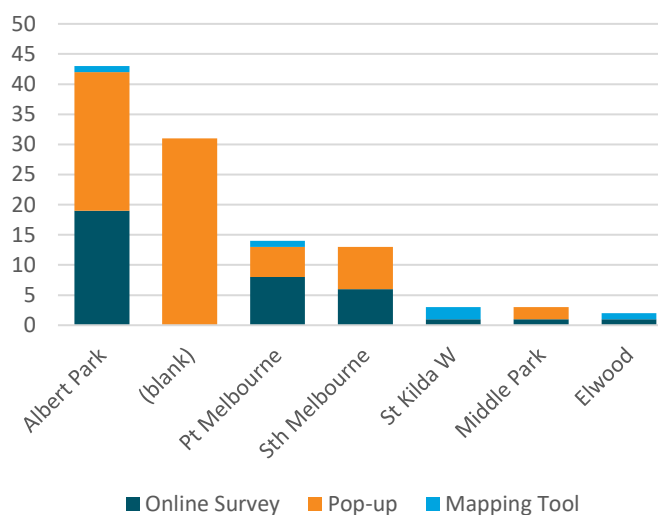
Across the City of Port Phillip, there is a higher proportion of women (51.2 per cent) to men (48.8 per cent), and across engagement projects in 2022, the balance was 46 per cent 'female' to 45 per cent 'male'.



## Residential Suburb

In total, 78 participants provided their suburb. More than half of participants came from **Albert Park (39 per cent)** or **Port Melbourne (13 per cent)**.

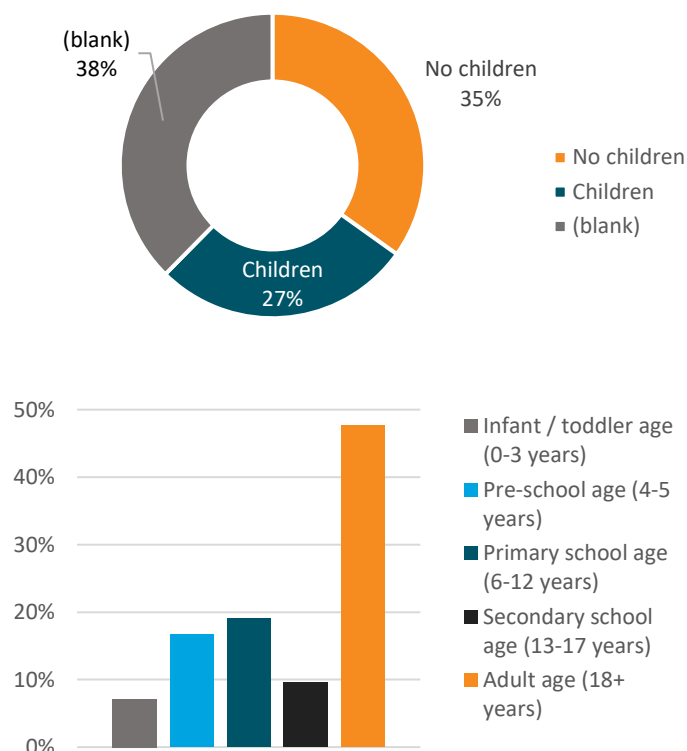
Attendees at the pop-ups represented a mix of suburbs also, reflecting the large catchment area of the park and its importance to the broader community – particularly on market days.



## Family structure

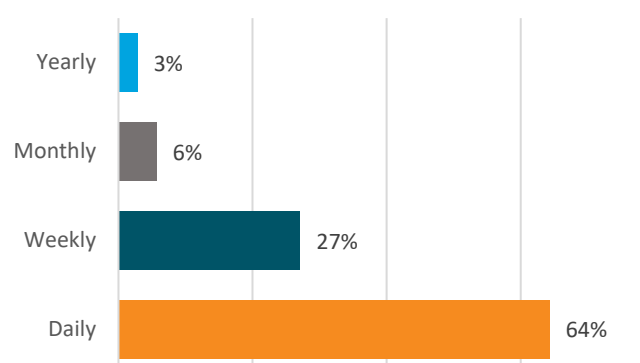
Participants were asked if they have children. Roughly one-third of responses fell into each category or didn't provide an answer.

**Of those who had children (27 per cent), nearly half (48 per cent) of these children were aged 18+.** Primary school students made up 19 per cent, and secondary school students made up 10 per cent. Toddlers and pre-school aged children made up 24 percent.



## Use of the park

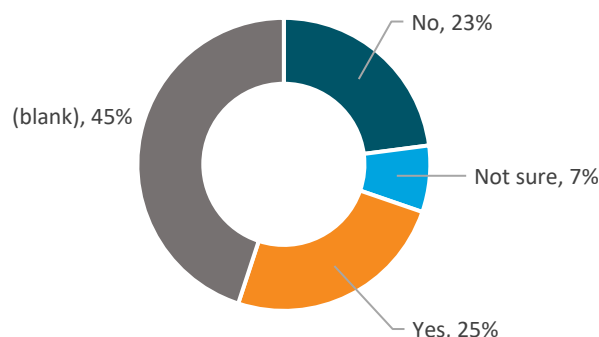
In total, 70 participants told us how often they use the park. Of these, nearly **two thirds (64 per cent)** told us they use the park daily. Weekly users represented 27 per cent of the responses.



## Diversity and inclusion

In total 44 participants told us if they had engaged with Council on projects in the past 12 months. Of these, **23 per cents of participants had not engaged Council in the past year.**

We also asked people how they identified. They told us the following:



Identification	Engaged with Council in past year?			Total
	Yes	No	Not sure	
Living with a disability	2			2
LGBTQIA+		1		1
Financially Disadvantaged	1			1
Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander background		1		1
Non-English speaking background	3	2	1	6

# What we heard

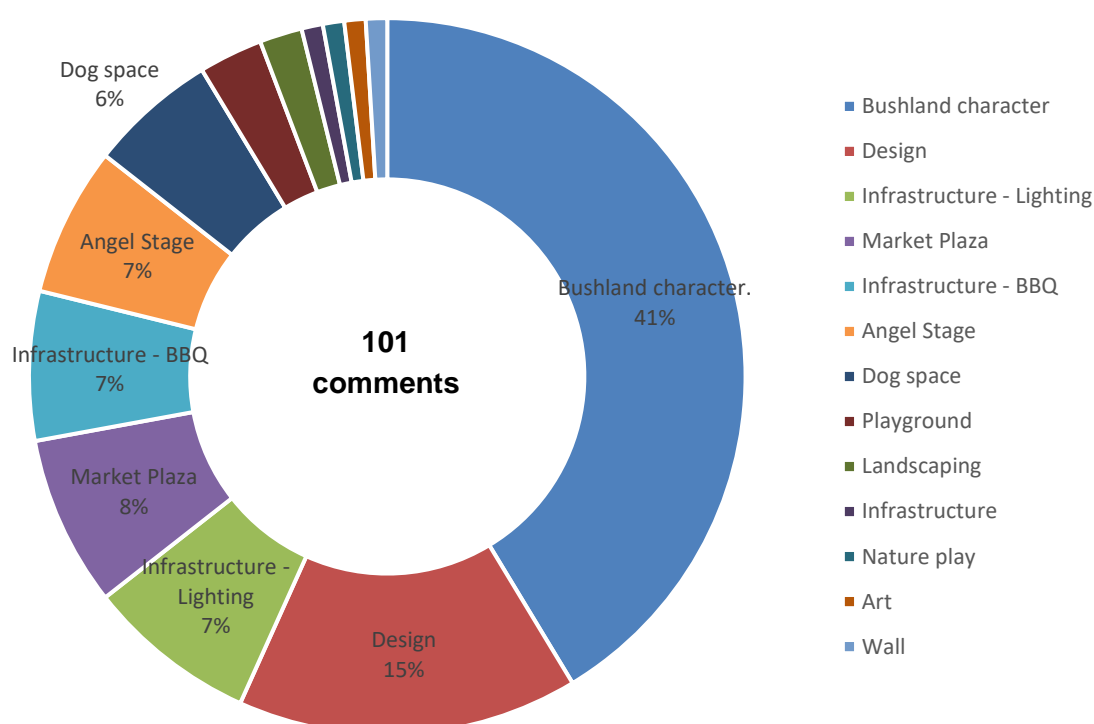
**Please note: This section uses a thematic analysis of the comments from participants.**

Comments from participants that related to multiple themes have been split to allow for accurate theme counts. As such, the number of total comments may differ from the total number of people who participated in the engagement activities.

## About the draft concept plan

### Elements that participants liked

The following themes relate to answers to the question **‘What things do you like in the draft designs, and why?’** The key themes and some comments are explored below.



## Bushland Character and Design (57 comments)

The most common elements that participants said they liked were the preservation of the bushland character of the park and general design. Comments were split evenly across genders.

*'We are lucky to have this project. Love that many of the entrances to the park is through trees and bushland planting' (Pop-up participant).*

*'I like that in the main, the natural/ bushland ambience of the park is being respected' (Albert Park resident).*

The 'light touch' design changes and increase to planting were strongly supported by participants. Many participants felt that this bushland character was essential part of their enjoyment of the space.

*'I support the general approach of careful refreshment of the design, rather than major change' (South Melbourne resident).*

*'[I like the] bushland character with natural grass, trees and relief from the urban setting' (Albert Park resident).*

## Lighting and Barbeques (17 comments)

Approximately 18 per cent of comments in support of the design related to proposed lighting and the relocation of the barbeques.

Comments were supportive of environmentally friendly lighting options, such as timed, motion sensitive or solar powered lighting – to improve accessibility and safety, particularly during darker winter months.

The repositioning of the barbeque area was broadly supported.

*'Relocation of BBQs – if we have them, this is a more sensible spot away from the dogs and near the new playground' (Albert Park resident).*

## Market Plaza and Angel Stage (15 comments)

Nearly 15 per cent of comments in support of the design talked specifically about the Market Plaza space, and the Angel Stage.

Participants were supportive of increased shading and minimal impact on the market area.

*'[I like the] improved amenity of the market' (Pop-up participant).*

*'No impact on market' (Pop-up participant).*

Similarly with comments relating to the Angel Stage, this was seen as an opportunity to improve on an existing asset in the park.

*'The Angel Stage area will benefit from an upgrade as it's wasteland at the moment – it would make a great performance space' (Albert Park resident).*

*'[I like the] redesign of Angel Plaza, however it is too open to the rest of the park. Should have a raised grass mound for seating for performances... needs to be quiet and separate' (Albert Park resident).*

## Space for dogs (6 comments)

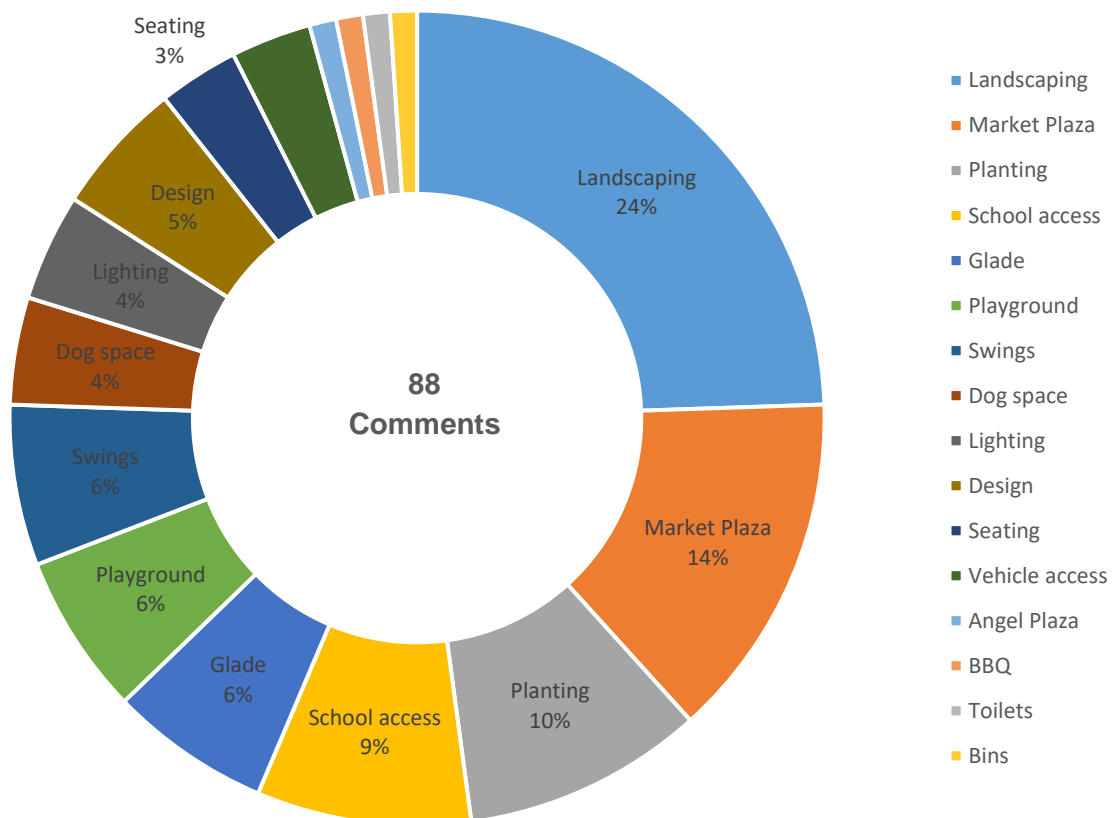
Park users were supportive of the draft concept plan's preservation of the off-leash

dog space. This support intersected with lighting infrastructure where dog walkers

accessed the park in the early morning or later in the evening.

## Elements that concerned participants

The following themes relate to answers to the question **‘What things do you dislike in the draft designs, and why?’** The key themes and some comments are explored below.





## Landscape, Planting, Design and the glade (41 comments)

Nearly half of comments were connected to themes of landscaping, planting and general design. Almost all of these comments disliked elements of the design that seemed to detract from the native bushland character of the park or change too much.

Participants were unsupportive of the use of concrete, either in paths and walkways or in the Market Plaza for planter boxes.

*'Northern area: New vehicle access not necessary and should be planted out... The path should not exit beside the sculpture studio and does not need to be concrete' (Albert Park resident).*

*'Rambling bush tracks are being decreased in favour of hard, wide, boring road (Albert Park resident).*

*'I don't like the significant length of proposed concrete paths. I think paths should be retained as compacted gravel' (Albert Park resident).*

*'Concrete boxes are not in keeping with the character of the red bricks heritage of the site... [make them] circular with red bricks (Elwood resident).*

Removal of trees, the protection of wildlife and the increase in habitat were all key concerns relating to planting.

*'Too many established trees that support wildlife are being removed' (Port Melbourne resident).*

*'I'm worried about removal of existing trees; they are now mature, and replacements take time to grow' (Albert Park resident).*

Participants also told us to limit changes to the glade (6 comments), preserving this quiet, shaded, and peaceful corner of the park.

## Market Plaza (11 comments)

Concerns about the Market Plaza were primarily focused on the introduction of the new planter boxes and impacts to the weekend market, as well as the removal of the palm trees.

*'The Market Plaza has too many planter boxes. Some trees in the earth please with wire hoops around them to protect their trunks' (Albert Park resident)*

*'The market space looks cluttered. It will make the space very crowded and become difficult to navigate on market days' (Albert Park resident)*

*'Give the plaza a more natural design' (Port Melbourne resident)*

## Playground and swings (11 Comments)

There were mixed comments on the swing sets in the park, with some comments in support and others insisting they be simply removed or moved elsewhere.

*'I think that all swings should be in the playground area. Sculpture suitable for playing on should take the place of the previous swing' (Albert Park resident).*

*'Do not place the swing in grass area. It has always been dangerous to dogs, who have no understanding... and frequently wander very near' (Albert Park resident).*

*'The proposed swing is not suitable in the oval but should be in the site beside the nursing home. Leave the oval*

*unencumbered for dog off leash  
(Albert Park resident).*

*'I don't like that the swing is being removed (or at least it isn't listed in the changes) because it's a nice spot and people frequently use it' (Albert Park resident).*

Participants were also concerned about the playground, suggesting there were already playgrounds available at other nearby parks, that the playground should be properly fenced, and that it should not encroach on the available bushland.

## School access (7 comments)

Concerns were raised related to the relationship between the park and the neighbouring school campuses. Participants emphasised the need to preserve the park as a community space, prevent encroachment, and carefully manage or design for the use of the park by students.

*'The possibility of integrating the new school arts complex needs further thought... controlled access between the park and the complex should be considered – the complex could reinforce some park activities without the school taking over the park space' (Albert Park resident).*

Several comments expressed concerns that the students were not fully considered in the plan.

*'I don't like that students are pushed to the edge of the park they should be allowed to walk through' (Albert Park resident).*

*'Kids will take the most direct route; this design won't work' (Albert Park resident).*

## Bins, BBQs, seating and access (9 comments)

Some participants did not like the increased vehicle access, suggesting that additional access for vehicles was not necessary.

Others told us that there must be an increase in seating available, with consideration for access to sun and shade in the different seasons.

*'Too many seats removed, keep the seats on the Foote Street boundary as they capture winter sun, [also put] seats under the large trees in the oval for dogwalkers to get shade in summer' (Albert Park resident).*

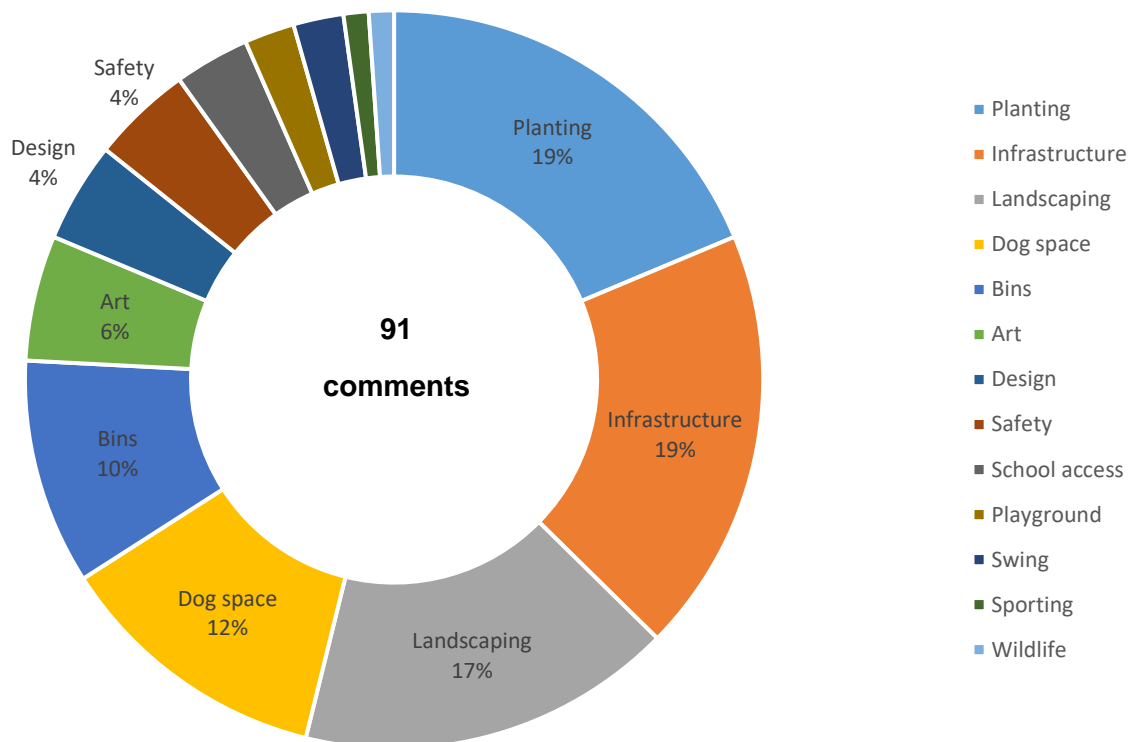
A variety of seating options would also be appropriate to support different ages and abilities.



## Elements that were missing

The following themes relate to answers to the question **'Is there anything missing from the designs in the draft Concept Plan?'** The key themes and some comments are explored below.

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## Planting and landscaping (32 comments)

Comments around planting focused largely on the use of native species to support local native wildlife – particularly birds.

*'Has advice been sought from specialists regarding plant species to support native birds?' (Albert Park resident).*

*'Garden beds with native plants! Council/Planners should consult local wildlife experts as well' (Albert Park resident).*

Many comments also focused specifically on trees, shrubs, and grasses.

*'[The upgrade must emphasise] re-establishing... middle or understory foliage of small trees and large shrubs and... native ground cover of large native grasses and small shrubs. [This] natural groundcover contributes to not only a proliferation of native wildlife but also to an impenetrable barrier to domestic animals and children in the management of subsurface contaminants (Albert Park resident).*

*'Plant advanced tree stock' (Albert Park resident).*

Participants shared ideas for landscaping and treatment of garden areas.

*'[Include an] indigenous culture acknowledgement. Encourage a biodiversity corridor' (Albert Park resident).*

*'The space next to the nursing home should be a beautifully landscaped area. Yes to native vegetation' (Port Melbourne resident).*

*'Have hoop edging to protect garden beds. Keep the design natural' (Albert Park Resident).*

*'Could areas of short Australian plants be tastefully fenced to prevent dogs and bike*

*riders from destroying them?' (Albert Park resident).*

## Infrastructure, bins and art (29 comments)

Approximately one third (32 per cent) of comments related to infrastructure, bins and art in the park.

Most comments about infrastructure related to retaining or increasing seating within the park, particularly in shaded areas for warmer months.

One comment, building on concerns about local wildlife, ask for more in this vein.

*'Bird boxes/baths, possum boxes/dreys, signage with useful and educational information on native wildlife and plants!' (Albert Park resident).*

Comments on bins related to primarily to providing more bins, dog waste bags, and sealed bins to reduce odour.

Participants also told us to create more opportunities for art, and to retain the graffiti.

## Safety, the school, and other elements (11 comments)

Approximately 12 per cent related to safety, the school and other additions for the park.

Relating to safety, participants told us that the walkways and areas around the toilets can feel unsafe, particularly in quieter times of day.

Some comments recommended more fencing to Richardson St to prevent children running on to the street.

In terms of children using the site, participants had questions about the future

school site and how this will interact with the park. While there was mixed sentiment about whether school children should or should not have access to the park it is clear that participants value this park as a community space and its natural existing character.

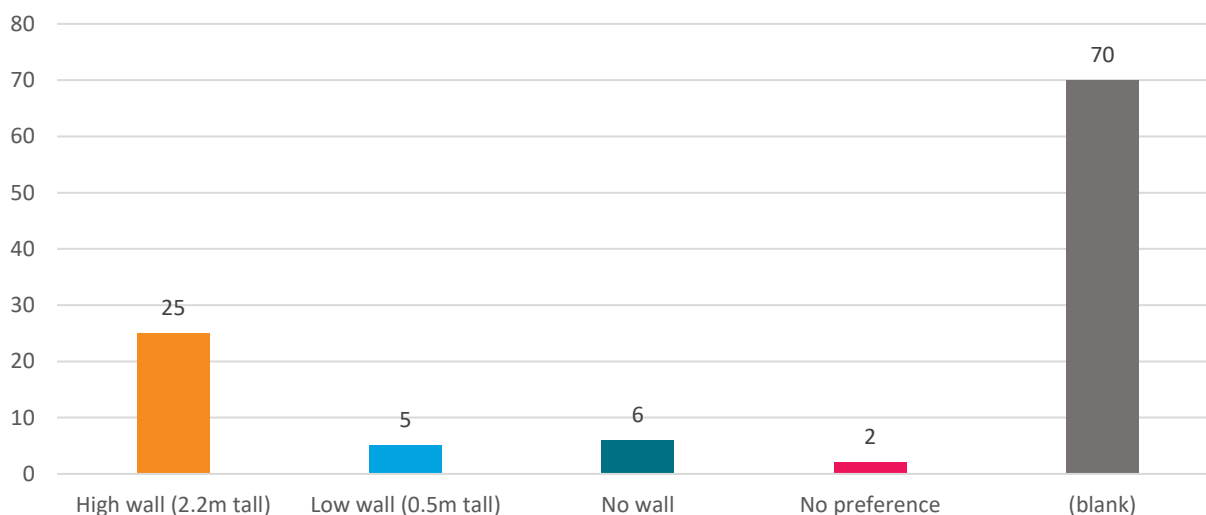
Other participants told us to create space for quiet contemplation, yoga or meditation, away from the thoroughfares and dogs. Others again asked for a water feature to

support wildlife and to entertain children and animals, and better irrigation, to create a more drought resistant park.

## Wall on the western pathway

We asked participants to choose a wall height for wall running along the western pathway, bordering the new school site. The question was: **‘Do you have a preference for the height of the wall for the new school development?’**

In total, 38 participants provided us with this feedback, with 70 participants leaving this question unanswered. Of those that answered, the most frequent was preference for a high wall.



# Next steps

## How this report will be used

Thank you to everyone who provided their feedback about the Gasworks Arts Park Upgrade.

This report, and the underlying feedback will be used by the project team and the designers to update the draft concept plan.

The report will also be used to share with Council how the engagement process went, and what changes (if any) have been made as a consequence.

## Next steps

Work will now begin to revise and finalise the concept plan for the park. We will share this report, and updates on the project with you via the 'Have your say' project page.