



**MIDCOAST**  
council

# MIDCOAST PLAYSPACE STRATEGY

**2023-2035**



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**Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, the Gathang-speaking people and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in the MidCoast Council area. We extend our respect to Elders past and present, and to all future cultural-knowledge holders.

## Glossary of terms

**Play:** an active or passive recreational activity that allow participants to develop their physical, social, emotional and moral capacities. Play can take place in the form of both organised as well as unstructured activities.

**Playground:** term used to describe a set of play equipment. Denotes that the facility was provided at a time when play equipment provision was not planned.

**Playspace:** modern term that refers to a space that has been designed for play. Term refers to the whole space, which may provide a dynamic play experience, rather than to play equipment itself.

**Play Value:** a term that denotes the essential value that is derived from a play experience, including from the space itself.

**Inclusive Play:** Play experiences for all the community, regardless of physical ability.

**Inclusive Playspace:** A playspace that is designed so that everyone can access all play equipment and be able to use that equipment in some manner.

**Community Hub:** a large Regional playspace that also includes other recreation infrastructure such as fitness and skateparks. Can be referred to as a Destination Park.

**Play Portfolio:** All the different play facilities taken as a whole.

**Catchment:** The total area, and hence population, that a facility will cater for. Is determined by several factors but mainly the hierarchy and embellishment of the playspace. The catchment can be broken by natural or manmade barriers such as rivers and major highways.

**Length of Stay (LOS):** A planning mechanism based on the time that a visitor will stay at a specific community facility. Specific to play and is not applicable to sport facilities.

**Distribution:** The analysis of where specific play facilities are located to ensure that the community has access to graduated and diverse play experiences.

**Play Hierarchy:** A planning framework that identifies different levels of playspaces and their inclusions. The aim being to provide a tiered selection of different play opportunities for all.

**Adaptive Management:** An approach to managing living eco-systems through adapting management and maintenance systems to meet the challenges of uncertainty. See Chapter 3 Planning Context in the OSRS.

**Nature Play:** A “free-flow” form of play that uses natural spaces and/or materials as the source of play. Examples can include play in natural bushland, or as constructed zones within playspaces, such as sand, water and natural material cubby-house building.

**Everyone Can Play:** NSW Government play guidelines.

# Executive summary

The MidCoast Playspace Strategy 2023 – 2035 is a critical supporting document to the MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035 (OSRS). The OSRS sets out the vision, guiding principles and aspirations for our public open space, how we use it and how we care for it. This Playspace Strategy is an asset specific planning document focused on one of the most important components of our public open space, playspaces.

One of the eight guiding principles we have adopted in the OSRS is *use knowledge and evidence-based management*.

Therefore, the Playspace Strategy has been developed on a foundation of evidence, and every recommendation contained within the Action Plan is then based on that evidence. This approach will ensure that in the future every playspace that we have will be where it needs to be and provide value based on evidence.

The Strategy highlights that 87% of our community reports that they have visited one of our parks and reserves to use our playspaces. The community has told us that they want us to provide high quality play experiences, and this Strategy is the primary planning document for achieving the community's aspirations.

The Strategy spends some time looking at why we play, what motivates us to play, and what we get out of playing. This is important as it lays the foundation for why we have set such high goals for the future of play in the MidCoast area.

The audit that was conducted as part of the Strategy has shown that our play portfolio is comprehensive, widely distributed but old, and in most cases in a state that is not delivering the play value that we all seek. In short, our children, and our community, in the majority of cases, do not have access to contemporary play experiences, and the audit highlights this as it investigated each play asset. The play audit tells us that there is much work to do to deliver what our community has asked for.

The most important part of this Strategy is the Playspace Action Plan. It contains 99 individual recommendations, and each one of these is based on an evidenced based approach to play planning, which is detailed extensively in the Planning for Play chapter. The Strategy reinforces the complexity involved in play planning, sets out a play planning model, and then uses these planning appreciations to consider and recommend actions for each of our existing playgrounds. In addition, the Playspace Action Plan also includes the construction of five new playspaces, to add to the play portfolio.

The Strategy speaks extensively of our play assets as a portfolio, and details how each individual play asset is part of a holistic package of play that offers our community a diverse range of play experiences. To achieve the optimum play portfolio, we need to remove some of our playgrounds, where they are not providing play value to their communities. Twelve playgrounds have been identified for removal. However, in locations where they are removed higher quality contemporary playspaces are provided in other parks and reserves, with the result that not only will more people have access to play than currently do, but that the overall play value is significantly increased for all the community.

Lastly, this Strategy has a life cycle of twelve years. Each of the recommendations in the Action Plan has been allocated a Short, Medium- or Long-term priority. Therefore, some communities will get upgraded playspaces in the near term, these have been judged to be the most important. Where the need is less acute the recommendations have been given medium- or long-term priorities. By the time we review this Strategy we will not have delivered all the recommendations, however, we will be working systematically through the recommendations seeking to give our children high quality play experiences where they are most needed.





# INTRODUCTION



# Introduction

*Planning our open space is one of the most important things that we do.*

During 2022 and the first half of 2023 we developed the MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035. This is the foundational strategy that guides us on how we manage the extensive public open spaces that we have, and how we assist the community in enjoying those spaces. The Strategy also provides guidance on other uses of our public open space, including recreation activities and play.

Through the development of the MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023-2035 we engaged with the community to confirm our analysis of our current open space and we identified five key insights. From these, a vision, guiding principles and actions list have been developed. The vision reflects the value that our community places on our open space. The eight guiding principles have been developed to guide us in our management and delivery of open space in the MidCoast region. The actions reflect our understanding of the short, medium and long term needs and aspirations of our community.

<p><b>INSIGHTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintenance needs to be improved</li> <li>Make open space more accessible, connected and flexible</li> <li>Cycling and walking are important</li> <li>Partnerships are important</li> <li>Need to protect for future generations</li> </ul>	<p><b>“ OUR VISION</b>  <b>We love our open space.</b>  <b>It’s where Indigenous culture and history is celebrated, biodiversity is protected, social connections happen, and locals and visitors feel welcome.</b>  <b>We will preserve and cherish it for future generations. ”</b></p>	<p><b>PRINCIPLES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain and strengthen</li> <li>Prepare for the future</li> <li>Connect with community</li> <li>Evidence-based management</li> <li>Protect nature and culture</li> <li>Build partnerships</li> <li>Promote safety</li> <li>Use rational decision making</li> </ul>						
<table border="0"> <tr> <td data-bbox="209 1592 395 1704"><b>ACTIONS</b></td> <td data-bbox="395 1592 585 1704">Pathways and trails</td> <td data-bbox="585 1592 775 1704">Sports lighting</td> <td data-bbox="775 1592 965 1704">Usage strategies</td> <td data-bbox="965 1592 1155 1704">Access</td> <td data-bbox="1155 1592 1339 1704">Multipurpose courts</td> </tr> </table>			<b>ACTIONS</b>	Pathways and trails	Sports lighting	Usage strategies	Access	Multipurpose courts
<b>ACTIONS</b>	Pathways and trails	Sports lighting	Usage strategies	Access	Multipurpose courts			

This playspace strategy is a direct recommendation from the MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035. The vision, guiding principles and intent of the open space and recreation strategy form the basis of the playspace strategy.



## OUR PLAYSPACE VISION

“ Our playspaces enhance our lives every day. They are contemporary, innovative, imaginative, inclusive, engaging, easy to get to and equitably distributed. ”

## OUR GOAL

“ Our goal is to have a play portfolio that our community is proud of. ”

## Background

Home to 96,800 people (2021), the MidCoast region offers our diverse community a wide range of lifestyle opportunities. Located on the mid north coast of NSW, the geographical area covers more than 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> and extends from the coastline, west to the escarpment of the Great Dividing Range. The Biripi and Worimi people are the traditional owners of the land. The region is well known for its natural beauty and is a key holiday destination that attracts many tourists and visitors throughout the seasons. The area spans from sparkling beaches on the coast to mountains in the hinterland, with expansive national parks and green spaces in between. It includes the Manning River valley, the Wallis, Smiths and Myall Lakes systems, the northern foreshore of Port Stephens, the agricultural hinterland and rugged, forested ranges of the Woko and Tapin Tops National Parks, and the World Heritage-listed Barrington Tops National Park. These natural features contribute to our lifestyles, livelihoods and wellbeing, and protecting and celebrating them is an important focus for our future.

We manage 4134ha of public open space, made up of 826 parks and reserves. There are 79 individual playgrounds spread throughout the region. These play an important role in the overall provision of recreation services to the community. We acknowledge the importance of play to our people; and we are keen to ensure playspaces are managed and delivered in the most effective manner for social, economic and environmental outcomes for the community.

To this end, Council has embarked on this strategy to assist it in determining the ‘state of play’ in MidCoast and to ensure it keeps abreast of changing demands, needs and at the same time manages these important assets for current and future generations.

***We acknowledge the importance of play to our community.***

A critical source document for this Strategy has been work done by 180 Sport & Leisure Solutions<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.campbelltown.nsw.gov.au/Parks-Sport-Recreation/Parks-Sport-Recreation-Policies-Strategies/Play-Space-Strategy>

## Methodology

In developing this strategy, the following actions were undertaken:

1. Defining and understanding the importance of play and trends in play planning
2. Auditing all playspaces in the region, including location and condition
3. Determining current and future classifications
4. Making recommendations for future design, management and provision of playspaces.
5. Consulting with the community with regards to their thoughts on the Strategy and play in MidCoast

***The Playspace Strategy makes recommendations on future playspaces.***

## Why do we need a Strategy?

This MidCoast Playspace Strategy is a direct recommendation from the MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035 (OSRS). The People who Play section of the OSRS highlighted both the importance of play to our community and the need to bring our play portfolio up to acceptable contemporary standards.

None of the amalgamated councils that made up the MidCoast Council had play planning strategies in place. Therefore, this Strategy provides new strategic direction for the development, and sustainable management of playspaces across the region, as well as a comprehensive action plan for the future development of the play portfolio.

We have 79 public playspaces in parks, reserves and community centres. The Action Plan in this Strategy articulates a hierarchy of quality playspaces offering diverse play opportunities.

Currently there is significant inequality in our play provision, resulting in a diverse range of outcomes, dependant on where you live. This Strategy will help us to deliver an equitable distribution across the region.

Playspaces are significant investments made by Council on behalf of the community. These assets need to be maintained over a 20-year lifecycle. This Strategy also provides direction for the management and maintenance of our playspace portfolio.

Changes to legislation and Australian Standards for playspace provision, community expectations, trends in play, the increasing urbanisation of the MidCoast region and changes in population mean we will need to review this Strategy every five years to make sure it remains relevant and up to date.

***We need to bring our play portfolio up to acceptable contemporary standards.***



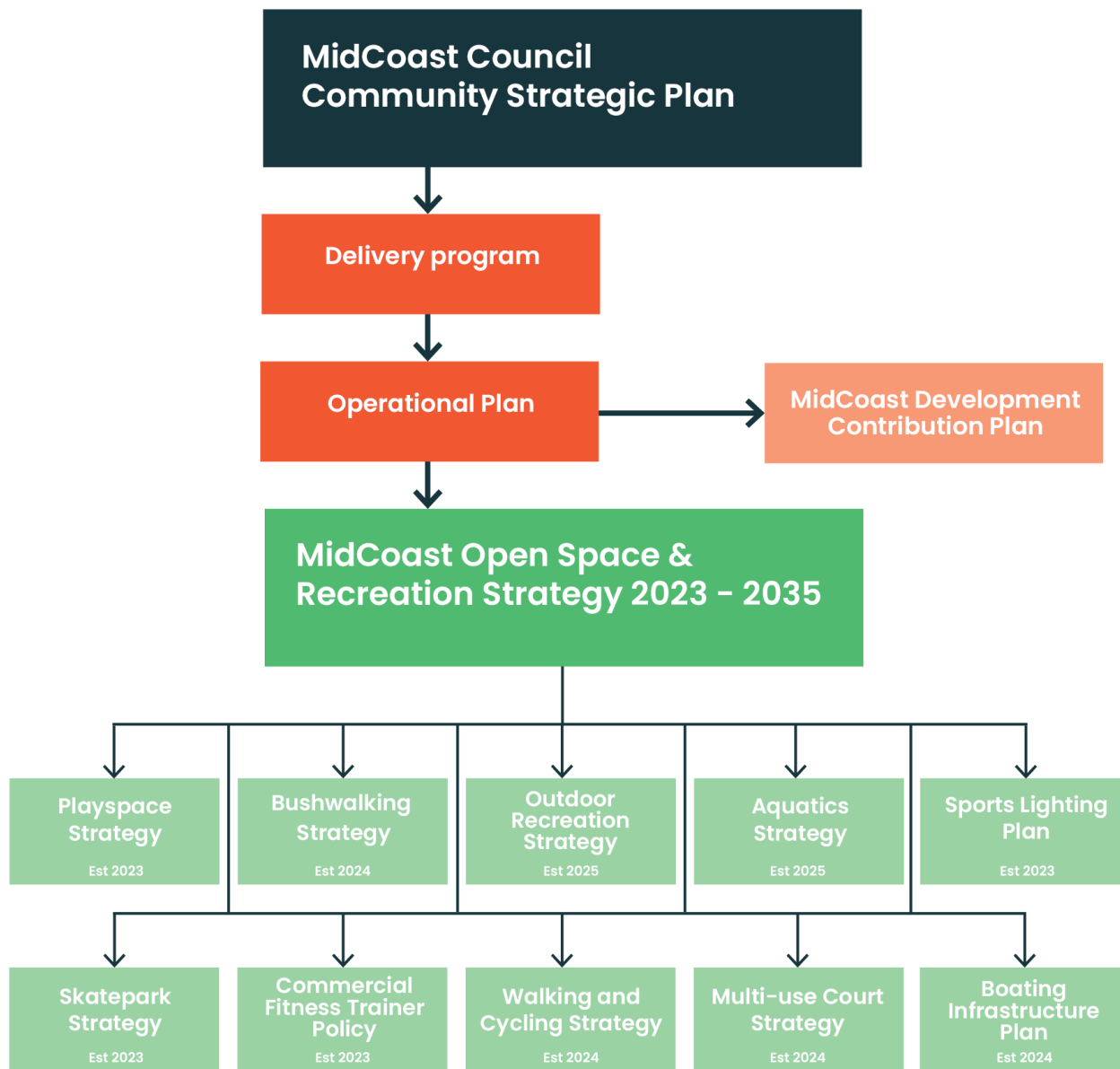


# STRATEGIC PLANNING



# Strategic planning

This Playspace Strategy is one component of our larger open space planning framework. The framework was identified in the MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035 (OSRS).



Planning for play is the most important component of open space planning, as it impacts the largest number of people in our community and covers all generations. More Australians report that they visit a park for its playspace than for any other reason<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-021-01203-x>

## Key Principles

The following key principles will direct the provision of playspaces in the MidCoast region.

1. **Equitable distribution** - Provision of a portfolio of contemporary playspaces that ensures that the individual playspaces are located where they can meet the needs of the community.
2. **Diversity** – A playspace portfolio that offers a range of play experiences, based on a graduated hierarchy of playspace facilities.
3. **Co-location** – Where appropriate co-locate playspaces with other facilities such as sporting facilities and village greens to maximise capacity and efficiency of use.
4. **Excellence in Design** – Innovative and contemporary designs that consider the context and embraces a ‘total park planning’ approach so that playspaces are inclusive, accessible, intergenerational, creative, and minimise maintenance to deliver fit for purpose facilities.
5. **Maintainability** – Playspaces that are robust and consider lifecycle management of the asset.
6. **Enhancing the environment** - Playspaces that are thoughtfully located, that both enhance their surrounding environment, as well as adding play value from being in a natural setting.
7. **Sustainability** - Playspaces that are designed, constructed and maintained sustainably.
8. **Ability** – Recognise that all children have different physical literacy levels, and at different ages, and so we will seek to provide a play portfolio that provides for all abilities.

## Strategy Objectives

This Strategy has the following objectives:

1. Adopt a holistic portfolio approach to planning for, constructing and managing our playspaces
2. Develop a playspace portfolio that reflects the community’s wishes and is seen as being excellent, innovative and engaging
3. Aligns with the aspiration and outcomes from the Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 - 2035
4. Provides the future planning framework for the delivery of playspaces within the region
5. Provides an evidence-based planning approach that explains why play is important and justifies each action within the Action Plan
6. Establish the principles for the provision of quality playspace facilities for the MidCoast region
7. Outline the process for the sustainable management and maintenance of playspaces
8. Provide an evidenced based strategy by which to seek external funding

## Adaptive Management

The MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035 (OSRS) is based on an adaptive management approach to land and facility management. Likewise, this playspace strategy is based on an adaptive management approach to open space management. Adaptive management is defined as:

***Adaptive management, also known as adaptive resource management or adaptive environmental assessment and management, is a structured, iterative process of robust decision making in the face of uncertainty, with an aim to reducing uncertainty over time via system monitoring.***

The adaptive management approach *focuses mainly on management and maintenance actions that we undertake to address impacts on our parks*. The maintenance section of this strategy details the approach we will take in the management of our playspace assets in our public open space.

Our parks and reserves are living eco-systems, which are subject to external drivers that affect their sustainability. These drivers include climate change, and visitation. An adaptive management approach to public open space management involves planning for uncertainty. The mechanism to achieve this is through an impact assessment model. This model, detailed in the OSRS, allows us to make decisions that have an inbuilt level of flexibility, designed for uncertainty.

As our playspaces are located in our parks, which are affected by increasing uncertainty, this Strategy, and its recommendations need to consider what our parks and playspaces will be affected by in the future.

## Parks for playspaces

Building a playspace within a natural living eco-system has impacts on that system. That cannot be avoided. However, the value of providing that playspace, within a natural setting, for the community necessitates its provision. However, ensuring that we sustainably provide that playspace, whilst maintaining the eco-system is our aim.

Just as the actual design of a playspace is vital in delivering play value to the community, so is where the playspace is located. It is rare to see a playspace not in a natural setting. There are exceptions, such as playspaces in fast food outlets, but by and large playspaces are located in natural places. Therefore, the playspace should value-add to the environment, as should the environment be a major feature in the value that the playspace provides.

Our 79 playspaces are located in parks and reserves that are not only located near our residents but are often our best parks. Research conducted by both the University of Wollongong<sup>3</sup> and the University of NSW has found a causal link between people being in nature and health outcomes. In short, a green space is good for us. Therefore, where we place our playspaces is important to the health and enjoyment of our community.

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<sup>3</sup> [2019: Urban trees found to improve mental and general health - University of Wollongong – UOW](#)



The individual actions in the Action Plan of this strategy have taken this into account, with a focus on ensuring that our playspaces are both contemporary, but also that the parks that they are in create a positive symbiotic link between the space and the playspace. In a design sense you see this in modern playspaces, where the playspace appears to blend in with the natural environment, sometimes being part of the natural environment. Likewise, the landscaping of the playspace has become a major consideration for delivering “wow” playspaces, with elements such as plant palettes, sandstone walls and benches, natural surface pathways and other features helping to link the playspace into its surrounding landscape.

As a land manager it is our responsibility to manage all our public open spaces sustainably, that is why we have adopted an adaptive management approach to our public open space management. This approach includes how we plan for, construct and maintain our playspaces.

## **Our open spaces**

There are 826 Council-managed open spaces in the MidCoast region of which 247 are Crown Land reserves.

These open spaces take several forms and provide for different purposes. However, their overarching purpose is the sustainable protection of their individual ecosystems.

Of these reserves a number are set aside for sport and recreation, including play.

Sport and recreational facilities and spaces are provided by a range of entities including Council, the Department of Education (via schools), National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Forest NSW and private recreation groups who also provide and manage recreational facilities.

The list below sets out a breakdown of some of the different types of recreation facility managed by Council. Facilities not managed by Council are not included in the list.

- Sports grounds – 45
- Playgrounds – 79
- Skateparks – 15
- Fitness facilities - 12



# UNDERSTANDING WHY PEOPLE PLAY



## Understanding why people play

To provide play opportunities for our community we need to first understand why people play. Firstly, play is joyful, and it is fun. But the urge to play is deeper than “fun”. Play is an evolutionary meme. The drive to play adapted into us for several very important reasons. Play helps us to identify hierarchy within the group, it enables us to develop social connections and it allows us to temper aggression. Viewed in this way there is no difference between sport and play with both serving these same purposes. In modern times we have differentiated between sport and play, however, the same evolutionary factors apply to both.

Research indicates that a child who does not play can have:

***“inhibited social and emotional learning, and damaged early child development. A play-deprived child may find it harder to interact with others throughout their lifetime, leading to poor resilience in certain situations, and reduced self-control.”***

So as a “tribe” play is vital to our development.

### Play as human movement!

***A human’s natural state is to be in motion.***

Even though the concept of play is highly complex and dynamic the physical act of play can be reduced to four simple activities; swing, slide, climb and balance. These four acts of movement stimulate different parts of the brain simultaneously. They help the brain develop skills such as spatial awareness, balance, rhythm and muscle control. Whether physical play happens in a modern playspace, or in a natural environment these four movements make up the physical act of play. If you look at a modern playspace you will be able to see these four activities dominate the whole space. These elements are also the most attractive to children. Where the activity of a specific play element is most aligned with one of these movements then children will be most attracted. If you sit and watch children play in a playspace you will notice that the elements that contain these four activities are the most popular. Another sign that these activities dominate the concept of play is that no matter the age of the person these basic movements are popular. It is not unusual to see a middle age or older person swinging on a swing in a playspace.

- **Swing** - to move easily and without interruption backwards and forwards or from one side to the other, especially from a fixed point, or to cause something or someone to do this.
- **Slide** - to (cause to) move easily and without interruption over a surface.
- **Climb** - to use your legs, or your legs and hands, to go up or onto the top of something.
- **Balance** - the condition of someone or something in which its weight is equally divided so that it can stay in one position or be under control while moving

A child that is proficient with these play activities will have built skills, including physical literacy, that will set them up with lifelong abilities, ensuring that as they age their physical abilities will be maintained.



## The Benefits of Play

Research shows that play has many benefits for children, families and the wider community as well as improving health and quality of life and suggests that children's access to good play provision can:

### Personal benefits of play

- Increase their self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-respect
- Improve and maintain their physical and mental health
- Give them the opportunity to mix with other children
- Allow them to increase their confidence through developing new skills
- Promote their imagination, independence and creativity
- Offer opportunities for children of all abilities and backgrounds to play together
- Provide opportunities for developing social skills and learning
- Build resilience through risk taking and challenge, problem solving, and dealing with new and novel situations
- Provide opportunities to learn about the environment and wider community.
- Develop problem solving skills.

### Societal benefits of play

- Parents feeling secure knowing their children are happy, safe and enjoying themselves
- Families benefit from healthier, happier children
- Play services are frequently seen as a focal point for communities
- Offers opportunities for social interaction for the wider community
- Supports the development of a greater sense of community spirit and cohesion
- Public outside spaces have an important role in the everyday lives of children and young people, especially as a place for meeting friends
- Connects people to public open space, leading to an awareness of the value of our parks and their protection

## Play theory

Play theory is the overarching concept that play is inherent to humans, and that there are certain fundamentals that when understood can help us provide outstanding play opportunities for our community.

It is widely acknowledged and researched that play has a significant impact on the social, physical and mental development of the child. Play theory in general identifies broad categories of play behaviour that apply across all ages but the way they are interpreted by each age group varies with some type of play assuming greater importance at particular stages of child development.

## Play value

One of the most important planning concepts to have arisen in the field of play planning over the recent period is that of *Play Value*. Play Value can be described as;

***Play Value is the essential value that is derived from a play experience.***

The term is frequently employed in the field of child development for the assessment of playspaces. When they are fun and engaging, playspaces are said to have play value; those that are quickly discarded or are considered uninteresting do not. In short, objects of play must be compelling and encourage the child's involvement in order to have true play value. Play value has been defined as 'how much play can you get out of something'. The concept of play value is now deeply imbedded in play planning and provision. It is not enough to "stick" some play equipment in the middle of a park and expect the child to derive value from the experience. Play elements are now designed for specific age groups, fit together as a group of elements, are blended into a natural environment, link together to other play zones, encourage others to engage with the experience, such as parents and grandparents, and to cause the child to want to "linger" in the play experience, ultimately delivering increased child development.

The issue of child development and play has become foremost in modern recreation infrastructure planning. It is now recognised that a large cohort of modern children are not receiving the level of development that children have in the past. A good example of this is the concept known as "social triggers from the built space". In some communities the level of communication development in children is lower than the Australian average. There are many causes for this, but one basic cause is the level of interaction between parent and child, especially in language and spatial development. Our built space, in which we move every day, has "triggers" imbedded in it. An obvious example are traffic lights, and crossing signals. From an early age a child is taught that red means stop, green means go, and that a walking green figure means they can walk.

However, research has shown that many children are not being taught these triggers in our built space. Therefore, it has become best practice to build these triggers into a child's play experience. Building inclusive playspaces, is viewed as a high value approach to planning. A child will therefore experience many social triggers built into the playspace as they engage with the space. This is one example of play value being delivered through intuitive play planning.

## Types of play

Over the recent past it has been recognised that there are several different types of play that children and adults can undertake.

### Cognitive play

Includes those activities that challenge the intellect of the child and can include games of strategy, exploration, observation or those that use and develop language. Council playspaces can develop cognitive behaviour through natural areas for exploration and observation of living things; spaces and materials for outdoor games such as hopscotch and hide and seek and materials and tools for use in sand and water settings. Other concepts can include spaces for quiet activities such as reading, contemplation and nature observation of complex spaces or structures, which challenge the user's perceptual skills.

### Social play

Can be found both by using existing physical equipment and through learning and exploring with friends in the natural environment. Whilst the latter have not been traditionally provided for in the

public domain, councils are beginning to design playspaces through appropriate landscaping including sand, water, plants, trees and sculptures to enhance natural play and social play.

## **Physical Play**

This type of play is also often referred to as gross motor activity and can include running, hanging, climbing, experiencing height, agility/gymnastic activities, sliding, jumping, balancing, swinging, crawling, bouncing, spinning, rocking, ball games and skipping. These activities are generally more 'active' and therefore adequate space is required in a suitable environment where other users will not be disturbed. Some of these activities are well provided for by traditional play equipment although others are more dependent upon the size and particular characteristics of spaces or other elements.

## **Nature Play**

There has been much attention on the concept of "nature play" over the last few years. Nature play is giving access to children to natural spaces or materials, which allow them to "free-play". It is widely accepted, and demonstrated through numerous research projects, that being in nature, and being physically active in nature delivers the best health results for children and adults. Community feedback on play often includes the provision of nature play.

The benefits of nature play are many. Nature play is a great way to connect our community with place and can turn a playspace into a place of connection, discovery and celebration. Nature stimulates the imagination and encourages exploration, adventure and risk-taking, helping children learn new skills such as adaptability, coordination and resilience. A growing body of research shows being in nature can lower stress hormone levels, enhance immune system function, reduce anxiety, increase self-esteem and improve mood.

***Our goal is to offer nature play as part of our play portfolio. Where opportunities exist to include it in the upgrade of existing or new playspaces, we will consider it as part of the play experience.***

## **Smart Play and Augmented Play**

Technology is impacting every facet of life, and play is no exception. Smart play, where QR codes and other triggers are built into a play experience are now becoming common. Augmented play is where the real world such as a park is blended with a virtual reality, such as a smart phone or tablet. In the case of open space, the augmentation is the introduction of electronic features into the real park. Augmented play can be applied as a group experience where it blends with the real world by overlaying 2D/3D content in our field of view. At present augmented play is experienced through a tablet, while also looking at the park and moving around through the real space to queues provided by the technology. In the future the experience could be enhanced with the use of transparent glasses which would allow the wearer to see 2D/3D content overlaid in their own real/live environment.

Augmented play and smart play will be increasingly considered as we upgrade and replace our playspaces.

***Our goal is to incorporate smart play and augmented play in our playspaces where appropriate.***



## Intergenerational Play

In times past, older generations were much more involved with younger people, and vice versa. But times change, and that isn't as much the case with today's society for several reasons. Non-profit groups Generations United and The Eisner Foundation published a study titled "I Need You, You Need Me: The Young, The Old, and What We Can Achieve Together"<sup>4</sup> in which all surveyed admitted we live in an age-segregated society. In this study 53% of adults say that they don't regularly spend time with individuals much older or younger than they are, outside of their family.

Parents are having children later in life and living greater distances from their own parents. Lives are busier and more scheduled as many households have two working parents, or only one parent, and children either have a busy calendar of extracurricular activities or don't have the interaction of parents as in times past.

Young people are more apt to move to new cities and/or states for meaningful work. Many people, including older people themselves, see social disengagement among older people with young people as a natural part of aging. There may also be differences in physical and cognitive functioning between different age groups, which leads to the occupying of separate physical spaces and undertaking different activities.

People of all ages benefit from increased physical activity and the reduction of health risk factors associated with outdoor activity. For children, play can provide a positive impact across all five developmental domains: physical, social-emotional, sensory, cognitive, and communicative. Being in an outdoor environment helps people relax and can help to restore the mind from specific age-related stresses such as school, work, family pressures or loneliness. Green spaces may be particularly beneficial for older adults as they can provide safe opportunities to be active and interact with other people while stimulating the mind and senses. Additionally, access to shared public spaces can reduce overall stress, improve coping abilities, encourage multigenerational interaction, reduce social isolation, enhance relationship-building skills, and improve or maintain cognitive function. The demand for quality children and youth services compounded with the increasing need for creative older adult programs creates an environment ripe for innovative intergenerational spaces.

However, it's important to note that while space may be multigenerational, it may not be intergenerational. Multigenerational simply refers to a composition, where people from different generations are present. Intergenerational refers to an active exchange or connection between and among the generations, and this is where there is a great opportunity, gained through intergenerational play, to enrich both people and the environment while promoting a wealth of positive benefits for all.

Many local government authorities are embracing intergenerational play, by providing specific play elements in their playspaces that not only give older people something to "do" when in a playspace with their children or grandchildren but play elements that all generations can use together.

***Our goal is to provide opportunities for inter-generational play in our playspaces.***

## Risky Play

One of the newest areas of play research is into what is known as risky play. Risky play is broken down into six different activities: Height, speed, tools, elements, rough and tumble and getting lost.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gu.org/resources/i-need-you-you-need-me-the-young-the-old-and-what-we-can-achieve-together/>

It is often thought that teenagers are high risk takers, but all children take risks. Research has shown that this is because risk taking is the best form of developing neural pathways, which facilitate learning. When a child undertakes one of the six risky activities, they learn boundaries, where they can and can't go, what they can and can't do, and they form a neural pathway for that activity<sup>5</sup>. The next time that they play they might try to extend their boundaries.

***Research shows that children that don't experience any risk are more likely to experience obesity, mental health issues, lack of independence, and a decrease in learning, perception, and judgement skills. When it comes to risky play, it's about keeping toddlers "as safe as necessary" while still providing opportunities to take age-appropriate risks.***

The activity that children do the most, and which offers them the best opportunity to undertake risky behaviour, and to learn, in a safe environment, is in their local playspace. This awareness of the value of risk is now built into our playspaces. Where once we removed all risk from community facilities, we now build it in, noting that real risk is removed, in accordance with Australian Standards, to which playspaces have to comply, but we can design for "perceived" risk. This is where there is very little risk of actual harm, but where there is a very high level of a perception of risk.

One of the best play elements to demonstrate this is the climbing tower. We have several of these around our playspaces, one of which is in Old Bar Park. This element is what is known as graduated, meaning that different aged children can interact with the element at different levels, dependant on their ability. As they climb up the ropes there is an increasing perception of risk, the higher they go the higher the perceived risk. However, in fact there is very little risk, as a fall will result in the child falling on to lower ropes, which then hold them, as well as the natural (sand) softfall that is under the element.

***Our goal is for our playspaces to allow children to be safely exposed to risky play that promotes neural development.***

## **Inclusive Play**

Any physical activity can be excluding. By its nature being physically active requires a level of ability that is not available to all. With 25% of Australian's living with a disability many activities that most of the community take for granted are not able to be done by all. And within that 25% there is a vast range of different abilities.

There are two types of inclusive play that we aim to build into our playspaces. The first is giving people the opportunity to have access to play elements. We do this by designing the space to allow anyone to access each element within the space. Designing access paths to allow someone with limited mobility to move around the space is one example of this. However, inclusion by opportunity does not guarantee that someone with a disability will be able to undertake the activity provided. It just means that they can get to the play element.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3499858/>

The second type of inclusion is inclusion by outcome, which is where someone can not only access a play element, but can use the element, regardless of ability. And this applies to the whole playspace.

Inclusion by opportunity is now included in all the new playspaces that we build, while we aim to include some elements of inclusion by outcome into many of our playspaces. An example of inclusion by opportunity is the Tuncurry playspace at Lone Pine Memorial Park, where you can access the play elements. The Livvi's Place playspace in Fotheringham Park in Taree offers inclusion by outcome because it allows people with a disability to get into and around the space as well as use all the play equipment and other elements.

Not all playspaces will be inclusive by outcome, however our goal is to include some elements that can be used by all.

### **Fitness (including Intergenerational fitness)**

It is not intuitive to include fitness as part of our play considerations and planning. Play has always been an activity for the young. However, as we have seen all ages play. It has become normal for the provision of intergenerational fitness facilities to be included with play equipment, within higher level playspaces. It has been found that the same things that attract visitation to playspaces also attract people to fitness equipment. Passing traffic is important for both, as are ancillary facilities, such as public toilets, pathways and shade. Both the Play Audit and the Action Plan later in the Strategy have fitness facilities included.

Structured fitness, undertaken on fitness equipment, designed as either fitness trails, where a participant will move around individual "pods" for different exercises, or in fitness stations, which have a number of fitness pieces in one location is viewed as providing a much-needed exercise opportunity for the community. This is especially the case with older people. Currently there are twelve fitness facilities located around the MidCoast region, often co-located with play equipment.

In the past little thought went into providing fitness equipment. However, the fitness trail at Gloucester Park is one excellent example of where much thought went into its provision. This facility, located around the whole sports park in a fitness trail configuration, is used by older citizens, younger people undertaking sports training and visitors to the nearby caravan park.

Similar to Intergenerational Play, Intergenerational Fitness is most often located near playspaces. Intergenerational fitness provides important opportunities for older people to maintain their mobility and strength, which is critical to maintaining quality of life. When co-located with play equipment, as part of a larger play facility these fitness facilities for older people encourage different generations to "play" together.

In our District and Regional playspaces we will include intergenerational play and fitness equipment.

***Our goal is to provide fitness facilities that will support our community being physically active.***



## Playspace Trends

Play and understanding its importance has come a long way in recent years with many local authorities now developing strategies that not only assess playspaces as assets that need to be managed, but also their relevance in design and the changing needs of a child as they grow and develop. Play is now seen as one of several mechanisms that can lead to positive health and development results, thus resulting in enhanced community outcomes. To this end, the traditional playspace equipment by way of slide, swings, and rockers while still important, are today being considered as only one component of the play spectrum. Other design elements are therefore being introduced to encourage an array of learning and development opportunities including the use of the natural environment (nature play), creative landscaping, and additional features that promote a sense of belonging and place to a park.

Playspaces are now considered not only as areas for children, but also the whole family and therefore can now include elements for adults and carers, such as toilets, barbeques, shade and shelter and end of trip facilities such as water, bike racks, paths and trails, carparks and in some instances fencing to offer a sense of security for children and families in larger parks near to main roads or traffic. In addition, a major trend is in providing Inclusive playspaces, that are designed specifically to provide inclusive play for those living with a disability. One of these Inclusive playspaces has been built in Taree and is known as a Livvi's Place playspace.

Play standards have also come a long way with equipment now designed and developed to include and consider adult use and weight bearing to allow social interaction and play with and between children. Additionally, the introduction of fitness equipment is also becoming increasingly popular with both adults and children and offers a unique element to many parks and playspaces. They are often standalone areas separate from children's playspaces.

From a planning perspective, the notion of playspaces being developed in areas where young families are prevalent is now an outdated planning method as the needs of a child (and demographics generally) will change in relative short periods of time (2-3 years) whereas a playspace as an asset may last more than twenty years.

Modern trends in planning for playspaces are therefore now based on an even distribution of facilities to ensure access for all including grandparents, aunts and uncles, people with disabilities and carers and families. It also considers the playspace hierarchy, design and distribution based on local through to regional, each offering their own unique experiences.

Liability and risk is always a key factor in the provision of any service or facility that is available to the public, and while councils have an obligation and duty of care, aspects such as the promotion of nature play has caused some concern in recent years due to the absence of standards for 'nature'. However, more innovative and proactive councils are working with their respective insurers to ensure a range of opportunities can be provided and children and their parents protected from real risks while still enjoying and benefiting from the experience of play in a natural setting.





# PLANNING FOR PLAY



## Planning for Play

Now that we have discussed why humans play, and the value that we obtain from play we need to discuss how we plan for the provision of playspaces, as part of a larger play portfolio.

The major planning considerations for play provision are Age differences, Catchment theory, Length of Stay (LOS), Distribution and the Play Hierarchy. All these planning mechanisms provide the decision framework for what playspaces we provide, where they are located, and what play equipment and ancillary facilities are provided at each facility.

***We need to plan for play, we can't just stick them in anywhere.***

### Intergenerational park guidelines

Local and neighbourhood parks need to be stimulating and engaging, but often, because of poor planning and design they are non-stimulating and boring. These parks lack challenging and appealing equipment and spaces for all ages and do not meet the needs of the wider community. In addition, physical inactivity remains the greatest public health problem of the 21st century. Play planning includes seeing parks as community places that can be designed to inspire all ages to be physically active and provide opportunities to build social connections across generations.

The most recent research conducted in this area has been by the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). The team of academics conducted research with the goal of connecting environmental design and landscape architecture with health and wellbeing, to promote evidence-based design. Using a transdisciplinary approach, the research team observed existing park use, investigated barriers to park use and physical activity; and formulated an evidence-based manual *Intergenerational Parks: A Design Guide for Physical Activity and Social Engagement Across Generations*<sup>6</sup>. The guide specifies innovative design principles and suggests park features and characteristics that can be used by local governments and park designers.

The evidence-based suggestions published in the Design Guide identify how to create opportunities for intergenerational physical activity and how to engage people socially within neighbourhood parks. The document is designed to help achieve designs that will entice, enable, and engage a variety of age groups.

This Playspace Strategy is built on an evidenced-based approach to planning, in accordance with the two guiding principles from the OSRS, and these Intergenerational Park guidelines will assist us provide the MidCoast community with innovative and exciting playspaces.

***Our goal is to have innovative and exciting playspaces that our community loves.***

### Community involvement in play planning

We adopt a place-making approach to providing infrastructure for our community. No one knows what they want more than the people that you are providing it for. Never is this more so than in providing playspaces. Children know what they like, and so asking them if they like to swing, or climb, or just hang out with their friends is a key first step in play planning.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://eprints.qut.edu.au/235562/1/Intergenerational\\_parks\\_design\\_guide\\_2022\\_reduced.pdf](https://eprints.qut.edu.au/235562/1/Intergenerational_parks_design_guide_2022_reduced.pdf)



Input from the community and sharing of local information and knowledge is important in the planning and maintaining of playspaces throughout the MidCoast region.

Community consultation is an important part of the decision-making process when planning a new playspace. Considerations of behaviour, demographics and preferences of the local community can usually be better understood after discussion and input during the initial planning. This can be achieved in a variety of ways including a questionnaire mail out to residents in the surrounding area; discussions and observations with users on site; consultation with local disability groups; local school or kindergarten children and their parents.

When we are planning a new or upgraded playspace we will conduct a “pop-up” session between our planners and local residents, so that the community has a chance to tell us what they like and what they want in their new playspace.

***Our goal is to have community input to the design and planning of all our playspaces.***

## **Planning for different needs**

Given the broad categories of play theory, play spaces need to include several components that encourage cognitive, social, and physical elements. However, not all play spaces will include all these elements as the classification will offer differing play experiences and target different users. That is, play spaces can and should be designed for several ages to include:

### **Play Needs**

**Toddlers (ages 0-3):** Simple settings and small scaled and detailed environments with friendly surfaces and a familiar adult close by. These age groups cannot perceive danger and must be protected from hazards. Play areas for young children must be sited away from traffic.

**Pre-Schoolers (ages 4-6):** The ages from three to six years cover a wide range of development in children. Co-ordination and physical skill development is relatively proficient by the age of 5 years and children of this age need to practice and hone skills such as climbing, running, agility skills, skipping, and ball play.

**Juniors (ages 7-11):** Older children may use play equipment as incidental props in their group games. For example, play structures may be used as part of obstacle courses, part of chasing and hiding games, as a lookout or a refuge; as a meeting and socialising place for after school activities or as a ‘base’ for the group

**Teenagers (ages 12 +):** Areas for ‘play’ for teenagers needs to be carefully planned and designed to meet the broader needs of this group. It also requires extensive community consultation to determine the right location and facilities for this play. Young people use open space for a number of uses including scootering/skating and bike riding, unstructured sport or just ‘hanging out’ with friends. The location needs to be carefully managed to avoid potential conflicts of use with younger children and their carers while ensuring a sense of ownership by young people.

**Adults:** Adults should not be excluded from using playgrounds, and equipment needs to be designed and developed for use by this group. The provision of swing seats and rockers designed with enough space for use by adults is a way of encouraging adults to use park facilities with their children. Naturally, provision for adults at the exclusion of children is not the intention, but design standards now consider loadings and structural requirements to withstand use by adults.

**Inclusivity:** An inclusive play space provides access to a variety of play experiences where everyone can engage and play together. This is not to say that every item of play equipment needs to be fully inclusive, but consideration should be given to access and inclusion in several play spaces across a Local Government Authority (LGA).

***Our goal is to provide play opportunities for the whole community.***

## Catchment

The distance someone has to walk to get to a playspace is an important consideration when planning a playspace. 400 metres or a 5-minute walk is the generally accepted ideal distance within which we would like people to have access to a Local playspace.

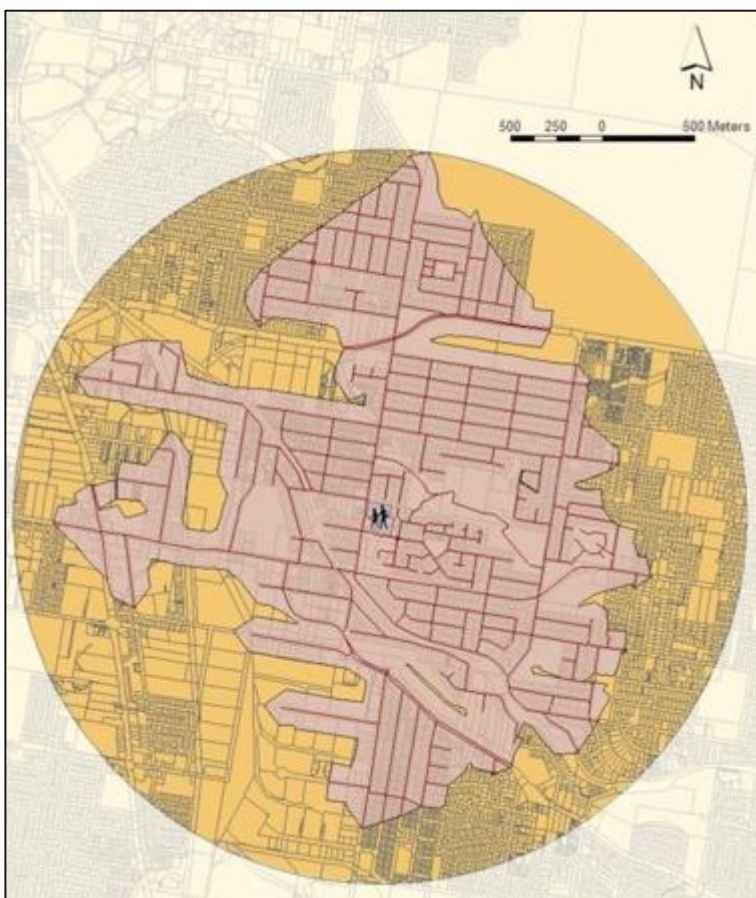
Catchment is the area encompassed by the walking distance from a town center, neighborhood center, or other location, such as a playspace. Catchment is the basic building block of walkable neighborhoods.

Catchment often has irregular shapes because they cover the actual distance walked, not the straight-line distance. The catchment can be broken by barriers that are in the area. Structures such as major roads, railway lines, overpasses, riparian corridors and rivers can be barriers to a parent walking with their child to the playspace. Many of the smaller settlements in the MidCoast area have natural barriers, such as coastal rivers, that greatly influenced the future recommendations in the Strategy's Action Plan.

In planning a playspace, we consider how many people live within the 400 metre catchment of the playspace. We then consider the demographic of that catchment. For example, a catchment with a large retirement village in it would give very different requirements for a playspace in a catchment with a large primary school or apartment blocks with young families. A playspace within the catchment of a retirement village might be an excellent location for an intergenerational playspace for grandparents and their visiting grandchildren.

Catchment theory is a companion with the play hierarchy, which will be discussed shortly. A local playspace has a catchment of 400 metres, while a neighbourhood playspace has a 1000 metre catchment. The design of these playspaces is partly driven by the distance that someone would walk to get to them. Once we start to consider the design of District and Regional playspaces, it is accepted that users will drive to them, typically for a different "play" experience.

***Our goal is to provide a high-quality play experience within accessible distance for all our residents.***



## Length of stay (LOS)

Connected to the concept of catchment is length of stay (LOS). When planning a playspace, planners consider the average amount of time that someone spends at a specific playspace. For example, the LOS for a local playspace is 20 minutes. The LOS is governed by a number of factors, such as the needs of the child, the distance that the visitors have travelled to the playspace, and the amount and type of equipment provided. The LOS is also influenced by the provision of other facilities, such as shade, public toilets, BBQs, etc. Generally speaking, the fewer the facilities, the shorter the stay. However, the overarching goal is not to place more and more play elements in a space, but rather to match the play elements and facilities with the size of the space, the catchment, any other playspaces in the area and the needs of the users. That is then where the play hierarchy comes in.

***Our goal is to have visitors to our playspaces gain value from the experience, regardless of how long they stay.***

## Distribution

Another principle for play planning is equitable distribution. Critical to providing a high-quality play experience for our community is ensuring that we have the right type of playspaces in the right locations, for the type of population in each location. This is known as Distribution.

***Not all communities should have a playspace.***

The play ratio detailed later in the Strategy will show that there is a “sweet spot” for when a community should have a playspace, around the 1:1000 is a good guide. If we put playspaces in communities that are too small, or the wrong demographic, they will not be used to their potential, and they will be a future burden on us to maintain. Many of our smaller communities, with a few hundred people, currently have play equipment. This is a repercussion of past provision, where it was thought that every community should have a playground. Distribution allows us to consider the whole community, and place playspaces in key locations, where the wider population can access a high-quality play experience. It’s a quality over quantity equation.

Distribution also takes into account the type of playspace provided. The Play Audit, detailed shortly, shows that we have too many small playgrounds. We aim to provide a portfolio of different play facilities, so that people can decide what experience they are seeking, at any time. For example, a family walking home from school may have 20 minutes, and so a local playspace, located between school and home is their chosen experience. In another situation they may be seeking a more dynamic experience, so a walk to a neighbourhood playspace might be what they prefer. On the weekend they may play sport, and afterwards use the district playspace near the sports fields, while a day outing to a regional playspace might be undertaken on Sunday. We will seek to locate these facilities within a specific radius of that family.

Distribution also seeks to interlock playspaces. For example, a Local playspace should be within the catchment of a Neighbourhood playspace, likewise a Neighbourhood should have several Local playspaces within its catchment. This concept is reflected in the recommendations in the Action Table.

Distribution considers the type of playspaces that will best meet the individual community’s needs. The classification of playspaces, as part of the Play Hierarchy comes next.

And so, when we distribute our playspaces, they need to be in central locations, and they need to be the right type of playspace for that area. As highlighted in the Parks for Playspaces section above we also need to consider the value of the park itself. We want our playspaces to be in high-



quality parks. This ensures that the whole experience of play, in natural settings, comes together to provide good community outcomes.

***Our goal is to distribute our playspaces evenly and fairly throughout our area.***

## Play Hierarchy

A major planning mechanism for the provision of play facilities is the play hierarchy. The play hierarchy contains both planning considerations as well as definitions, which are applied to each level of the hierarchy. Each level of provision fits within the larger play offering, complimenting each other and graduating the play offering through the different levels that suit both the family’s aspirations of play for their children and the desire for a particular play experience. The play hierarchy aligns with the overall outcomes for child development discussed in the previous section.

***The Play Audit, the Action Plan and the mapping in this strategy are all based on the play hierarchy.***

The play hierarchy is:

- Local
- Neighbourhood
- District
- Regional

Classification	Planning Considerations	Definition
<b>Local</b> (Facility with a catchment of 400m walking radius)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length of Stay (LOS) of 20 minutes</li> <li>• 400m catchment walking radius</li> <li>• Radius not to include “firewalls” such as major roads, railways, or industrial areas</li> <li>• Around 6 play elements</li> <li>• No or limited seating</li> <li>• No shade</li> <li>• No BBQ’s</li> <li>• No toilets</li> <li>• Limited planting</li> <li>• Minor maintenance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Park size - Normally small in size (approx. 0.1 – 0.2ha)</li> <li>• Offering passive and low-key recreation opportunities such as seating and landscaping,</li> <li>• local playspaces would be small in nature and would target toddlers and/or juniors (0-3 and 3-6-year-old)</li> <li>• Equipment would normally include basic swing and slide aspects and minor landscaping</li> <li>• Complement other larger playspaces within the portfolio, and may be within the catchment of a Neighbourhood or a District level playspace nearby</li> </ul>
<b>Neighbourhood</b> (Facility with a catchment of 1km walking radius)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length of Stay (LOS) of 30-45 minutes</li> <li>• 1km catchment walking radius</li> <li>• Radius not to include “firewalls” such as major roads, railways, or industrial areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Park size - Targeting a broader demographic catchment and therefore (normally) located on larger parcels of land (approx. 0.2 – 0.4ha)</li> <li>• Neighbourhood playspaces would include equipment for</li> </ul>

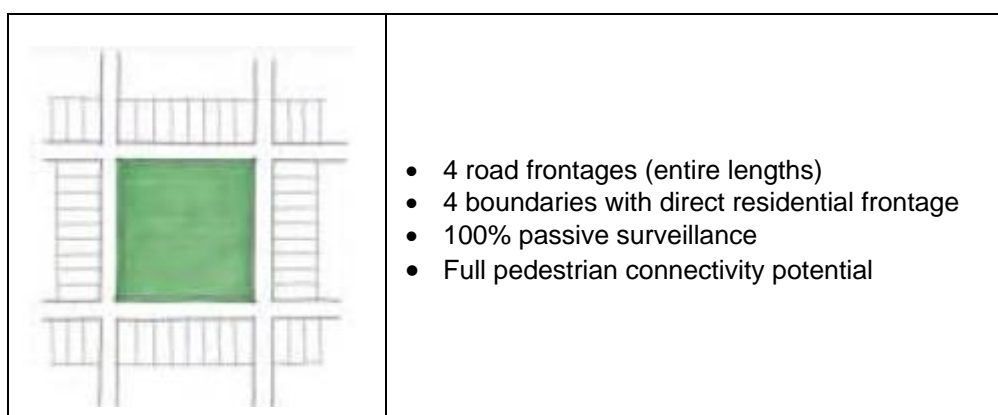
Classification	Planning Considerations	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to 10 play elements</li> <li>• Seating</li> <li>• May have limited shade</li> <li>• No BBQ's</li> <li>• No toilets</li> <li>• Plantings</li> <li>• Regular maintenance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• toddlers to seniors and may include assets such as seating, shade, bins and picnic tables.</li> <li>• Ideally linked to a number of Local playspaces in the area.</li> <li>• Should support a District within the portfolio or may be the largest playspace in a smaller centre.</li> </ul>
<p><b>District</b> (Facility with a catchment of 10km driving radius)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length of Stay (LOS) of 1 hour+</li> <li>• 10km driving radius</li> <li>• Up to 15 multi-play elements</li> <li>• Can include play “zones” and quiet areas for Inclusive playspaces</li> <li>• Seating</li> <li>• Shade</li> <li>• BBQ's</li> <li>• Toilets</li> <li>• Large areas of plantings</li> <li>• Regular maintenance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Park size - Usually attracting a wider catchment and located on larger parcels of land also used for other activities such as sport or other forms of recreation</li> <li>• (approx. 0.5 – 1.0ha)</li> <li>• These playspaces offer a wider variety of play ‘choice’ from toddler – senior and in some instance’s youth.</li> <li>• District level facilities normally include seating, shading, shelter and end of trip facilities such as water fountains and bicycle racks.</li> <li>• Accessible playspaces are often considered in District level classifications or higher.</li> <li>• Ideally linked to a number of Local and Neighbourhood playspaces in the area.</li> <li>• May support a Regional within the portfolio but can also be the top provision in smaller centres.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Regional</b> (Facility with a catchment of more than 10km driving radius)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length of Stay (LOS) of more than 2 hours</li> <li>• More than 10km driving radius</li> <li>• Normally has a “signature” play element which is the focus of the space</li> <li>• More than 20 multi-play elements</li> <li>• Includes play “zones” and quiet areas for Inclusive playspaces</li> <li>• Seating, including sandstone barriers as seating</li> <li>• Shading of specific play zones</li> <li>• An offering of BBQ's in different breakout areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Park size - These types of facilities attract visitation from outside a council boundary. Should not be located at sports facilities but rather large high value passive parks</li> <li>• (approx. 1.0 – 3.0ha)</li> <li>• Are generally those places where people tend to stay longer and would therefore require facilities and services such as toilets, water, shelter and shade, and can include the provision of food.</li> <li>• The playspaces themselves often offer a unique aspect which encourages use, such as a special feature, larger open</li> </ul>

Classification	Planning Considerations	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toilets, including all accessible</li> <li>• Large areas of plantings, including mature shade trees</li> <li>• Daily cleaning and maintenance</li> <li>• Zones or the whole space can be fenced, especially in the case of Inclusive playspaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• space, or range of play opportunities.</li> <li>• Can provide other recreation facilities, such as skateparks, ramp-parks and intergenerational fitness. These Regional playspaces can then be classified as Community Hubs, or Destination Parks.</li> <li>• These playspaces are often located in highly attractive parks, with high value natural values.</li> <li>• Where Regional level playspaces are provided there must be District, Neighbourhood and a number of Locals within its catchment.</li> </ul>

***Our goal is to provide the right play facility in the right place, for the enjoyment of the community.***

### Visibility, Accessibility, Connectivity (VAC)

Bringing these play planning considerations together we have what is known as the VAC = Visibility, Accessibility, Connectivity. All playspaces should be placed in parks where there is a high level of passive surveillance, they should be accessible for everyone, and they should be connected within a larger portfolio. When you plan well this is the test for our planning, is it visible, can everyone get there, is it connected to the community and does it connect the community to the public open space portfolio<sup>7</sup>.



<sup>7</sup> <https://www.parksleisure.com.au/research-portal/resources>



The image above is purely an illustration of how a well-planned park, and the playspace within it, can become part of a community, and where the facility is safe for all, accessible to all and encourages our community to value and visit their parks. Most of our parks are more dynamic than this simple example, with linear parks, coastal parks and parks neighbouring bushland being the norm. However, the concepts of VAC still apply to these parks.

***Our goal is to ensure our playspaces are seen, accessible and connected.***

## **Playspace Design Elements**

Playspace design is dynamic and involves several considerations.

Playspace components can be broken into two simple groups; core and complementary.

The core components listed in this section are built upon in the higher categories. Think of local playspaces as the base, and neighbourhood, district and regional playspaces as larger and more dynamic versions of the base.

It is important to provide a range of opportunities across our area and consideration should therefore be given to ensuring that a 'cookie cutter' approach is not adopted for classifications of playspaces.

A local playspace for example may be designed with creative or natural landscaping whereas another may include five or six pieces of equipment in an open space setting with little or no natural features or opportunities.

Likewise, a regional playspace may include several design elements but should complement and offer a point of difference to other playspaces across the area. They may also be themed in line with a local cultural or historical consideration which gives it a truly unique feature. A perfect example of this is the Livvi's Place playspace in Taree, or the Lone Pine playspace in Tuncurry. Inclusive playspaces are classified as regional, due to their unique characteristics.

The following are guidelines as to what design considerations apply to local through to regional playspaces. This is a further breakdown of the details in the Play Hierarchy above.

***Our goal is to design playspaces, in collaboration with individual communities, that are innovative, engaging and contemporary, that each community will be proud of.***

## **Design Elements - Local Playspaces**

Local playspaces are normally low level by way of design and equipment and are generally passive in nature catering for younger (toddlers and juniors up to the age of six). Local playspaces may also be used incidentally i.e. on route to or from a destination such as shops, schools, or from public transport and in some instances as physical links to other open spaces. Alternatively, such playspaces may be used deliberately as a need for low impact play and exploration for young children under the guidance of adult supervision. Local playspaces rarely provide for risky play or if they do it is limited to elements such as slippery slides.

## Core Components

All playspaces, regardless of their category have core components. These components fall under specific themes, such as swing, balance, rocking and climbing. These components form the backbone of all playspaces, regardless of size.

Core components of local playspaces are in line with a 'traditional' playspace to include approximately 5-6 pieces of equipment such as:

- Play equipment area (5 pieces) for age group 0-6
- swings
- slide
- rockers
- shop counters
- bench or area to sit and rest e.g. tree logs, boulders etc

## Complementary Components

Not all local playspaces need to comprise formal play equipment areas and could include an imaginative (natural) play area to ensure provision is complemented and not duplicated with other local playspaces nearby. Additional features, over and above the core play elements could therefore include:

- limited shade structure
- water
- fencing if located near to a safety hazard such as main roads or steep drop offs
- each should (where possible) offer its own setting with a different set of opportunities from the parks nearby.

It must be noted that not all local playspaces would include all of the above, but these elements developed in conjunction with similar parks nearby, i.e. planning should ensure playspaces are complemented and not duplicated within a close proximity to each other. Specific areas set aside for adults are not necessarily developed in local playspaces due to the age of the child requiring constant surveillance by the carer. However, seating and shading may be provided across all playspaces and designed to ensure both active and passive surveillance by carers.

## Design Elements - Neighbourhood Playspace

Neighbourhood playspaces build on the local core components. Neighbourhood playspaces consider the broader suburb and thus the need to provide for a more diverse range of opportunities and offer a wider range of opportunity for children primarily in the four to twelve year age group (juniors and seniors) but should also include equipment for toddlers. When discussing neighbourhood playspaces, it is assumed that:

- People will travel further to use the park and therefore tend to do so deliberately rather than incidentally.
- Generally located within each suburb and therefore facilities such as toilets may not be required.
- Would be no more than approximately 1-2 kilometres from homes.

## Neighbourhood Playspace Components

Neighbourhood playspaces are designed to cater for the needs of more than one user group, and for more than one type of activity. Toddler, junior and senior play areas will be provided and sited

around a picnic areas/shelters and tables. Neighbourhood playspaces might be set along an urban waterway or natural settings and key components can therefore include:

- Play Equipment Area (10 pieces) for age groups 1-12
- Imaginative Creative Area (natural settings)
- Non-Structured Play Area
- Adult / Carer Area
- Bins

## **Design Elements - District Playspace**

The third level in the hierarchy is the district playspace. District parks tend to serve wider catchments and sited where special features (natural or manmade) such as a water body, a cluster of sporting facilities, civic areas, or historic site are located. In discussing this classification, it is assumed that visitors are offered greater recreation opportunities and therefore stay longer at the 'park'. As such, amenities such as water, car parking, toilets, barbecues and rubbish bins may all be warranted.

Other key aspects of district playspaces include a safe (normally fenced) play area for young children and areas where parents and carers can meet and socialise in a safe environment. Children's birthday parties are common occurrences in such parks and parents can prepare barbecues in areas with good surveillance of play equipment which has an additional safeguard of fencing to prevent children from leaving the playspace.

District level playspaces can also be used for specific activities such as youth recreation, sporting facilities, dog parks or adult exercise areas whereby the land is designed to be used for a number of specific activities.

### **District Playspace Components**

When discussing the playspace component of district level parks, it is assumed that the following components would be provided:

- Play Equipment Area for all age groups (15 pieces +)
- Often fenced or secured in areas of high safety concern such as main roads
- Imaginative Creative Area (natural settings)
- Non-Structured Play Area
- Adult / Carer Area

## **Design Elements - Regional Playspaces**

Regional playspaces are similar to the district classification but with additional components that would attract both local and regional visitors. This may be in the form of an adventure playground, water park, or unique aspect such as additional space for larger community events such as carnivals and concerts. Regional playspaces are often well landscaped and/or use the natural landscape to offer a unique experience.

- Play Equipment Area for all age groups (20 pieces +)
- Often fenced or secured in areas of high safety concern such as main roads
- Intergenerational play elements
- Intergenerational fitness
- Separated zones providing different play experiences, such as swing, balance
- Imaginative Creative Area (natural settings)
- Non-Structured Play Area
- Adult / Carer Area



## Community Hubs (Destination Parks)

As our community has become more diverse and our need for more dynamic and complex playspaces has grown, the demand for larger play areas and more diverse play equipment has also grown. This has resulted in the addition of a new category of play facilities, that being the Community Hub, sometimes referred to as a Destination Park.

A Community Hub is similar to a regional playspace. Often it will have a large playspace, located within a larger passive recreation park, with a large number of play elements, signature pieces and landscaping, as well as intergenerational fitness and mobility zones, fitness zones, a skatepark, ramp park and youth zone. All of these come together to create a Community Hub, where people come, and stay for long periods of time.

These Community Hubs can then attract commercial activity, such as a cafe, restaurant, allied health businesses, bike repair shop and others. In effect they can become a one stop shop for families and others.

A Community Hub is often located in a park with a significant attractor feature, such as a coastal foreshore park, adjoining bushland, or swimming area.

***Our goal is to co-locate our facilities so that the community can enjoy the value gained from being able to access different activities in the same location.***

## Everyone Can Play

The NSW Government has produced the Everyone Can Play guidelines<sup>8</sup>.

Everyone Can Play is a best practice resource for councils, community leaders, landscape architects and passionate local residents. It is a reference guide for creating world-class playspaces, designed to include everyone in the community.

These guidelines have been recognised as world leading for the planning for and provision for play. They provide a planning framework that encourages local government and other land managers to provide playspaces that are inclusive and welcoming.

The guidelines state:

*Playspaces exist at the heart of our neighbourhoods and should cater for everyone – young and old, families and carers, and people of all abilities. Playspaces should be welcoming and comfortable, easy to navigate and interesting. They should offer a range of physical challenges, a variety of landscape settings and provide opportunities to connect with others.*

The guidelines form the basis of MidCoast's approach to play provision. We will seek to provide play experiences to our community that are bespoke, contemporary and inclusive of all. Our play portfolio has suffered from a lack of planning in the past, with play equipment provided in places that did not provide play value. It is our aim to bring our play portfolio up to contemporary standards in alignment with the Everyone Can Play standard.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.everyonecanplay.nsw.gov.au/>

The Everyone Can Play guidelines have transformed the way playspaces are planned, designed, delivered and managed.

***Our goal is to design our contemporary playspaces in accordance with the Everyone Can Play guidelines.***

## **Play for Tourists?**

It is often asked whether individual councils are responsible for providing infrastructure for tourists, over and above what we provide for our residents. This is important for play planning, because if we do plan for tourists then we should provide more, and bigger.

The MidCoast region experiences a high level of tourist visitation, most notably through the summer months. Our coastal towns and villages are the primary focus of this visitation, but there is also tourism to our mountain regions as well. In addition, the M1 motorway passes through our region, from south to north. Several of our smaller towns have a symbiotic relationship with the highway, both from passing traffic, commerce, and visitation.

A simple example of this seasonal visitation is Hawks Nest. The town has a regular population of 1,414 residents. This is enough to warrant one Local playspace. However, for approximately three months of the year Hawks Nest experiences significant tourist visitation, mainly from families, with children. It could be assumed that the regular population doubles, or even triples during this period, not to mention day visitors. During this period a Local playspace is not enough to cater for all the children, and parents that would make use of the playspace.

However, to ensure that we have the right types of playspaces, in the right places, to meet the community's needs, whilst also managing limited resources, we need to plan for the long-term, and for year-round use, not seasonal use. After all, a playspace has a life of 20 years, whereas tourist visitation fluctuates greatly.

To plan effectively we have to benchmark our playspace provision based on residents. This is outlined in more detail in the following section on playspace ratio per population. In the case of the Hawks Nest example, it is planned to provide a suite of playspaces that will meet the play needs of the resident community, but will also, at the same time, provide an enjoyable play experience for our visitors.

***Our goal is to provide high quality contemporary playspaces for our community that also enhance the experience for visitors.***

## **Play Signage**

Often our playspaces, especially our Local playspaces, are located where they are not readily seen. To provide a playspace within the catchment of a local population it is often the case that they are at the end of cul-de-sacs, dead ends or just not on main roads. This means that expensive community infrastructure is somewhere that the larger community is not aware of it.

To this end there are opportunities to raise awareness of the locations of public playspaces. These opportunities include increasing publicity and communication via social media, such as Council's Facebook page.

However, a primary means of letting the community know that high quality playspaces may be in a location is the installation of 'Play' signs on roads in the vicinity of playspaces. The aim being to identify their location and make the community aware of their presence.

Therefore, providing signage i.e. a play symbol or larger sign provides benefits for people with difficulty reading and who are not proficient in English, is a simple way to alert the community of its presence.

We will install playspace signs at major intersections leading to playspaces. In addition, we will install signage in playspaces due for upgrade or replacement, alerting the community of impending work to be carried out.

We have a style guide for our street and park signage, the *MidCoast Council Signage Guidelines*, that we will comply with to ensure that the community knows when they see a particular sign that there is a playspace in the vicinity.

The picture to the right is indicative only. We will ask the community what they think about signage during consultation of individual playspace constructions.

***Our goal is to ensure that playspaces are easy to find.***

## **Australian Standards**

No other infrastructure in the recreation portfolio is subject to standards more than play. As opposed to sports fields and other sport facilities there is a specific Australian Standard for both the provision of play equipment, as well as how playspaces can be constructed. Terms such as free-height of fall, fall zones, impact areas, and soft-fall are concepts that planners and contractors as well as inspectors need to apply to playspaces.

The Australian Standards are guidelines for the design and installation of playspaces within Australian states and territories. They specify safety requirements and ensure a high quality of workmanship associated with the design, installation, maintenance and testing of play equipment and surfacing. They are not intended to provide totally risk-free environments.

Australian Standards are a minimum benchmark and are not mandatory unless referenced in legislation or regulation. The Australian Standards for Playgrounds should be consulted by anyone planning, designing, building or maintaining a playground.

The Australian Standards Committee on Playgrounds has recently published a new Play Equipment Standard (AS4685 2021<sup>9</sup>).

Changes to the Standards are not retrospective and play equipment that currently complies with previous Standards remain compliant. However, due to the age of many of our playgrounds there will be many that do not comply with the latest standards, or even previous standards, even though they are functionally sound.

## **New Urban Developments**

Several new urban developments are due to commence construction in the Mid Coast area during the lifecycle of this Strategy. Developers often provide one, or a number of new playspaces within their developments. This is because playspaces often sell properties, whether existing houses or house blocks. People want to live near playspaces, and parks, and people understand that this increases the value of their property. Developer provided playspaces also ensure that over the long-term the whole development gains a good reputation, through having community infrastructure and plenty of parks.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://adventureplus.net.au/blog/australian-playground-standards-basics-every-designer-should-know>



When developers seek approval from Council for their developments to proceed Council can guide the provision of parks, sport and playspace facilities. This ensures that the community, in 10- or 20-years' time, has all the community infrastructure that they need.

This Strategy forms the framework and guide for both the developer and Council for the future provision of new playspaces. Even though we can't include any new urban development playspaces in the Strategy's Action Plan we are aware that they may come, and so we have considered how they will fit into the play portfolio. Those playspaces that are in the Action Plan have been considered as to their catchment, and how any new catchment may overlay it's own.

***Our goal is to work with developers to ensure high quality, contemporary and accessible playspaces are provided.***

## **To fence or not to fence?**

The question of whether to fence a playspace or not is one of the most debated in modern play planning. There are a number of arguments both for and against. These include, on the pro side, that playspaces are often located near carparks, roads and waterways. Fencing the facility makes it safer for children. Parents report that a fenced playspace makes them feel more relaxed about the safety of their children.

On the con side is the argument, put forward by professionals, that enclosing children within a fenced area creates a sense of caging, and reduces the play experience.

Contemporary thinking is that when we provide a playspace whether to fence it or not should be on a case by case basis. If the situation demands it then we will put them in. In addition, because this strategy sets out a policy of engaging with the community on design considerations on each playspace provision and upgrade then asking the community about fencing will be a part of that engagement.

Therefore, we won't be setting a policy either way in relation to fencing, but rather will consider it for each playspace.

## **Community Gardens**

The importance of play to our children is acknowledged. However, recently it has also been noted that introducing children to nature is another important consideration for play. Several councils around Australia are now including with their playspaces community gardens. The combining of these two community facilities not only gives children play opportunities, but it also exposes them to the natural source of our food. Families can take their child to play and grab a vegetable that they will eat for dinner. Taken to the next level, some councils have also constructed brick structures near the gardens and have placed native beehives in them. This then introduces to children the awareness of where our food is pollinated from. A simple but impactful approach.

MidCoast Council will seek opportunities to introduce the same structure where appropriate.

## **Specialised Playspaces**

Before we finish this section that has detailed all the concepts involved in play planning it is important to introduce a touch of reality. As much as we seek to provide all our playspaces that align with a position in the play hierarchy, as well as all the individual considerations highlighted in the previous table, the reality is that many situations arise where we can't deliver the "perfect" playspace to meet all the community's needs. Many factors limit our ability to achieve our goals,

suitable parks and too many separate communities are two, but most limiting is budget. The availability of a budget that meets all the factors is often not accessible. Often, we need to compromise what we WANT to deliver, for what we CAN deliver.

When the budget is not sufficient, we will seek to provide specialised playspaces. As detailed in the Understanding Why People Play section there are four basic physical acts in play; Swing, Slide, Climb and Balance. If we can't deliver a full Local playspace because of budget, we will instead pick one of these play movements and focus on it. For example, we will provide a playspace that is exclusively Swing, or Slide, or Climb or Balance. This is thought to be the best approach, to deliver high play value, whilst having limited funds. One case in point is the recommendation in the Action Plan to build a Swing playspace at Moira Parade Reserve in Hawks Nest.

## Play Planning Decision Tool

As can be seen from the Planning for Play section, planning for play involves quite a number of different but interlocking considerations, including; Pedshed, Length of Stay (LOS), Distribution, Hierarchy, Design, including community design, Age of the participants and more. For ease of explanation these planning considerations, fully detailed above, can be compressed down into a simple tool.

The tool highlights the different factors that are considered when we are deciding where to put a playspace, what category it should be, what is the target age group, how large the catchment will be, can we interlock the playspace with others and what the community has told us.

***Our goal is to ensure that all actions that we take are rational, evidenced based, sustainable and easily explained.***

Consideration	Metric			
	Local	Neighbourhood	District	Regional
Hierarchy	Local	Neighbourhood	District	Regional
Play Elements	5	10	15	20+
Catchment	400m	1000m	10km	10km+
Length of Stay	20mins	40mins	1hr	2hrs+
Standards (AS)	AS4685	AS4685	AS4685	AS4685
Play Ratio	1:1000	1:1500	1:5000	1:10000+
VAC (minimum)	25% surveillance	50% surveillance	75% surveillance	100% surveillance
Community Engagement	Design	Design	Loc + design	Loc + design
Target Age	0-3-year-old	0-8-year-old	0-11-year-old +	Intergenerational
Park Size	0.1 – 0.2ha	0.2 – 0.4ha	0.5 – 1.0ha	1.0ha min
Inclusive Play	No	No	Situational	Yes
Fitness	No	No	Situational	Yes
Nature Play	No	No	No	Situational





# THE MIDCOAST "STATE OF PLAY"



## The MidCoast “State of Play”

There are currently 79 individual play facilities spread throughout the open space in MidCoast. These take the form of large Regional playspaces, located in major centres, right down to individual swings in small villages. It is evident that over the years there has been very little play planning involved in the development of these 79 play facilities. This is not unusual. Traditionally play equipment was placed into public open spaces on a piecemeal basis. It is not unusual to see one, two or three pieces of old play equipment in a park. These “playgrounds” range in age, and hence condition.

As noted, the provision of play equipment in the past was generally not a planned process. Only in recent times has significant planning consideration been applied to the provision of play, mainly driven by research and the awareness of the significant value of play for our communities. Therefore, the existing portfolio of old play facilities in the MidCoast area is generally in line with other similar councils i.e., not fit for purpose. The play hierarchy detailed above will now be applied to future play provision, resulting in a play portfolio that is more dynamic, balanced, targeted and which provides play for all age groups, and which will result in a significant improvement in play provision in the MidCoast region.

More recently, as we have upgraded old playgrounds to contemporary playspaces a more considered approach has been taken, with play-value for our children being the foremost consideration. This Playspace Strategy has been developed, detailing what we have, what we need, and where they should be (see Action Plan). This strategy will result in a play portfolio that is diverse, well located, and which aligns with our growing community.

### Supply and Distribution

Whilst there is no universally accepted ratio of playspaces per 1000 population, similar studies across Australia have shown a distribution of between 1:1200 to 1:2000. The planning outcome is to balance provision to ensure good access and distribution. In affect equality of provision, which is one of our key principles.

Given the principle of access for all and considering similar NSW local authority’s populations and playspace provision, the table below highlights a mean supply of playspaces in several urban and peri-urban councils.

As seen at the bottom of the table the overall mean is one playspace for every 1448 residents. It would therefore be reasonable to identify a provision ratio of 1500-2000 people per playspace for the MidCoast region, and to plan to that ratio. However, due to the dispersed nature of our region i.e., almost 200 individual towns and villages, spaced out along a largely linear corridor, the ratio has been adjusted downwards, with a ratio of 1:1000 being indicated as Good Supply, and any ratio below 1:1000 being Over Supply and above 1:1500 being Under Supply.

Each individual playspace offers its own planning considerations and so the ratio should be a planning guide. Our many small villages and settlements currently have small playgrounds. These villages have far less population than the benchmarked ratio, however, mitigating planning factors come into play, such as the amount of passing visitation that comes from being close to the Pacific Highway, distance to the nearest playspace and distance of travel, especially when considering our remote coastal villages. Also considered; are high peak tourism visitation and predicted age and makeup of the future population of each location. These factors are considered when we are planning for play.

## Quantity versus Quality

Similar to our parks, and sporting facilities, the ratio indicated below shows we currently have enough “playspaces” for our population. However, like our sporting infrastructure the quality of our playspaces is quite poor (see Play Audit), with the majority of the facilities being more than 15 years old (noting that the average life of playspace equipment is 20 years), while quite a number are more than 20 years old, with some equipment being installed in the 1980’s (40 years old). This means that we have a large number that need replacing.

LGA	Total playspaces	Approximate population	Playspace to population
Blacktown	295	337,000	1 per 1,142
Camden	76	77,000	1 per 1,013
Central Coast	243	339,000	1 per 1,395
Lake Macquarie	114	213,845	1 per 1875
Liverpool	96	205,000	1 per 2,135
<b>MidCoast</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>96,800</b>	<b>1 per 1,225</b>
Penrith	140	194,134	1 per 1,387
Randwick	52	143,776	1 per 2,765
Waverley	40	71,769	1 per 1,794
Wingecarribee	48	52,456	1 per 1092
Wollongong	155	208,000	1 per 1,342
Woollahra	24	53,891	1 per 2,245
Yarra Ranges	119	157,419	1 per 1322
<b>On average 1 playspace for every 1,448 population</b>			

## Playspace ratio per location

As a follow-on from the benchmarking exercise the following table highlights the population of each of the towns and villages in the MidCoast region that currently have play equipment, along with the number in each location, giving an indication of playspaces per head of population.

<b>Over Supply &gt; 1:1000</b>	<b>Good Supply 1:1000</b>	<b>Under Supply &lt; 1:1500</b>
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Serial	Location	No of Playspaces	Population	Playspace per 1,000
1.	Allworth	1	190	1:190
2.	Black Head	1	972	1:972
3.	Bulahdelah	2	1,538	1:769
4.	Coolongolook	1	382	1:382
5.	Coomba Park	1	168	1:168
6.	Cooperbrook	1	625	1:625
7.	Craven	1	104	1:104
8.	Cundletown	2	2,050	1:1025
9.	Diamond Beach	1	1,012	1:1012
10.	Elizabeth Beach	1	259	1:259
11.	Forster	9	14,187	1:1576
12.	Gloucester	3	3,133	1:1044
13.	Green Point	1	522	1:522
14.	Hallidays Point	1	656	1:656
15.	Harrington	3	3,381	1:1127
16.	Hawks Nest	4	1,413	1:353
17.	Krambach	1	382	1:382
18.	Lansdowne	1	607	1:607
19.	Limeburners Creek	1	327	1:327
20.	Manning Point	1	229	1:229
21.	Nabiac	1	1,294	1:1294
22.	Nerong	1	168	1:168
23.	North Arm Cove	1	552	1:552
24.	Old Bar	4	5,126	1:1281
25.	Pindimar	1	345	1:345
26.	Smiths Lake	1	1,332	1:1332
27.	Stratford	1	161	1:161
28.	Stroud	2	988	1:494



Serial	Location	No of Playspaces	Population	Playspace per 1,000
29.	Stroud Road	2	242	1:121
30.	Taree	17	16,715	1:983
31.	Tea Gardens	2	3,288	1:1644
32.	Tinonee	3	1,202	1:400
33.	Tuncurry	4	6,376	1:1594
34.	Wallabi Point	1	938	1:938
35.	Wards River	1	178	1:178
36.	Wingham	5	5,395	1:1079
	<b>MidCoast</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>96,800</b>	<b>1:1225</b>

## Play Ratio Analysis

The following analysis can be conducted from the ratio table:

- Those locations where over supply is indicated is based not only on the average provision ratio, but also on the play hierarchy and distribution. With the advent of larger and more complex and dynamic playspaces there is now a lean towards less supply, but more quality. If a high quality and dynamic district or regional playspace is provided within a reasonable drive for a family then they have been found to be far more likely to visit those playspaces than a local playspace near to them which is of poor quality and offers less play value.
- Most of the small towns are over supplied as discussed previously. Rationalisation will be needed to balance out the portfolio. This will benefit all, with a higher level of play opportunity and less facilities for us to maintain.
- The standout from the ratio comparison is Taree. The ratio for Taree indicates an oversupply compared to the MidCoast average provision. However, the condition of the playspaces that are provided in a specific location is also important. The Taree play portfolio is very old and needing most to be replaced. In addition, Taree has a large number of local playspaces, which gives the impression of good supply, however, Taree lacks a full suite of playspaces, from local through to regional. Therefore, there should be a significant focus on play in Taree in the Action Plan.
- Several “mountain” towns, such as Stroud Road, Craven and Wards River are located on Bucketts Way, a short drive from each other. These towns and their old play equipment offer an opportunity for rationalisation and improvement in the quality of provision.

The play ratio can also be displayed as below, which gives a clearer picture of the state of play in MidCoast.

**Total number of locations with playspaces = 36**

<b>Over Supply &gt; 1:1000</b> <b>Total locations = 23</b>	<b>Good Supply 1:1000 - 1500</b> <b>Total locations = 10</b>	<b>Under Supply &lt; 1:1500</b> <b>Total locations = 3</b>
Allworth Black Head Bulahdelah Coolongolook Coomba Park Cooperbrook Craven Elizabeth Beach Green Point Hallidays Point Hawks Nest Krumbach Lansdowne Limeburners Creek Manning Point Nerong North Arm Cove Pindimar Stratford Stroud Stroud Road Tinonee Wards River	Cundletown Diamond Beach Gloucester Harrington Nabiac Old Bar Smiths Lake Wallabi Point Wingham Taree*	Forster Tea Gardens Tuncurry

\*- Taree has a total of 17 playgrounds. This gives a total play ratio of 1:983, which is just in the Over Supply bracket. However, as indicated in the Play Audit following the majority of these playgrounds are mostly above 20 years of age and in poor or very poor condition. It is considered that some of these facilities are not fit-for-purpose and so are not currently being used. Therefore, these facilities have been removed from the equation and so Taree has been placed in the Under-Supply category.

**Note.**

*Normally the Livvi's Place playspace in Taree would be classified as a Regional playspace. Inclusive playspaces are generally given default Regional classifications as people travel long distances to visit them. However, the Taree facility is not attracting the level of able-bodied visitation normally seen for Regional playspaces, mainly because of the type and number of play elements provided. Due to that the facility has been given a District classification and the Catchment radius indicated on the current map has been indicated at 1km and not 10km+.*

## Play Audit

To get a full understanding of the state of play in the MidCoast region an audit of play facilities has been undertaken. The following table examines all our existing play facilities.

Each of the 79 playspaces has been allocated a category in accordance with the play hierarchy as detailed above. However, this classification is arbitrary, and is allocated as a means of identification and to understand the state of the larger existing MidCoast play portfolio, and to ascertain the current catchment for each playspace.

The categorisation is not a statement that each individual play facility meets the recommended requirements listed in the hierarchy. A case in point is the single swing in Horrace Dean Park in Tinonee. For the purposes of the exercise this has been categorised as a Local playspace, but it does not meet that classification. However, when we come to the Action Plan and mapping the recommendations are in alignment with the hierarchy classifications. Play facilities that do not meet the hierarchy recommendations have been indicated as detailed above.

The age of the individual playspace has also been identified. The age is important to the planning of future provision as an average playspace should have an asset life of approximately 20 years, if maintained accordingly.

The following table shows the current MidCoast play portfolio and is displayed with the following metrics:

Key	Description
<b>Park #</b>	Map Reference number
<b>Site</b>	Name of park or reserve
<b>Suburb</b>	Location of the playspace
<b>Age</b>	Grouped according to when developed or last upgraded < 5 = less than 5 years old 5+ = 5-10 years old 10+ = 10-15 years old 15+ = 15-20 years old >20 = more than 20 years old
<b>Current Classification</b>	L = Local N = Neighbourhood D = District R = Regional F = Fitness * = Indicates that the facility does not meet the component provision standards for that facility
<b>Condition Rating</b>	Subjective assessment based on physical appearance and general asset condition with a ranking of: E = Excellent condition / Almost New G = Good condition with no major signs of wear and tear F = Fair condition with some signs of ageing /wear and tear P = Poor condition with some or equipment heavily damaged or worn



Park #	Site	Suburb	Age (Years)					Current Classification					Condition Rating				
			< 5	5+	10+	15+	>20	L	N	D	R	F	E	G	F	P	
1	Edith Waters Reserve	Allworth					X	X*									X
2	Black Head Reserve	Black Head			X			X								X	
3	Black Head Reserve	Black Head	X									X		X			
4	Mountain Park	Bulahdelah	X					X					X				
5	Mountain Park	Bulahdelah	X									X		X			
6	Wade Park	Bulahdelah			X			X								X	
7	Coolongolook Oval	Coolongolook	X					X					X				
8	Coomba Park	Coomba Park				X		X*								X	
9	Coomba Park	Coomba Park	X									X		X			
10	Cooperbrook Park	Cooperbrook	X					X*					X				
11	Craven Reserve	Craven					X	X*									X
12	Cundletown Park	Cundletown					X	X*									X
13	Market Square	Cundletown					X	X								X	
14	Diamond Park	Diamond Beach				X		X								X	
15	Pacific Palms Community Reserve	Elizabeth Beach			X			X								X	
16	Forster Heights Park	Forster				X		X*								X	
17	Forster Breakwall	Forster	X									X		X			
18	Forster Town Park	Forster					X	X*								X	
19	Lakes Estate Sports	Forster		X				X*							X		
20	Marjorie Debert Reserve	Forster	X					X					X				
21	Palmgrove Park	Forster		X					X						X		
22	Pebble Beach Reserve	Forster		X				X*							X		
23	Pilot Hill Forster	Forster					X	X*								X	
24	Elizabeth Reserve	Forster	X									X		X			
25	Billabong Park	Gloucester				X				X						X	
26	Gloucester Park	Gloucester		X								X		X			
27	Gloucester Pool	Gloucester				X		X*								X	
28	King George V Park	Gloucester	X					X					X				
29	Bottlebrush Reserve	Green Point				X		X*								X	
30	Seascope	Hallidays Point					X	X*								X	
31	Gordon Smith Reserve	Harrington				X		X*								X	
32	Oxley Reserve #2	Harrington		X				X*							X		
33	Oxley Reserve #1	Harrington		X				X*							X		

Park #	Site	Suburb	Age (Years)					Current Classification					Condition Rating			
			< 5	5+	10+	15+	>20	L	N	D	R	F	E	G	F	P
34	Oxley Reserve	Harrington		X								X		X		
35	Jimmy's Beach Day	Hawks Nest				X		X*							X	
36	Moirra Parade Reserve	Hawks Nest				X		X							X	
37	Providence Bay	Hawks Nest				X			X						X	
38	Winda Woppa Reserve	Hawks Nest					X	X							X	
39	Leo Carney Park	Krambach					X	X*								X
40	Lansdowne Recreation Reserve	Lansdowne			X			X*							X	
41	Limeburners Creek Reserve	Limeburners Ck		X				X						X		
42	Vic Shoesmith Reserve	Manning Point					X	X*								X
43	Nabiac Oval	Nabiac	X					X						X		
44	Redbill Park	Nerong			X			X*								X
45	North Arm Cove Reserve	North Arm Cove		X				X*						X		
46	North Arm Cove Reserve	North Arm Cove	X									X	X			
47	Badgers Park	Old Bar					X	X*							X	
48	Bluehaven Reserve	Old Bar				X		X*							X	
49	Molong Reserve	Old Bar			X			X							X	
50	Old Bar Park	Old Bar	X							X			X			
51	Leone Fidden Reserve	Pindimar					X	X*								X
52	Smith Lake Debert Reserve	Smiths Lake	X						X				X			
53	Stratford Reserve	Stratford					X	X*								X
54	Allen Park	Stroud			X			X						X		
55	Kevin Francis Park	Stroud					X	X*							X	
56	Scenic Park	Stroud Road					X	X*							X	
57	Taylor Park	Stroud Road					X	X*							X	
58	Barton Walk	Taree					X	X*							X	
59	Boyce Park	Taree					X	X*								X
60	Chatham Park	Taree					X	X*								X
61	Debrecency Park	Taree					X	X*								X
62	Edinburgh Park	Taree					X	X*							X	
63	Endeavour Reserve	Taree		X								X				X

Park #	Site	Suburb	Age (Years)					Current Classification					Condition Rating			
			< 5	5+	10+	15+	>20	L	N	D	R	F	E	G	F	P
64	Fotheringham Park	Taree	X						X					X		
65	Kanangra Drive Reserve	Taree				X		X*							X	
66	Martin Reserve	Taree					X	X*								X
67	Mitchell Reserve	Taree					X	X*							X	
68	Queen Elizabeth	Taree	X								X		X			
69	Ruprecht Park	Taree					X	X*								X
70	Stokes Park	Taree				X		X*							X	
71	Taree Park	Taree					X	X*								X
72	Taree Rec Ground	Taree	X								X				X	
73	Winton Reserve	Taree					X	X*								X
74	Wrigley Park	Taree					X	X*								X
75	Dunshea Av Reserve	Tea Gardens					X	X*								X
76	Tea Gardens Library	Tea Gardens				X		X*							X	
77	Horrace Dean Park	Tinonee					X	X*								X
78	Tallships Reserve	Tinonee		X				X*						X		
79	Tinonee Recreation	Tinonee					X	X*								X
80	Banksia Estate Reserve	Tuncurry				X		X*							X	
81	Tuncurry Sports	Tuncurry				X		X*							X	
82	Lone Pine Park	Tuncurry	X							X			X			
83	Rockpool Reserve	Tuncurry	X							X			X			
84	Shelly Close Reserve	Wallabi Point					X	X*							X	
85	Wards River Park	Wards River					X	X*								X
86	Abbott Street Reserve	Wingham					X	X*							X	
87	Apex Park	Wingham					X	X*							X	
88	Central Park	Wingham		X							X			X		
89	Central Park	Wingham					X	X*							X	
90	Jacaranda Av Reserve	Wingham					X	X*							X	
91	Price Street Reserve	Wingham					X	X*								X



## Play Audit Analysis

A number of key issues have been identified:

Serial	Issues Identified
1	Ageing equipment
2	High levels of wear and tear
3	Elements of poor design
4	Inequality in distribution

The lifespan of a playground and its equipment is highly variable, dependant on its location.

- Playspaces located close to the foreshore rust and deteriorate faster than an inland location
- Playgrounds in tourist destinations have very high usage during peak holiday periods
- Poorly designed or placed equipment deteriorates faster

The audit tells us several things about the MidCoast play portfolio. Firstly, of the 79 playspaces (note that fitness facilities have also been included in the audit), 71 of them have been categorised as Local playspaces, with 4 Neighbourhood, 4 District and no Regional.

As noted previously many of the playspaces are in fact just a couple of play elements. It is one of the aims of this strategy to remove these random pieces of play equipment and replace them with a Local playspace that aligns with the description as outlined in the Play Hierarchy.

### 1 Ageing equipment

The play audit highlights the age of the portfolio. The majority of the playspaces are more than 10 years old, with many more being more than 20 years old. In short, the portfolio, as a whole, is old, and well past the play value of the collective equipment. That is not to say that the individual equipment is unsafe, as we conduct regular inspections, but rather the equipment is aged, with limited play value. Any planning that may have been undertaken for these older playgrounds is now out of date.

***An aged facility, if well maintained, can still be in good condition, and still provide play value.***

### 2 High levels of wear and tear

We see a very poor standard of condition, with many of the facilities being rated Fair or Poor. You can observe a direct collocation between the age of the facility and its condition. With a well-maintained play portfolio this does not necessarily need to be the case. An aged facility, if well maintained, can still be in good condition. Overall, the condition of the portfolio, with some exceptions, is very poor.

### 3 Elements of poor design

There is a general lack of design evident in the existing play portfolio. The older the playspace, the less planning went into its design, and so the less play value the community will be deriving from it. There may well be play equipment in a park, but is it delivering optimum community outcomes?

### 4 Inequality of distribution

A modern, contemporary play portfolio should include a suite of different classifications, and each individual playspace, regardless of its classification should offer something different than others of its same category. When the play portfolio is presented in a table or graph the whole portfolio should present as a tiered 'system', starting with a select number of Regional, a corresponding number of District, more Neighbourhood's, and finally a large selection of Local. Consider the Local playspaces as the "backbone" of the portfolio. In the case of the existing MidCoast play portfolio the majority of playspaces are Local or less, meaning that there is no tiered system, but rather a block of similar facilities.

In addition, the number of Local playspaces is far in excess of benchmarks and for our population. Local playspaces should dominate any play portfolio, but not to the extent that they do in MidCoast. There are several reasons for this oversupply of Local playspaces. Firstly, MidCoast is fairly unique in that it has 195 towns and villages spread throughout the area. The three historic councils that made up MidCoast provided small (Local) playspaces in many of these locations. This meant that playspaces were provided in towns where there may have only been a few hundred people, well below the benchmark for provision. The second reason is a lack of planning. In the past play equipment was provided where people asked for it, or where Council thought it was needed or just to fill up a park. This ignores all the components of play planning, most specifically distribution.

***In short, the MidCoast play portfolio is old, and is not delivering the play value that we seek.***



# PLAYSPACE ACTION PLAN



# Playspace Action Plan

In alignment with the outcomes of the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035* the MidCoast Playspace Strategy 2023 – 2035 seeks to provide more enhanced play value for our community. To achieve this aim, we need to rationalise our play portfolio.

## How we identified and prioritised the actions

Aside from the planning considerations extensively outlined in this Strategy we also apply a framework of rationale decision making to where and what we provide. This framework is highlighted in the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035* as an overarching guide. It is reproduced below for clarity.

Decision Driver	Rationale
Evidence approach	Each action has been tested through community feedback, analysis of community need, analysis of current play trends and its impacts on the environment. The priority placed on each action is a result of analysis of the impact on the community if that project is not undertaken.
Equitable provision	Actions were also developed through an equitable lens, in that each location within the LGA was considered for what they have received in the past, how long since that location received a new facility and how passionate the community is in engaging with us. It is not so much the squeaky wheel but rather an appreciation of how engaged each individual community is in regard to community infrastructure.
Asset portfolio condition	As can be seen in the Play Audit table above the state of our play portfolio is aged, and some of the individual components are no longer fit for purpose. In developing the actions and their priorities the condition of existing infrastructure, and its projected life was a strong determinant in setting its priority.
Financial Sustainability	The prioritisation of the actions in the Action plan, and the ability for projects to progress to delivery in the future, has also been influenced by considering the associated financial operating model and/or the long-term asset management requirements in minimising future financial burdens to Council. This financial planning of actions also includes the consideration of access to future potential funding programs, the funds of which the vast majority of the actions will require.

Project priority timeframes, such as Short, Medium and Long term priorities are not “locked in”, but rather are a guide for us and the community. If circumstances change, such as new funding programs, changes within individual communities, or changes in community participation we will revisit the priorities. This might mean a community comes to us and asks for a project to be brought forward, which, when considered, can be done, we will.



## Future Regional Playspaces

For the purposes of Regional level playspace provision the following centres have been identified:

1. Taree
2. Gloucester
3. Old Bar

The Regional playspaces will also be allocated intergenerational play experiences, with play and mobility for seniors being included in these facilities. Future intergenerational fitness facilities will also be co-located with Regional playspaces.

*Note.*

*Special consideration has been given to the play situation in Tuncurry and Forster. Tuncurry currently has two contemporary District level playspaces, as well as two older Local playspaces, that have been identified for upgrades in the future. Due to this Tuncurry has a Good supply. Normally Forster would need a Regional level playspace for its population, however with Forster within the Tuncurry catchment and vice versa, the two towns provision and catchment interact. Therefore, Forster should not have a Regional playspace, but rather have a District, providing 3 District level playspaces between the towns. This will give a better portfolio outcome.*

*Note.*

*The Livvi's Place playspace in Taree is not providing the play value expected of this kind of facility. Therefore, the recommendation, as highlighted in the Action Plan below, is for the facility to be upgraded to a full Regional level facility. This is planned to be achieved by extending the current footprint of the playspace. Added to the current facility will be several different play zones, as would be expected in a Regional facility.*

## Future District Playspaces

For the purposes of District level playspace provision the following centres have been identified:

1. Black Head
2. Cundletown
3. Forster
4. Harrington
5. Stroud
6. Hawks Nest
7. Tuncurry x 2
8. Wingham

*Note.*

*Special consideration has been given to the play situation in Tea Gardens and Hawks Nest. Much like the situation at Tuncurry and Forster these two towns fall within each other's play catchment as well as being the central settlement for surrounding locations. To service the residents and high levels of tourists the two have been considered together. The Action Plan includes an upgraded District playspace at Providence Park in Hawks Nest, along with new Locals for both.*

## Future Community Hubs

A select number of Regional centres have been identified for the provision of future community hubs, which include the elements outlined in the planning section. These can include a Regional playspace, intergenerational play and fitness, a skatepark and other commercial facilities, such as cafes. This identification does not take a formal structure but allows for additional facilities to be added if they are deemed to be suitable.

1. Fotheringham Park, Taree
2. Billabong Park, Gloucester

## Maps and future provision

The following section and mapping provide the future Action Plan for our play portfolio. In developing this action plan the existing play portfolio has been assessed for its functionality, its locations, the distribution of each existing and future catchment and its quantum of the different hierarchies.

The future play portfolio will tier down through the different levels, with a number of Regional level facilities in major centres, supported by District level facilities in minor centres and the remainder of the portfolio being Local level playspaces in key locations. It is anticipated that this will ensure that all members of our community have access to a quality play experience on a daily basis, with the opportunity for all to be able to access a District or Regional facility when desired.

The following table shows the MidCoast future play portfolio and is displayed with the following metrics:

Key	Description
<b>Park #</b>	Map Reference number
<b>Suburb</b>	Physical location of the playspace
<b>Future Classification</b>	Shows the recommended future hierarchical classification of the playspace. L = Local N = Neighbourhood D = District R = Regional F = Fitness
<b>Action</b>	Details the specific action to be carried out for the facility. Replace = Provide contemporary equipment at the same level Upgrade = Increase classification Remove = Remove existing equipment and do not replace At End of Life (AEOL) = Once equipment is no longer serviceable or providing play value
<b>Priority</b>	Details the priority that the provision or upgrade is to take place. The priorities are broken up as follows: S – Short-term priority. 0 – 3 years M – Medium-term priority. 4 – 8 years L – Long-term priority. 9 – 12 years
<b>Rationale</b>	Brief description that justifies the action.

Park #	Site	Suburb	Play Or Fitness	Action	Priority			Rationale
					S	M	L	
1	Edith Waters Reserve	Allworth	Play	L. Replace	X			Standalone. No other provision in the area
2	Black Head Reserve	Black Head	Play	L. Upgrade to D		X		Caters for larger catchment, including Tallwoods
3	Black Head Reserve	Black Head	Fitness	Replace AEOL			X	Co-locate with new District playspace
4	Mountain Park	Bulahdelah	Play	L. No action required				Good condition, meeting need
5	Mountain Park	Bulahdelah	Fitness	Remove AEOL			X	Replaced by Inter-gen fitness at new District
6	Wade Park	Bulahdelah	Play	L. Upgrade to N AEOL			X	Complements 4 AEOL
7	Coolongolook	Coolongolook	Play	L. No action required				Good condition, meeting need
8	Coomba Park	Coomba Park	Play	L. Replace AEOL			X	Standalone catchment with no other provision.
9	Coomba Park	Coomba Park	Fitness	Replace AEOL			X	Combine playspace upgrade and inter-gen fitness and remove current
10	Cooperbrook Park	Cooperbrook Park	Play	L. Replace	X			Standalone catchment with no other provision
11	Craven Reserve	Craven	Play	L. Remove AEOL		X		Poor condition. New provision in Gloucester
12	Cundletown Park	Cundletown	Play	L. Replace	X			Meets demand. Complements Taree provision.
13	Market Square	Cundletown	Play	L. Upgrade to D	X			Main provision. Complements Taree provision.
14	Diamond Park	Diamond B	Play	L. Upgrade to N	X			Meets demand. Will address future need.
15	Pacific Palms	Elizabeth B	Play	L. Upgrade to N		X		Meets demand. Will address future need.
16	Forster Heights	Forster	Play	L. Replace	X			Meets need. Complements nearby District playspaces
17	Forster Break	Forster	Fitness	No action required			X	Good location. Remove AEOL. See 98
18	Forster Town Park	Forster	Play	L. Remove. See 98				Replaced by District at John Holland Park.
19	Lakes Sports	Forster	Play	L. Replace	X			Demand driven, increases catchment
20	Marjorie Debert Reserve	Forster	Play	L. No action required				Complements larger portfolio
21	Palmgrove Park	Forster	Play	N. Replace AEOL		X		Increases overall catchment

Park #	Site	Suburb	Play Or Fitness	Action	Priority			Rationale
					S	M	L	
22	Pebble Beach	Forster	Play	L. Upgrade to N	X			Increases overall catchment
23	Pilot Hill Park	Forster	Play	L. Remove. See 98				Poor condition. See District at John Holland
24	Elizabeth Reserve	Forster	Fitness	Replace AEOL			X	Co-locate with new Local playspace
25	Billabong Park	Gloucester	Play	D. Upgrade to R	X			Increases catchment and replaces Farley Gates
26	Gloucester Park	Gloucester	Fitness	Replace AEOL			X	Good location, well used
27	Gloucester Park	Gloucester	Play	L. Replace at AEOL	X			Provision within swimming pool
28	King George V	Gloucester	Play	L. No action required				Good condition, meeting need
29	Bottlebrush Reserve	Green Point	Play	L. Replace AEOL	X			Standalone catchment. No other provision in the area
30	Seascape	Hallidays Point	Play	L. Upgrade to N	X			Growing catchment. Compliments new District
31	Gordon Smith	Harrington	Play	L. Replace AEOL	X			Complements larger portfolio
32	Oxley Res #2	Harrington	Play	L. Replace AEOL	X			Complements larger portfolio
33	Oxley Res #1	Harrington	Play	L. Upgrade to D	X			Increases catchment in growth areas
34	Oxley Reserve	Harrington	Fitness	No action required				Meeting need. Good location.
35	Jimmys Beach	Hawks Nest	Play	L. Remove AEOL			X	Not required. New District at Providence Park. See #37
36	Moirs Pde Reserve	Hawks Nest	Play	Replace with Swing	X			Specialised Swing playspace.
37	Providence Park	Hawks Nest	Play	L. Upgrade to D EOL			X	Main provision in larger portfolio
38	Winda Woppa Reserve	Hawks Nest	Play	L. Replace AEOL			X	Complements larger local portfolio
39	Leo Carney Park	Krambach	Play	L. Replace	X			Standalone. No other provision in the area
40	Lansdowne Reserve	Lansdowne	Play	L. Upgrade to N EOL			X	Growing catchment. Community driven.
41	Limeburners Creek	Limeburners	Play	L. No action required				Standalone. No other provision in the area
42	Vic Shoemith Reserve	Manning Point	Play	L. Upgrade to N	X			Growing catchment
43	Nabiac Oval	Nabiac	Play	L. No action required				Meeting need. High visitation from Hwy traffic.
44	Redbill Park	Nerong	Play	L. Replace AEOL	X			Standalone. No other provision in the area



Park #	Site	Suburb	Play Or Fitness	Action	Priority			Rationale
					S	M	L	
45	North Arm Cove Reserve	North Arm	Play	L. Replace		X		Standalone. No other provision in the area
46	North Arm Cove Reserve	North Arm	Fitness	No action required				New facility in 2023.
47	Badgers Park	Old Bar	Play	L. Replace AEOL			X	Fits within larger portfolio
48	Bluehaven Reserve	Old Bar	Play	L. Replace AEOL			X	Fits within larger portfolio
49	Molong Reserve	Old Bar	Play	L. Replace AEOL			X	Fits within larger portfolio
50	Old Bar Park	Old Bar	Play	D. Upgrade to R EOL		X		Increases overall catchment
51	Leone Fidden Reserve	Pindimar	Play	L. Replace	X			Standalone. Move to S Pindimar Foreshore
52	Smiths Lake	Smiths Lake	Play	N. No action required				Meeting need. Services the Smiths Lake area
53	Stratford Reserve	Stratford	Play	L. Replace	X			Standalone. No other provision in the area
54	Allen Park	Stroud	Play	L. Upgrade to D		X		Increases overall catchment. Covers Stroud Rd Road.
55	Kevin Francis	Stroud	Play	L. Replace	X			Complements District
56	Scenic Park	Stroud Road	Play	L. Remove AEOL			X	Covered by new provision in Stroud
57	Taylor Park	Stroud Road	Play	L. Remove AEOL			X	Covered by new provision in Stroud
58	Barton Walk	Taree	Play	L. Replace	X			Complements larger local portfolio
59	Boyce Park	Taree	Play	L. Replace	X			Complements larger local portfolio
60	Chatham Park	Taree	Play	L. Replace		X		Complements larger local portfolio
61	Debrecency Park	Taree	Play	L. Remove	X			Poor condition. Not required.
62	Edinburgh Park	Taree	Play	L. Replace		X		Fits within larger portfolio
63	Endeavour Reserve	Taree	Fitness	Replace AEOL	X			Good location
64	Fotheringham Park	Taree	Play	D. Upgrade to R	X			Upgrade by adding new play zones
65	Kanangra Reserve	Taree	Play	L. Upgrade to N	X			Expands catchment
66	Martin Reserve	Taree	Play	L. Upgrade to N	X			Increases catchment in North Taree.
67	Mitchell Reserve	Taree	Play	L. Replace	X			Complements larger portfolio

Park #	Site	Suburb	Play Or Fitness	Action	Priority			Rationale
					S	M	L	
68	Queen Elizabeth Park	Taree	Fitness	Replace AEOL			X	Good condition, meeting need
69	Ruprecht Park	Taree	Play	L. Replace	X			Complements larger portfolio
70	Stokes Park	Taree	Play	L. Replace	X			Complements larger portfolio
71	Taree Park (Johnny Martin Oval)	Taree	Play	L. Removed	X			Poor condition. Not required.
72	Taree Recreation Ground	Taree	Fitness	Replace AEOL			X	Good condition, meeting need
73	Winton Reserve	Taree	Play	L. Replace	X			Complements larger portfolio
74	Wrigley Park	Taree	Play	L. Remove	X			Poor condition. Not required. See 66
75	Dunshea Reserve	Tea Gardens	Play	L. Replace		X		Complements larger portfolio
76	Library (Myall)	Tea Gardens	Play	L. Upgrade to N	X			Complements larger portfolio
77	Horrace Dean	Tinonee	Play	Remove (swing) EOL			X	Covered by 78. Consider leaving till EOL
78	Tallships Reserve	Tinonee	Play	L. Replace AEOL	X			Catchment improvement.
79	Tinonee Recreation Ground	Tinonee	Play	L. Upgrade to N		X		Improvements overall catchment
80	Banksia Reserve	Tuncurry	Play	L. Replace		X		Complements and supports the three District.
81	Tuncurry Sports Ground	Tuncurry	Play	L. Upgrade to N		X		Improves overall catchment.
82	Lone Pine Park	Tuncurry	Play	D. No action required				Complements other Districts. Add more play elements.
83	Rockpool Reserve	Tuncurry	Play	D. No action required				Meeting need. Complements other District
84	Shelly Reserve	Wallabi Point	Play	L. Upgrade to N	X			Growing catchment. Fits within larger Old Bar
85	Wards River Park	Wards River	Play	L. Replace	X			Standalone catchment with no other provision
86	Abbott Reserve	Wingham	Play	L. Replace	X			Complements larger portfolio
87	Apex Park	Wingham	Play	L. Replace	X			Complements larger portfolio
88	Central Park	Wingham	Fitness	Remove		X		Replaced by District playspace fitness. To be confirmed through masterplan.
89	Central Park	Wingham	Play	L. Upgrade to D	X			Covers all Wingham. Key provision.

Park #	Site	Suburb	Play Or Fitness	Action	Priority			Rationale
					S	M	L	
90	Jacaranda Reserve	Wingham	Play	L. Upgrade to N	X			Complements District at Central Park
91	Price Reserve	Wingham	Play	L. Replace		X		Complements larger portfolio
92	Elizabeth Reserve	Forster	Play	L. New provision	X			Complements larger portfolio.
93	John Holland Park	Forster	Fitness	New provision	X			Inter-gen fitness as part of new District playspace
94	Oak Reserve	Gloucester	Play	N. New provision		X		Fills gap in south Gloucester
95	Killabakh Reserve	Killabakh	Play	L. New provision	X			Covers distribution gap. Demand driven
96	Lansdowne Reserve	Lansdowne	Fitness	New provision		X		Community requested. Justified
97	John Holland	Forster	Play	D. New provision	X			Increased catchment. Replaces 18 & 23.
98	Endeavour Reserve	Taree	Play	N. New provision	X			Complements larger portfolio. High attractor.
99	Providence Park	Hawks Nest	Fitness	New provision	X			Co-located with 37.

## Catchment on the maps

As described in the planning section a critical planning consideration for play planning is catchment, which is the radius around a specific facility that people will travel to access that facility. The catchment is completely dependent on the size (classification) of the facility. On the maps in the Action Plan the catchment for each playspace has been displayed as indicated in the figure below. The aim of using catchment for play planning is twofold. One, to provide a play portfolio that has as few gaps in supply as possible, a gap is where a suburb or part of a town is not covered by the catchment of a playspace, two, that all residents have access to as many different play experiences as possible.



1\* Local = Less than a full Local as described in the play hierarchy. 200m radius (catchment) around facility indicates catchment.

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Local = 400m radius (catchment) around facility indicates catchment.



Neighbourhood = 1000m radius (catchment) around facility indicates catchment.



District = 10km radius (catchment) around facility indicates catchment.



Regional = Greater than 10km radius (catchment) around facility indicates catchment.

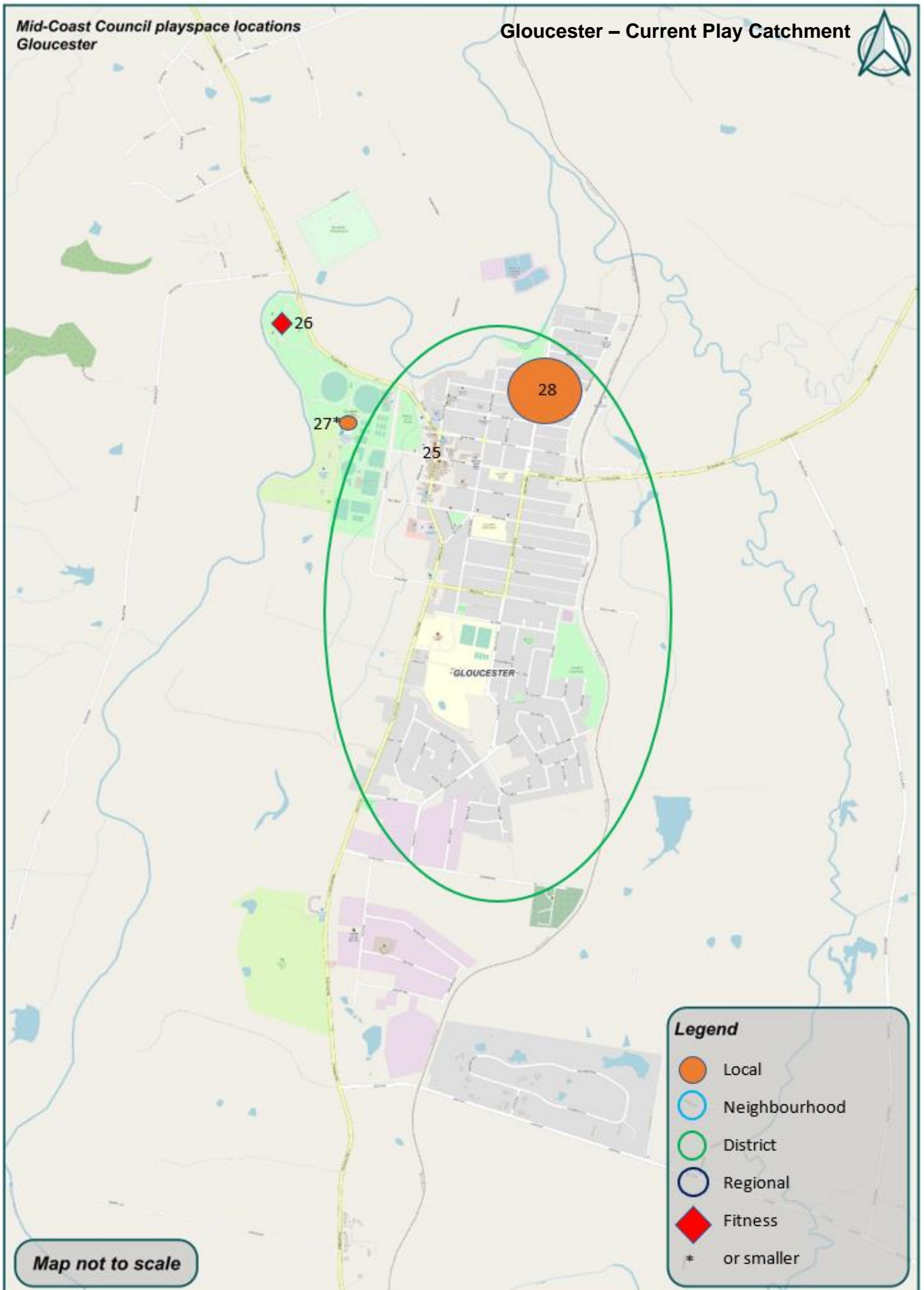


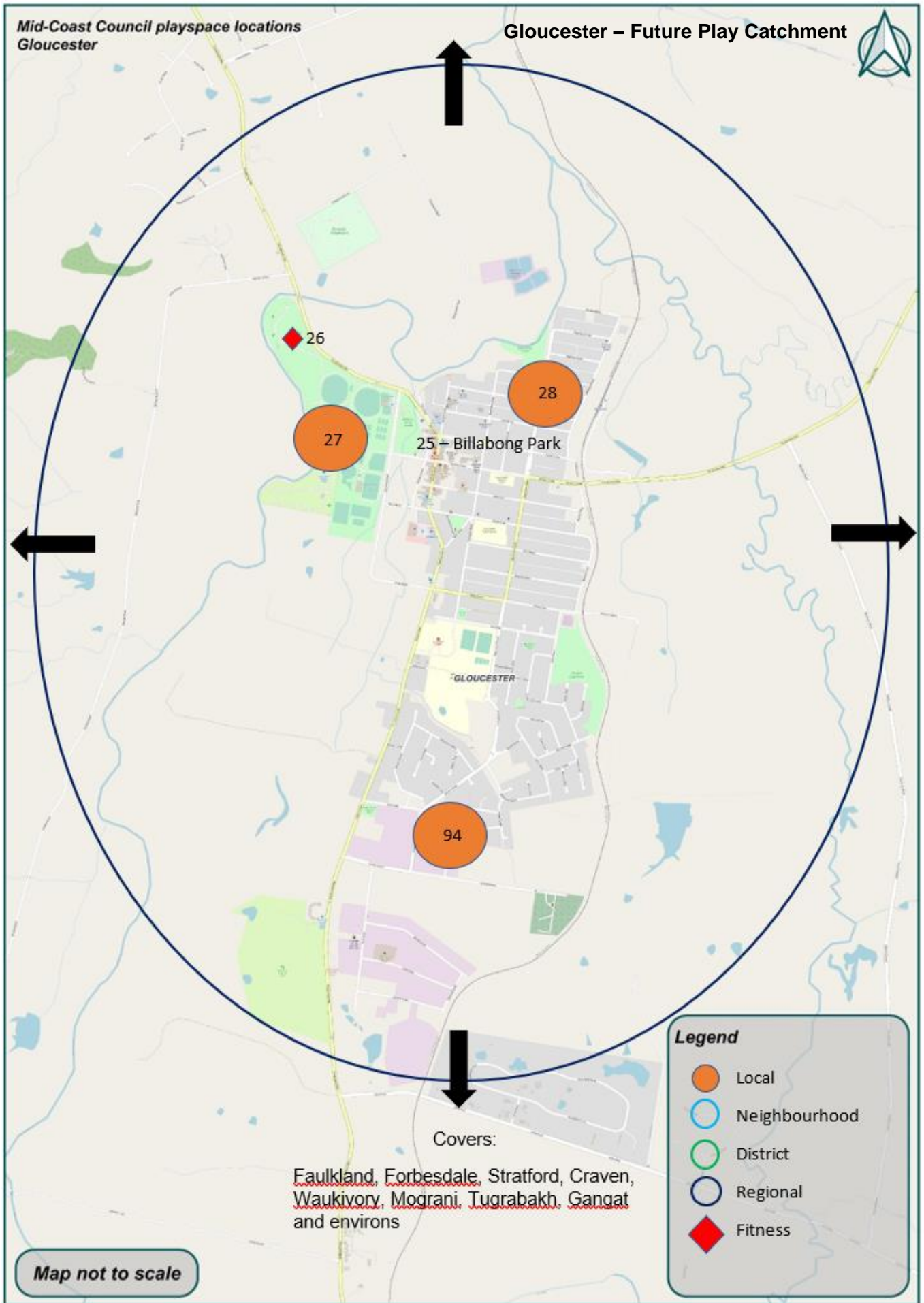
Fitness = Has no catchment.

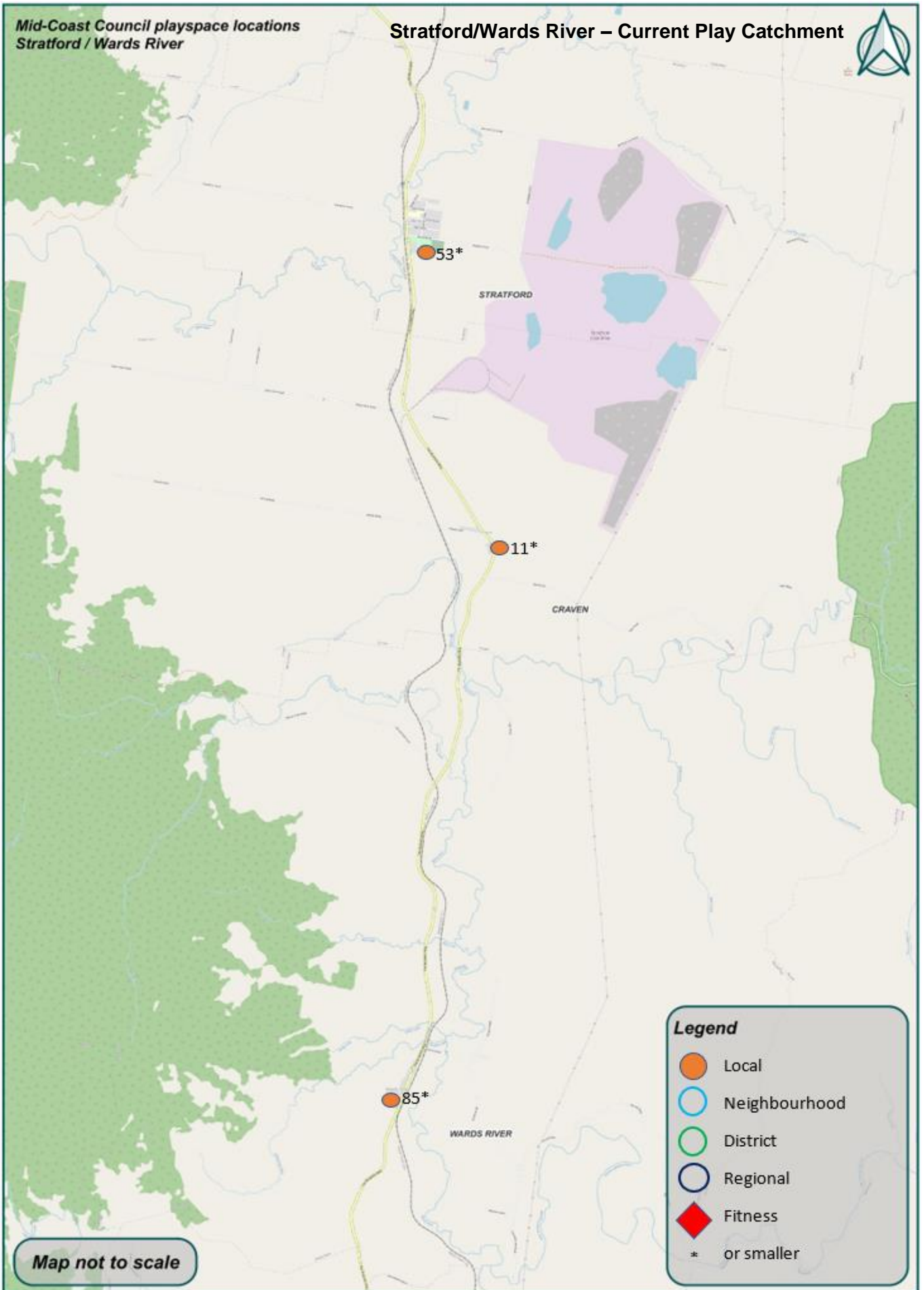
### Note:

*Of the 71 local playspaces in MidCoast 64 have been identified as being smaller, and less provisioned than the definition of a local playspace as outlined in the Play Hierarchy. Therefore, the 400m catchment for these facilities is less than a fully compliant local facility. In these cases, the catchment for these facilities have been indicated at 200m.*

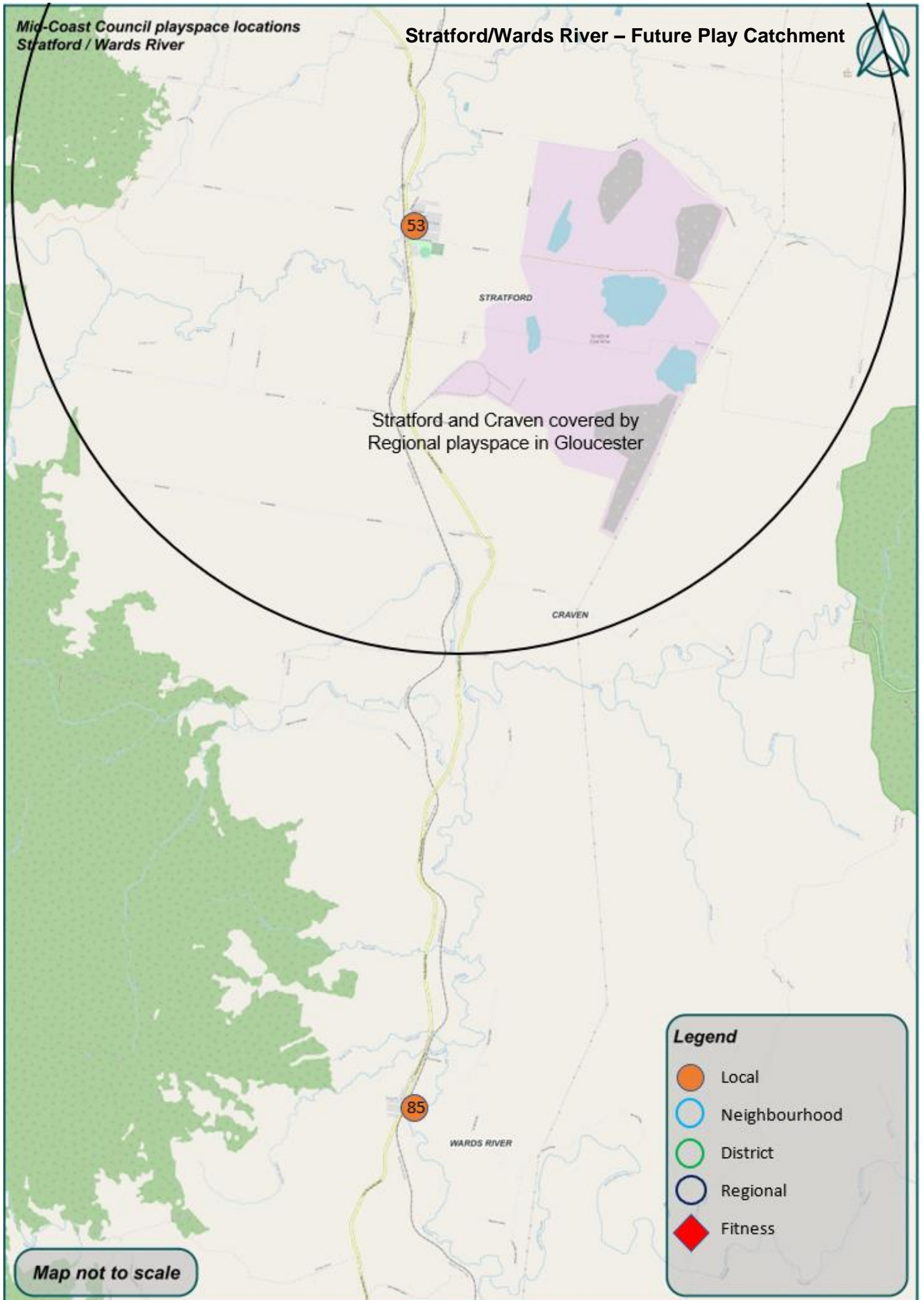








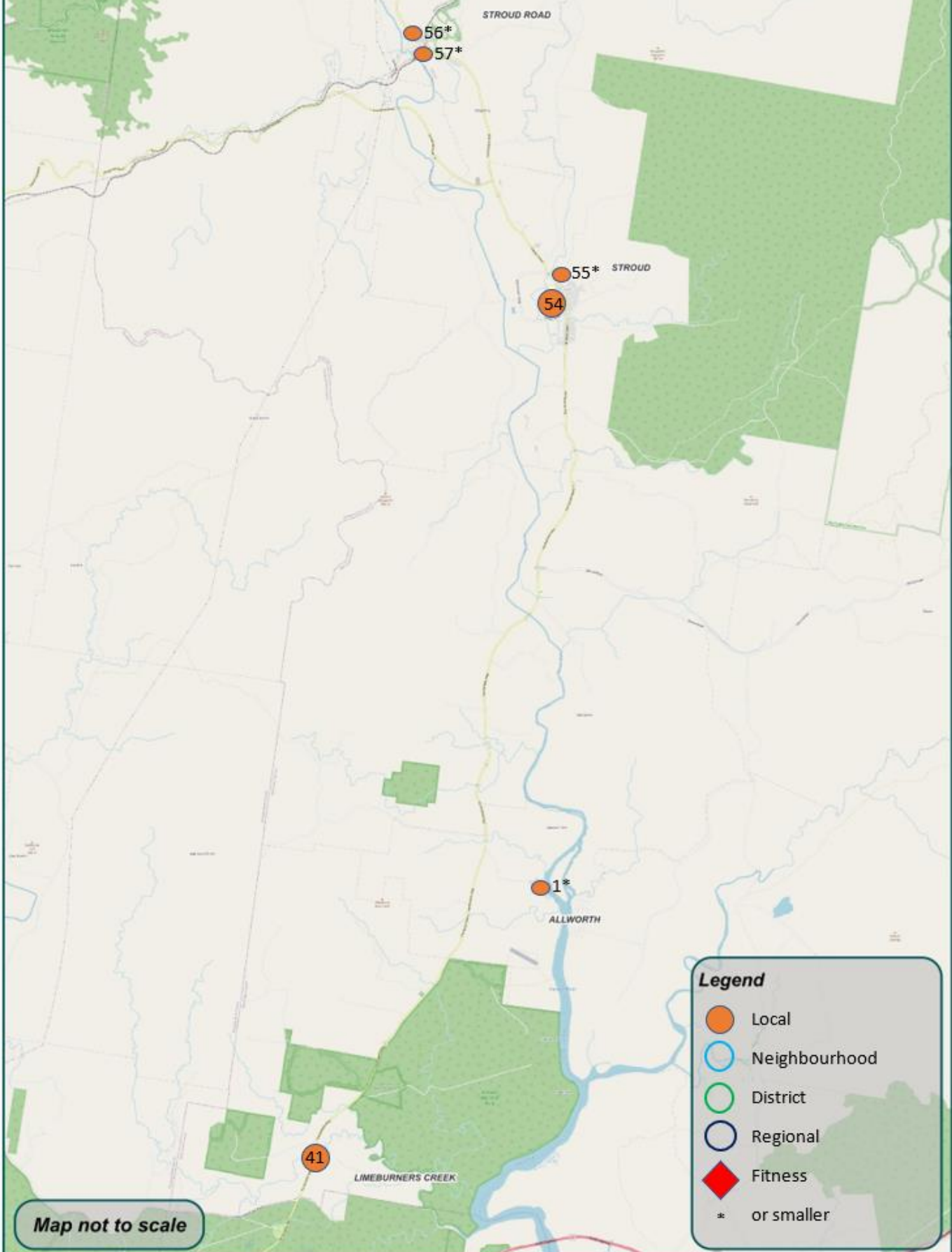






Mid-Coast Council playspace locations  
Stroud Road / Stroud / Limeburners Creek

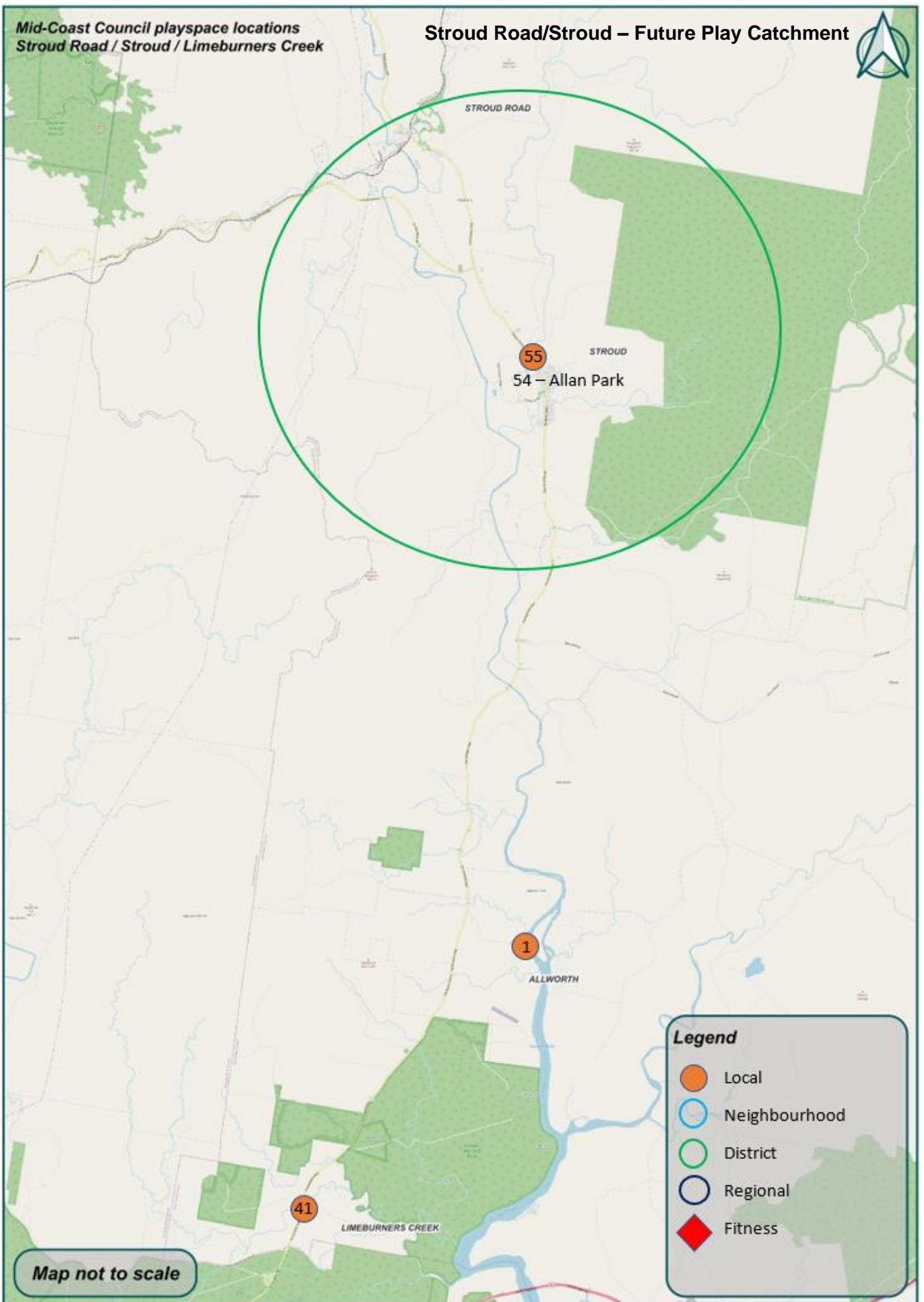
### Stroud Road/Stroud – Current Play Catchment



Map not to scale

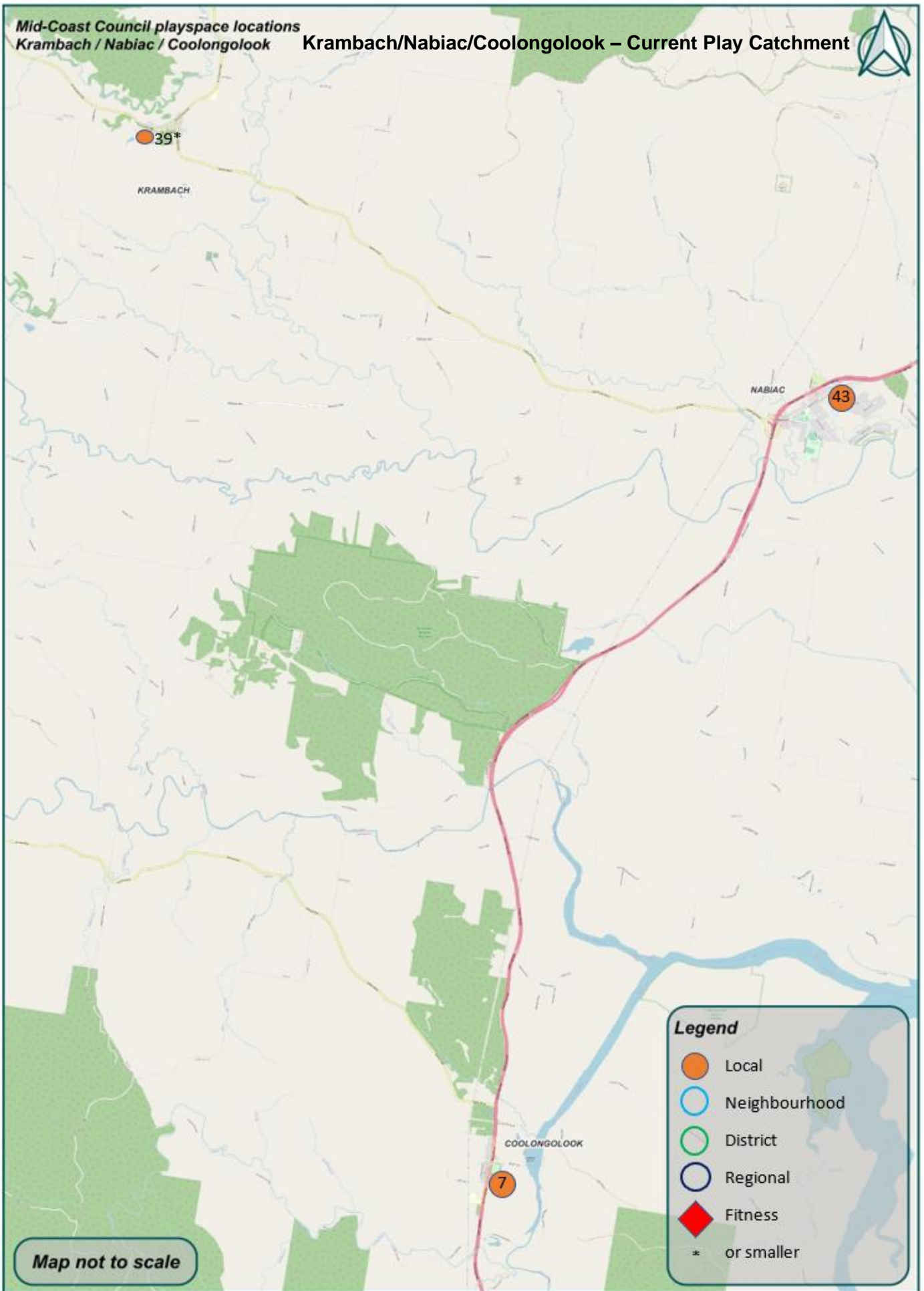
**Legend**

- Local
- Neighbourhood
- District
- Regional
- Fitness
- \* or smaller



Mid-Coast Council playspace locations  
Krambach / NABIAC / Coolongolook

Krambach/NABIAC/Coolongolook – Current Play Catchment

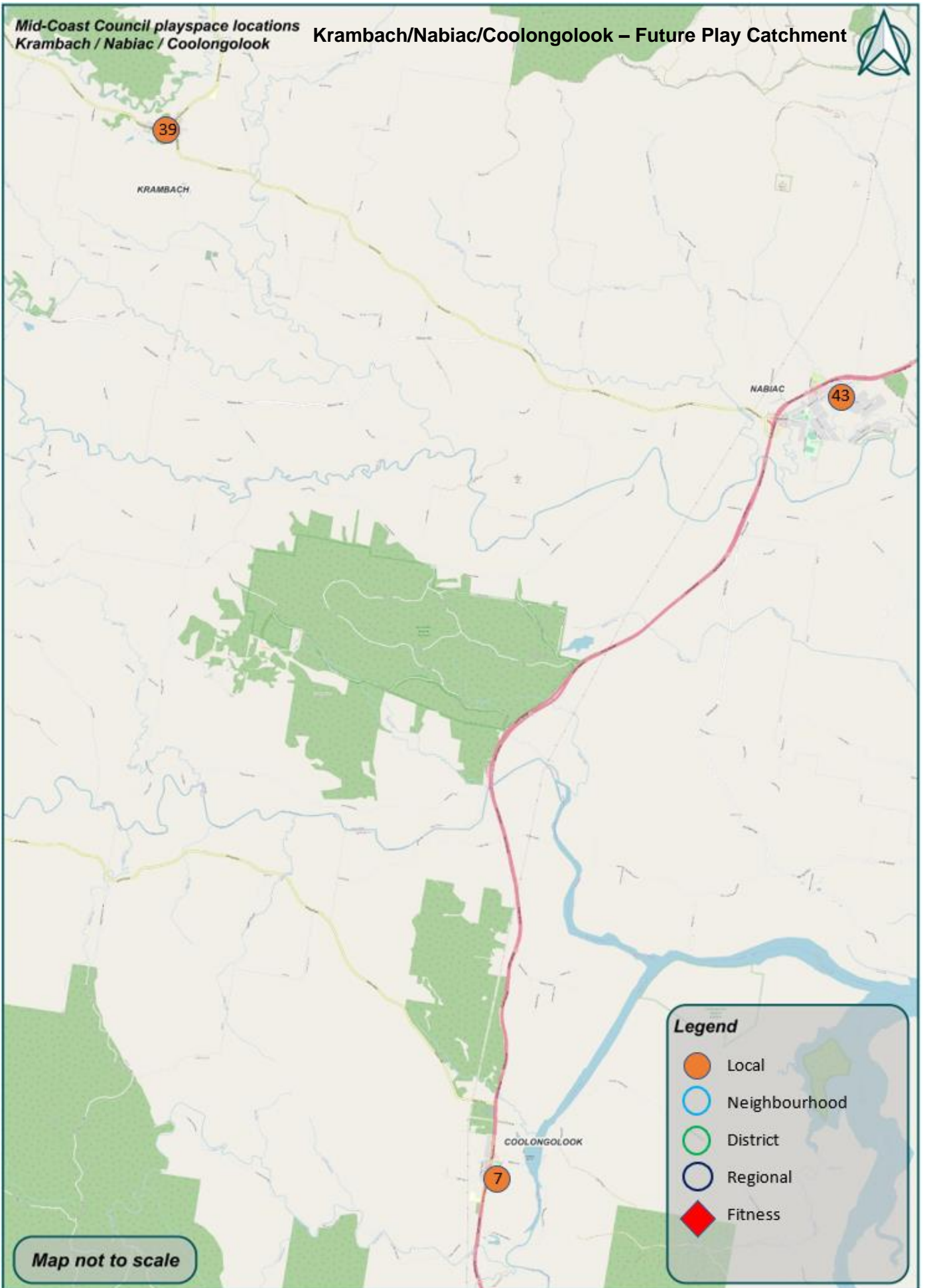


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**Legend**

- Local
- Neighbourhood
- District
- Regional
- Fitness
- \* or smaller

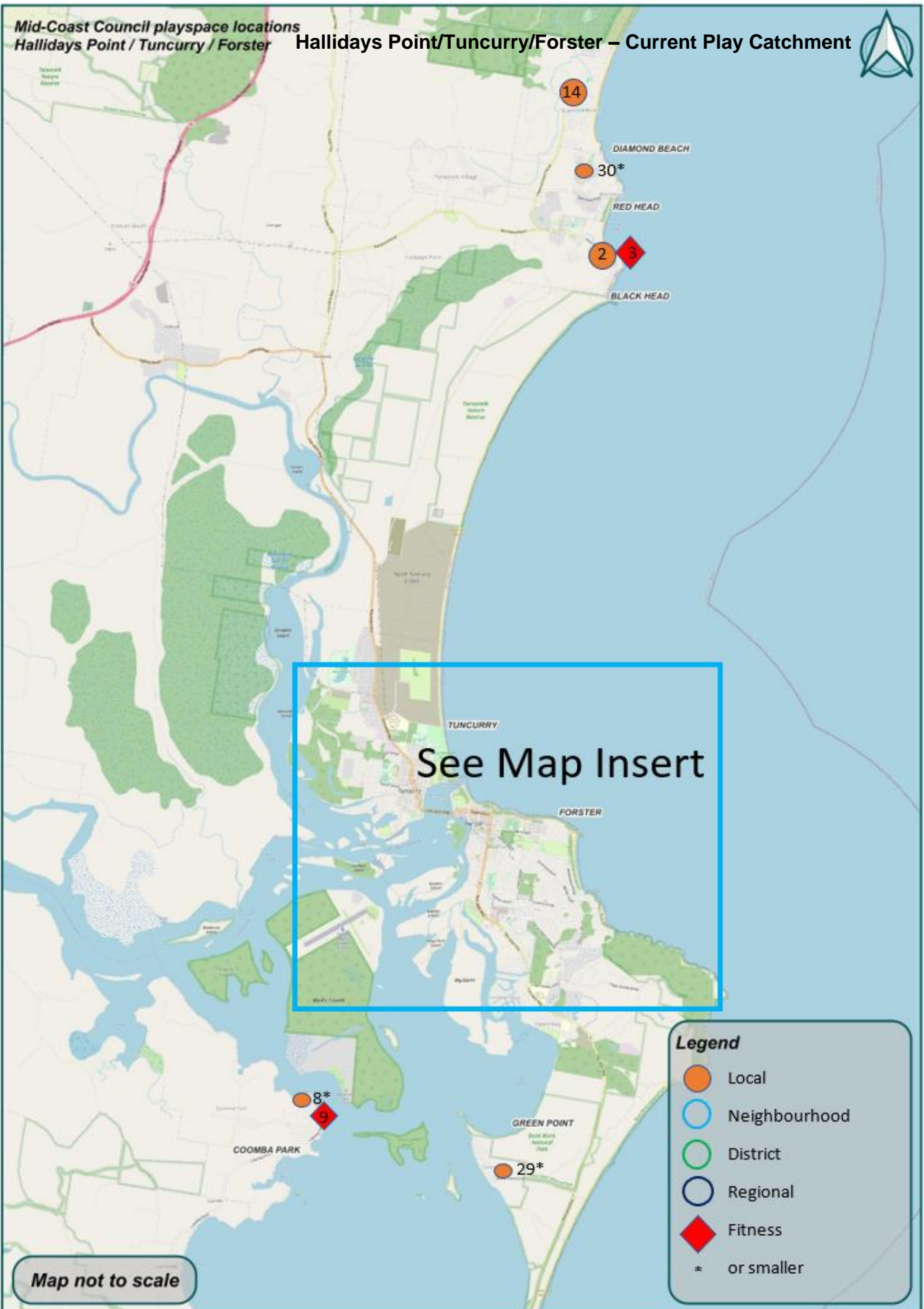






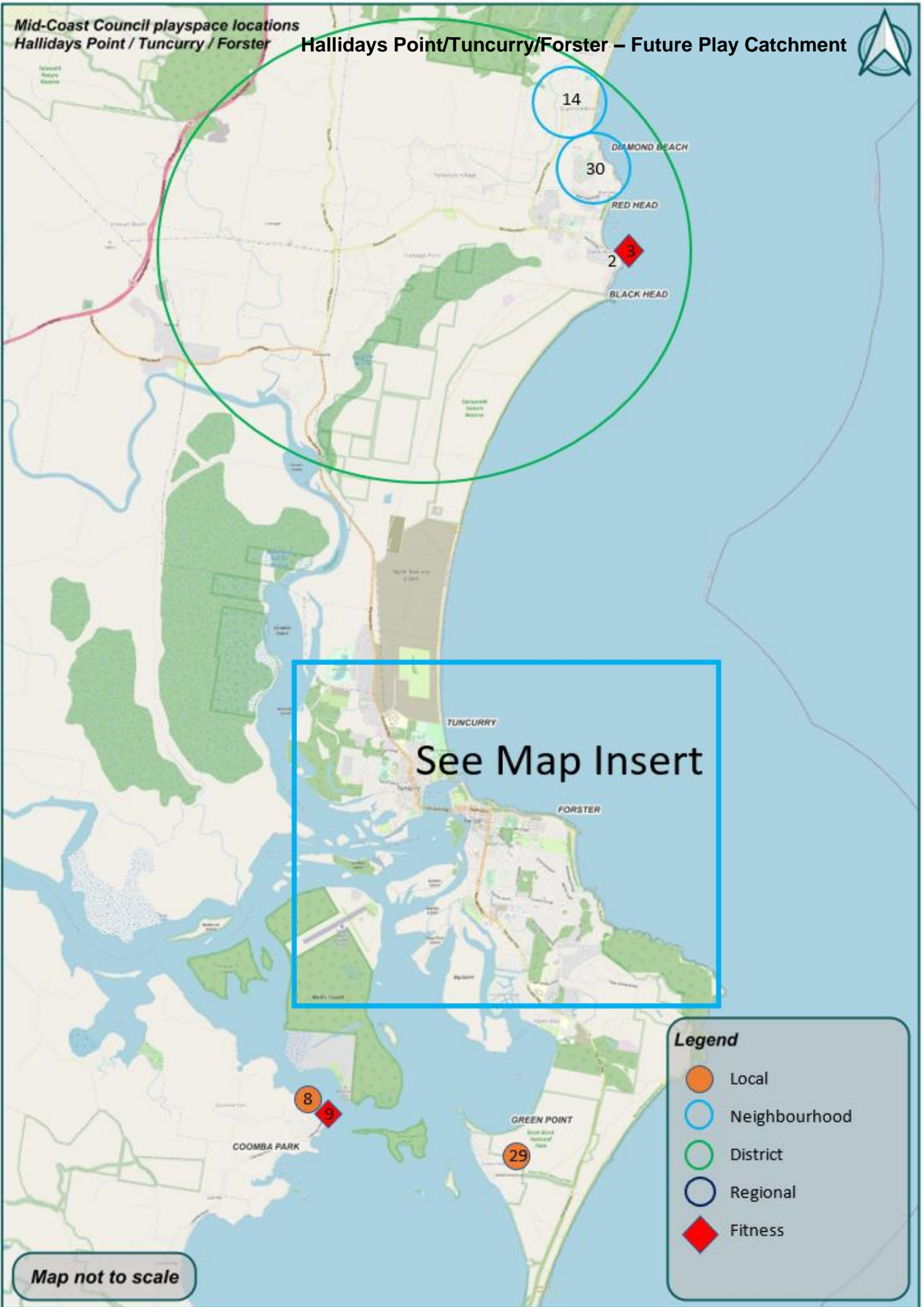
**Mid-Coast Council playspace locations  
Hallidays Point / Tuncurry / Forster**

**Hallidays Point/Tuncurry/Forster – Current Play Catchment**



Mid-Coast Council playspace locations  
Hallidays Point / Tuncurry / Forster

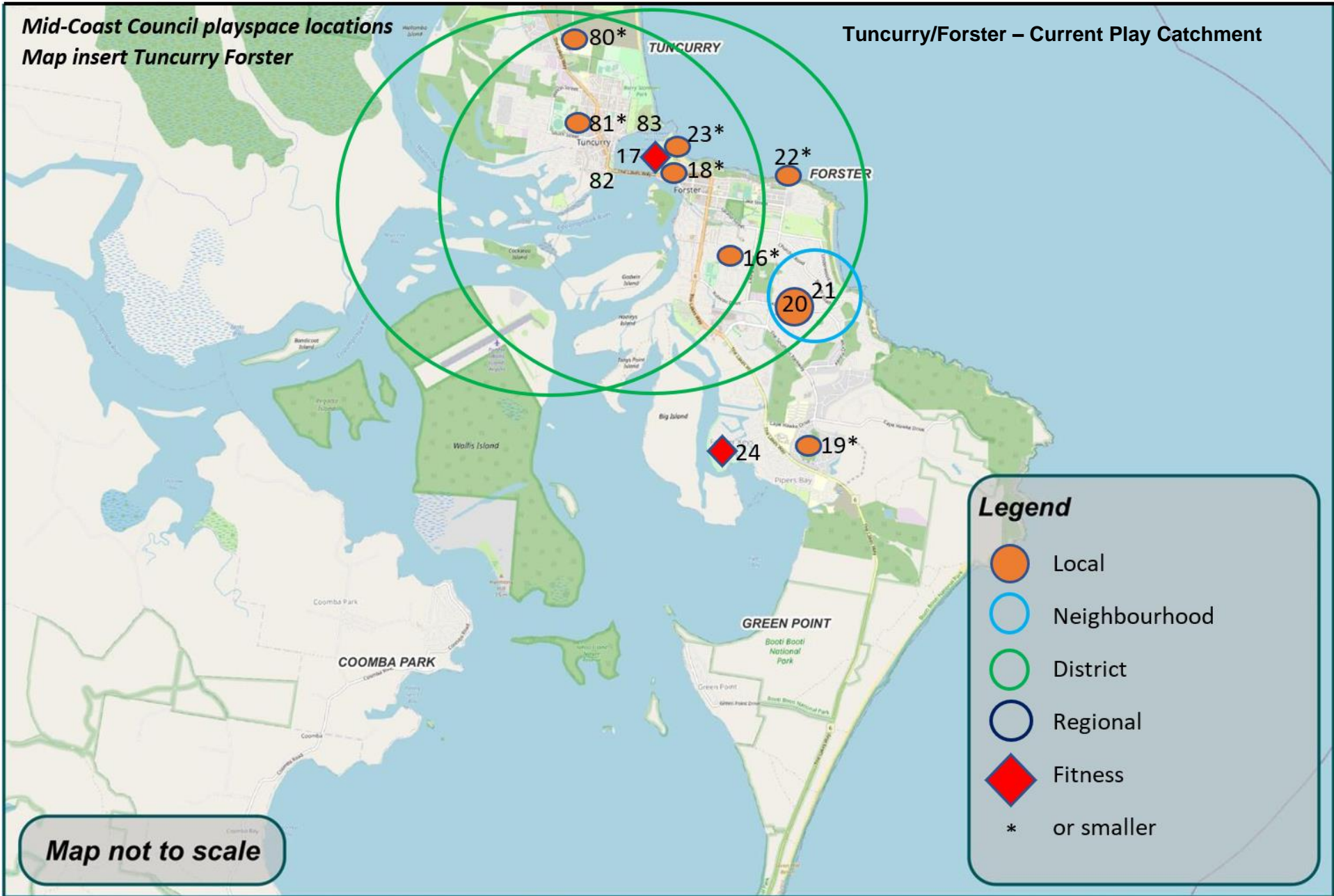
### Hallidays Point/Tuncurry/Forster – Future Play Catchment





**Mid-Coast Council playspace locations**  
**Map insert Tuncurry Forster**

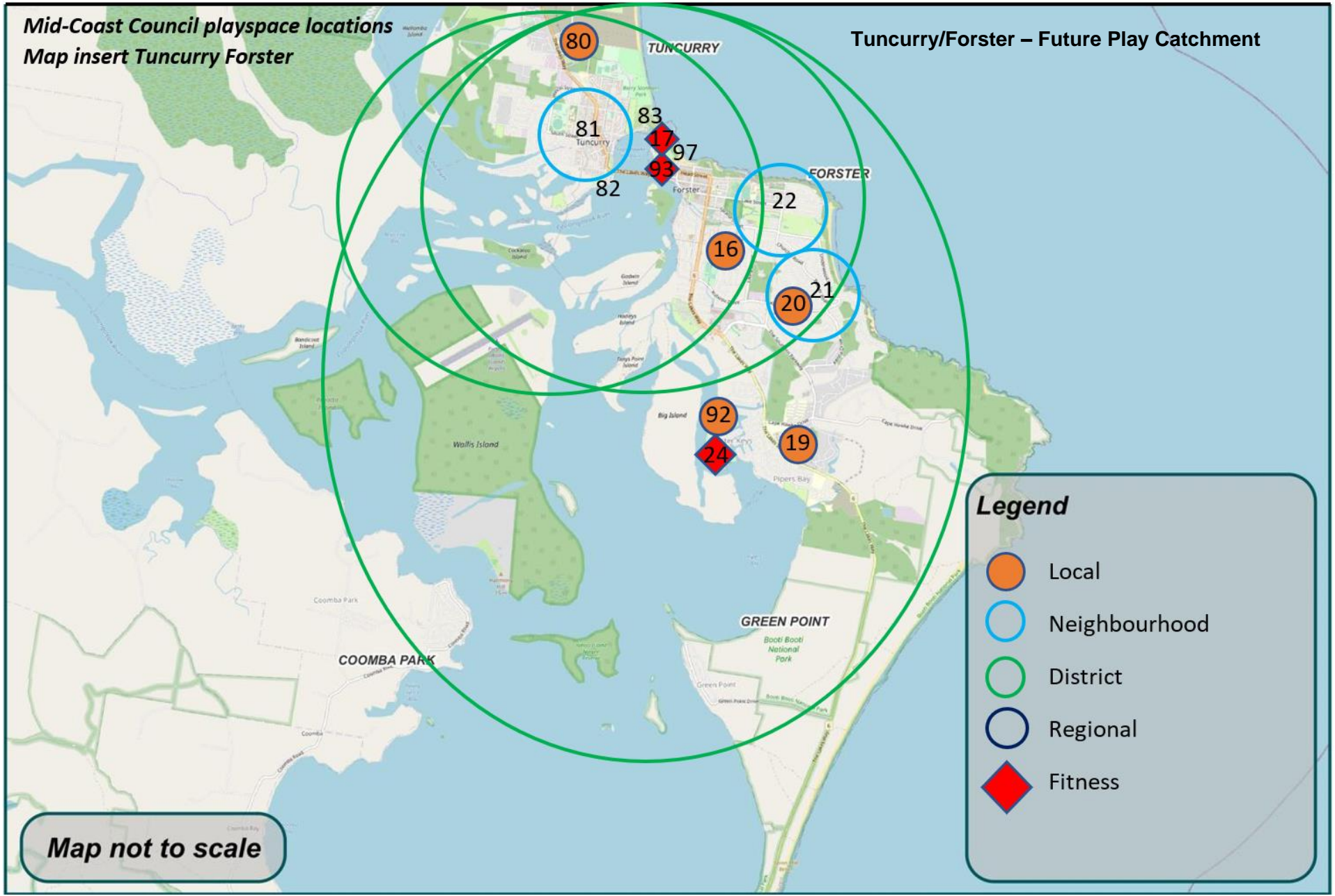
**Tuncurry/Forster – Current Play Catchment**



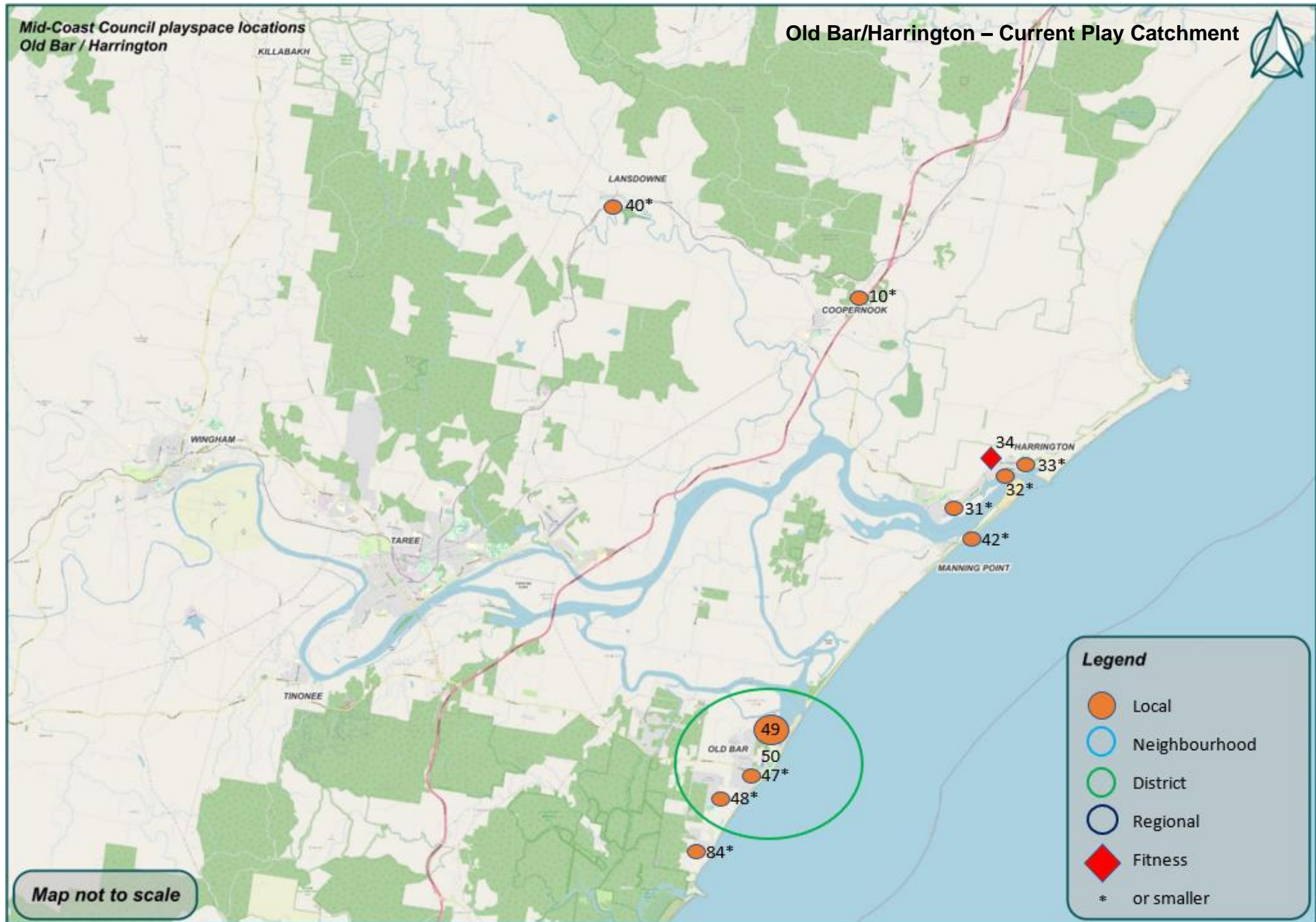
**Legend**

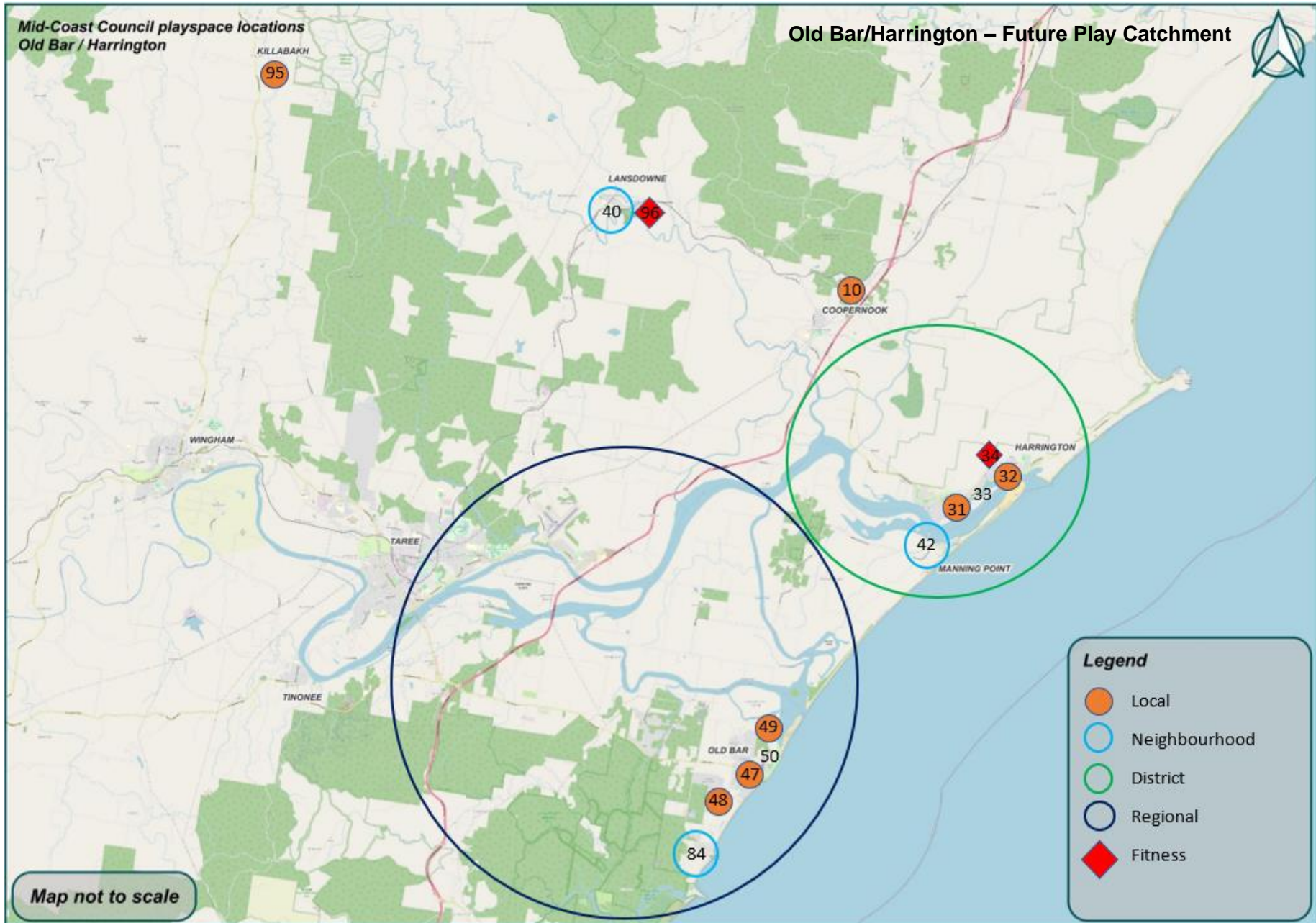
- Local
- Neighbourhood
- District
- Regional
- ◆ Fitness
- \* or smaller

**Map not to scale**

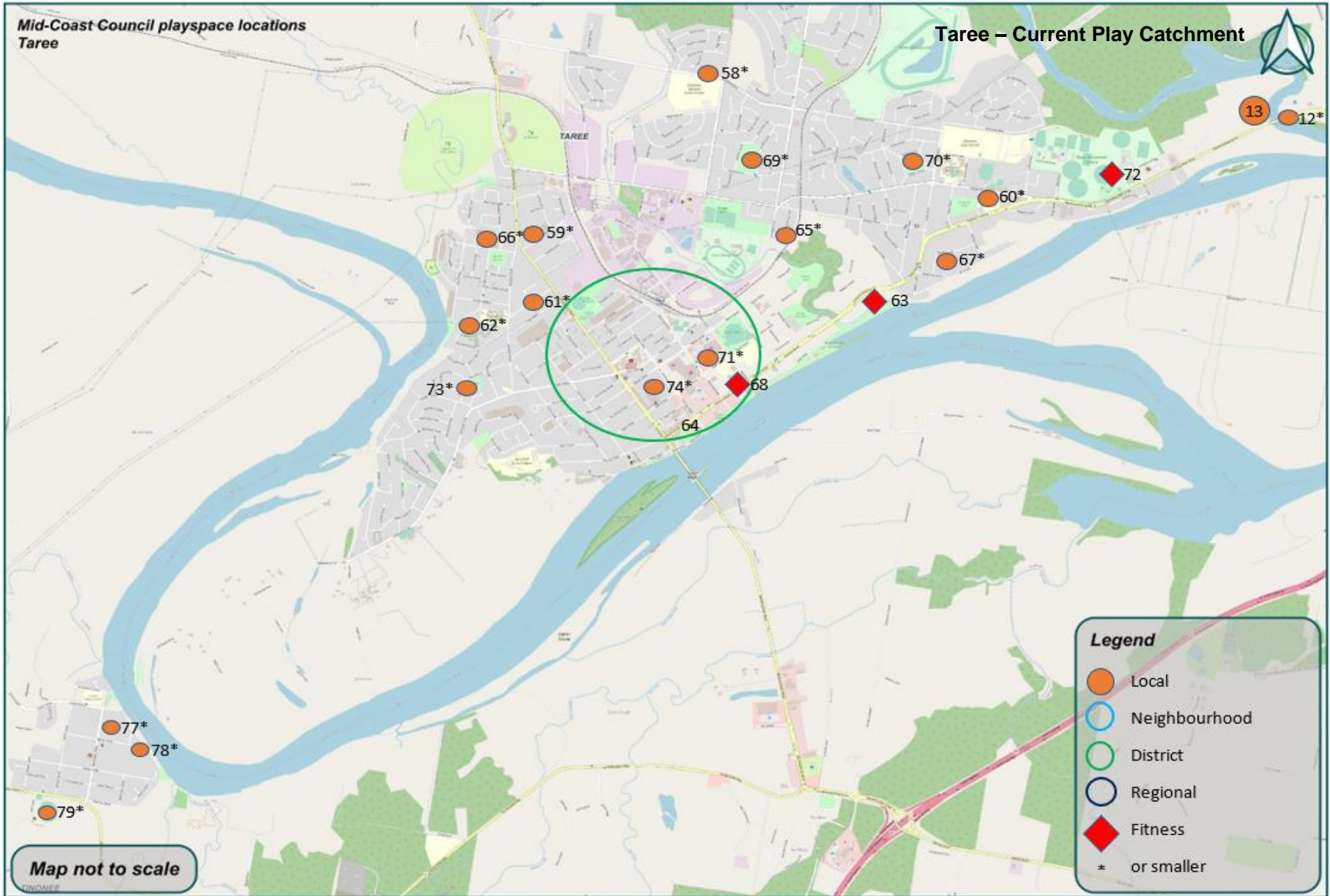


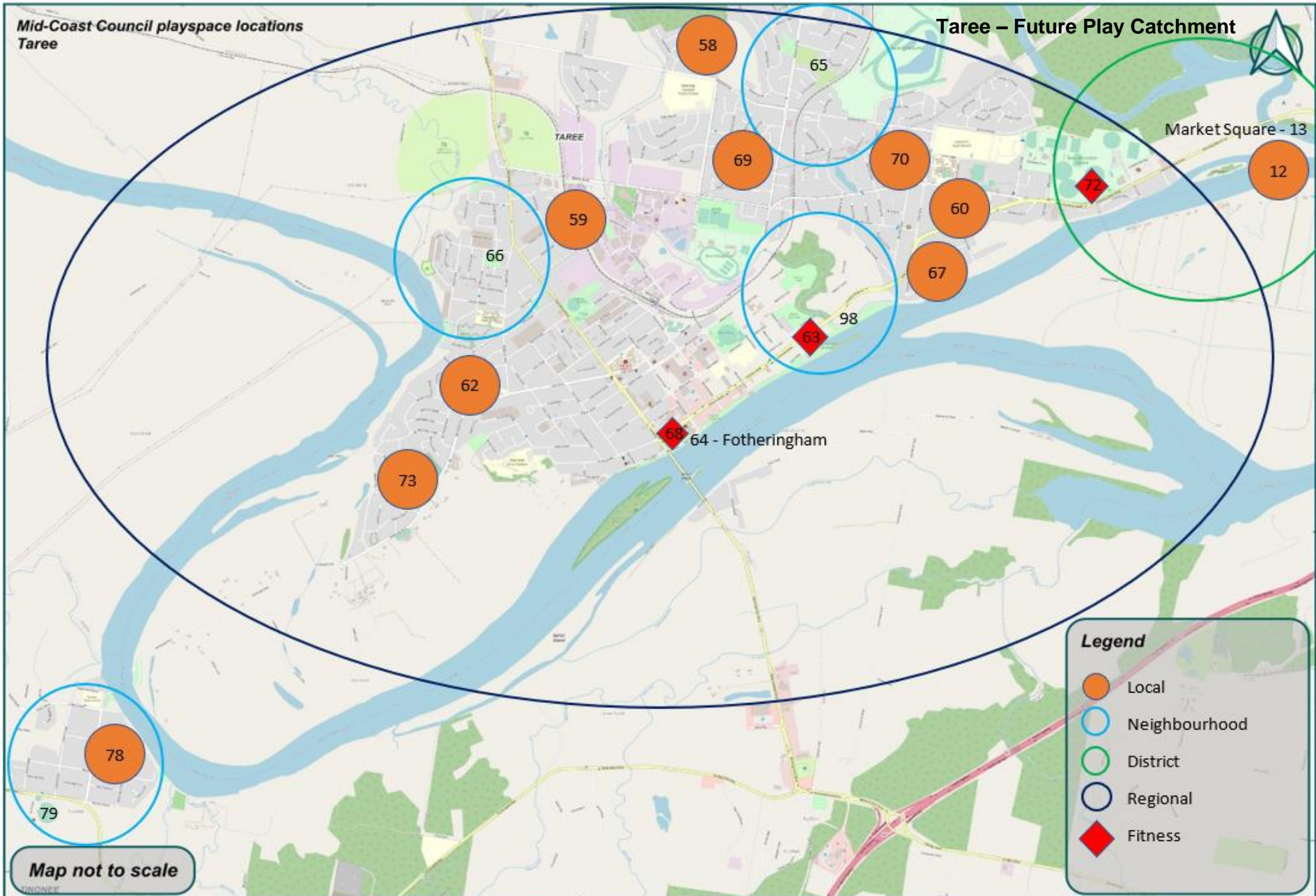




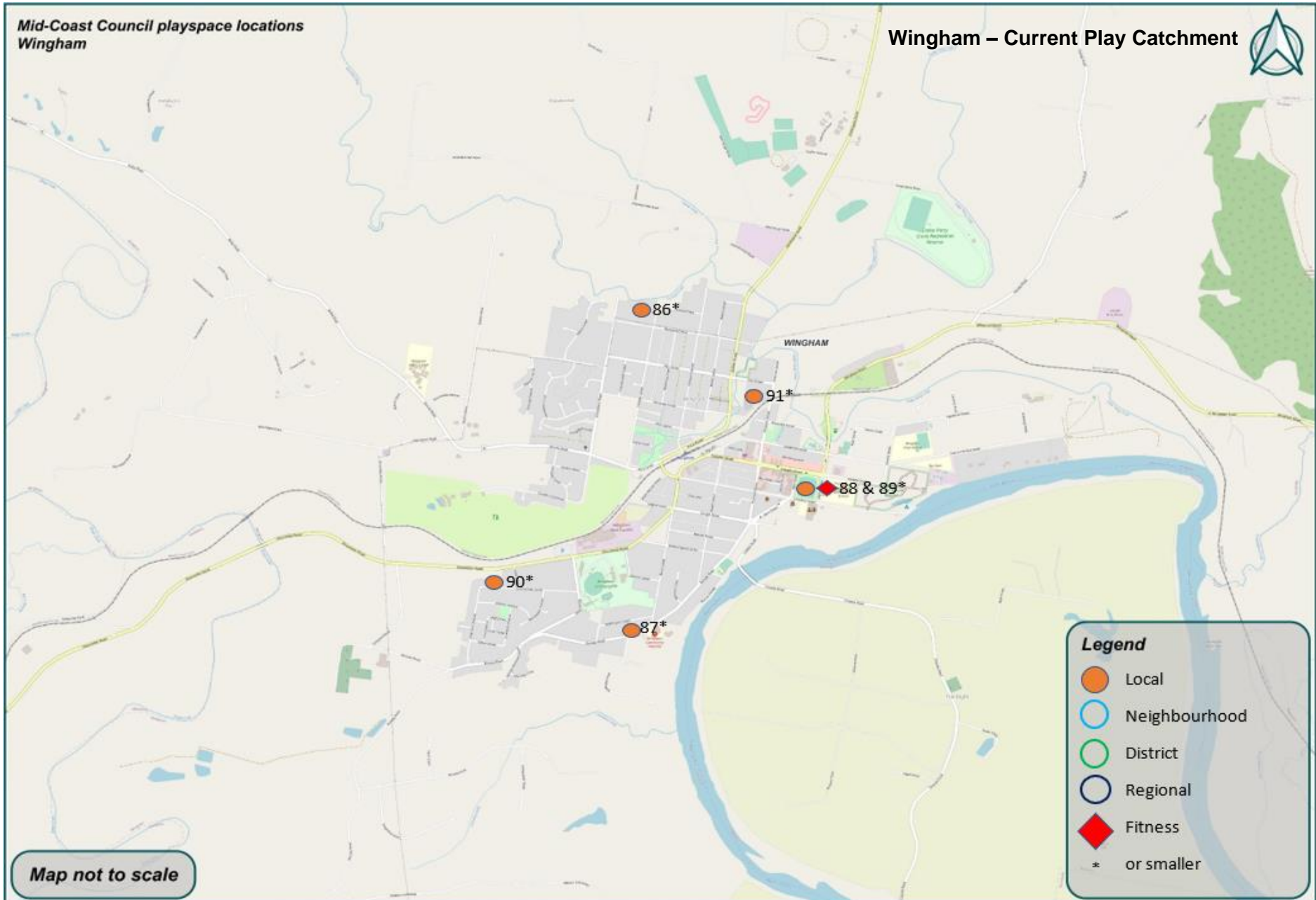


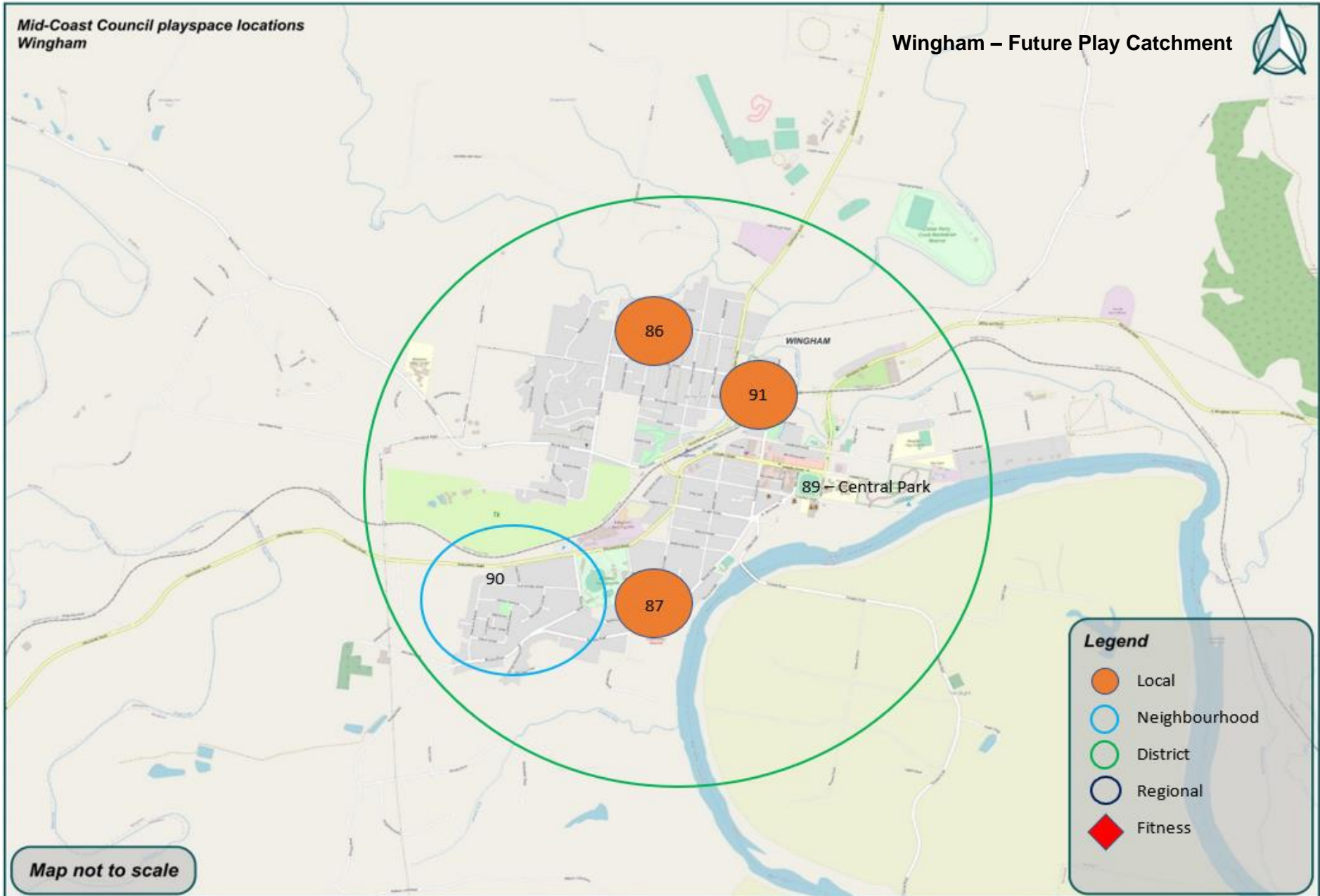


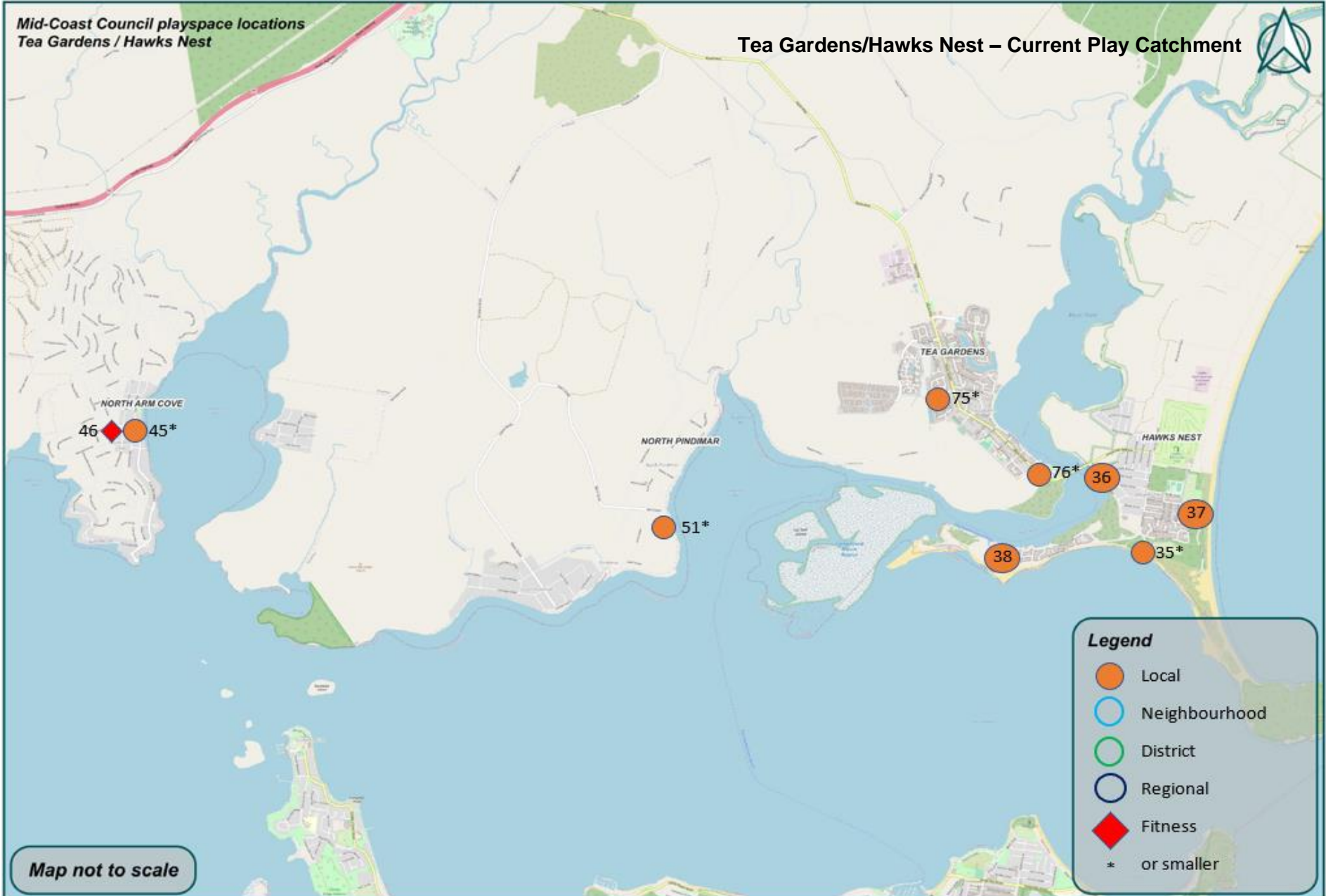




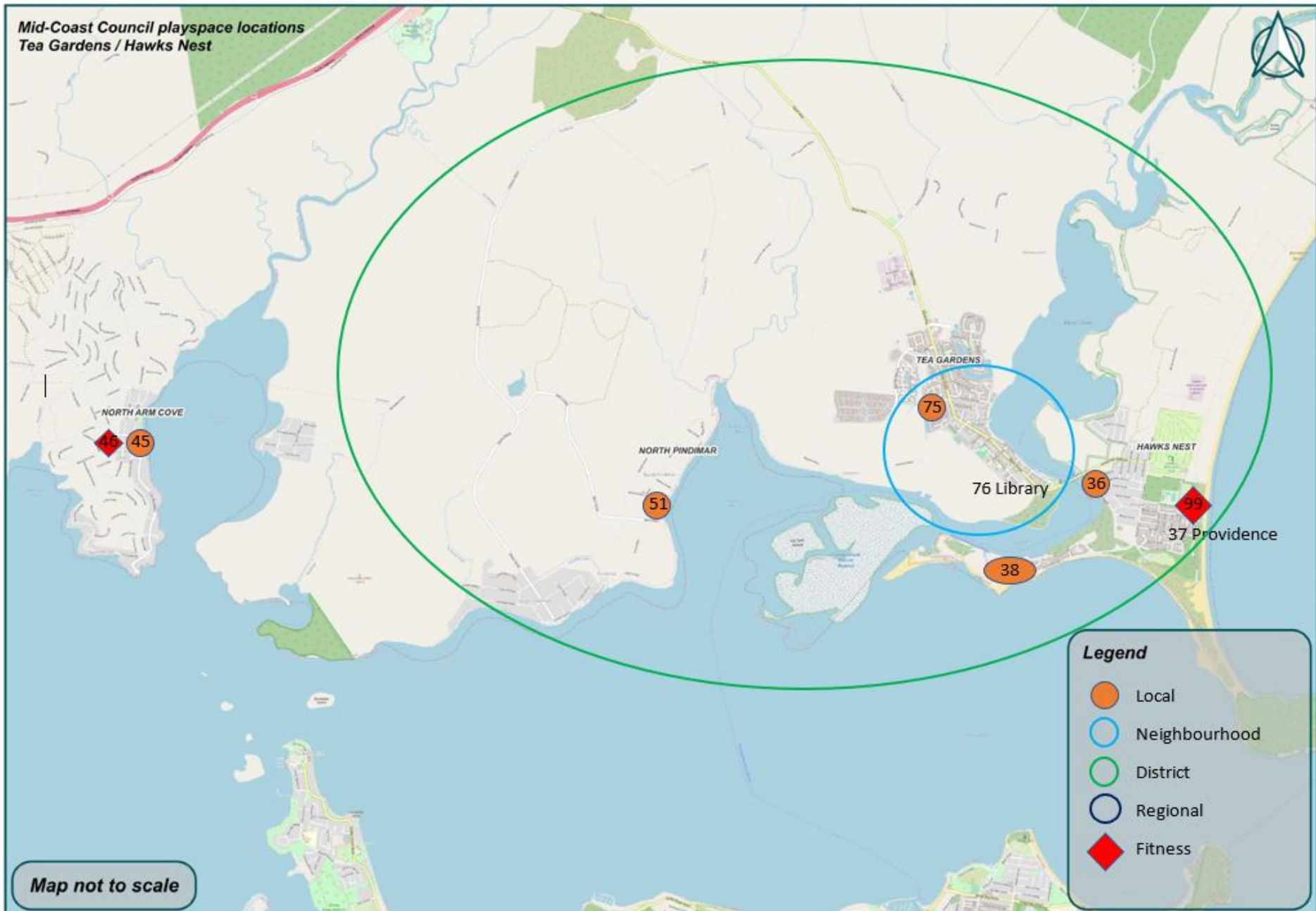


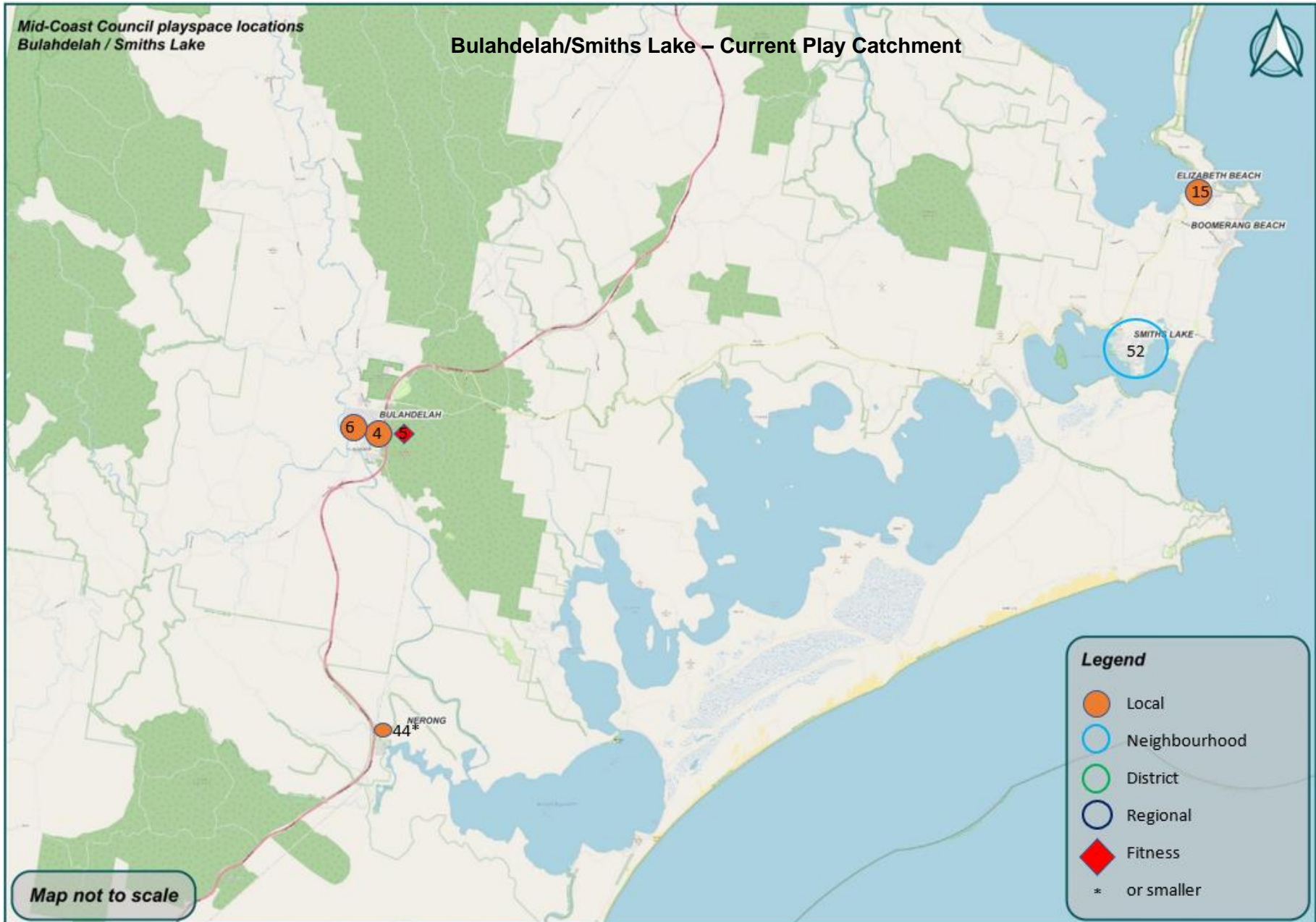




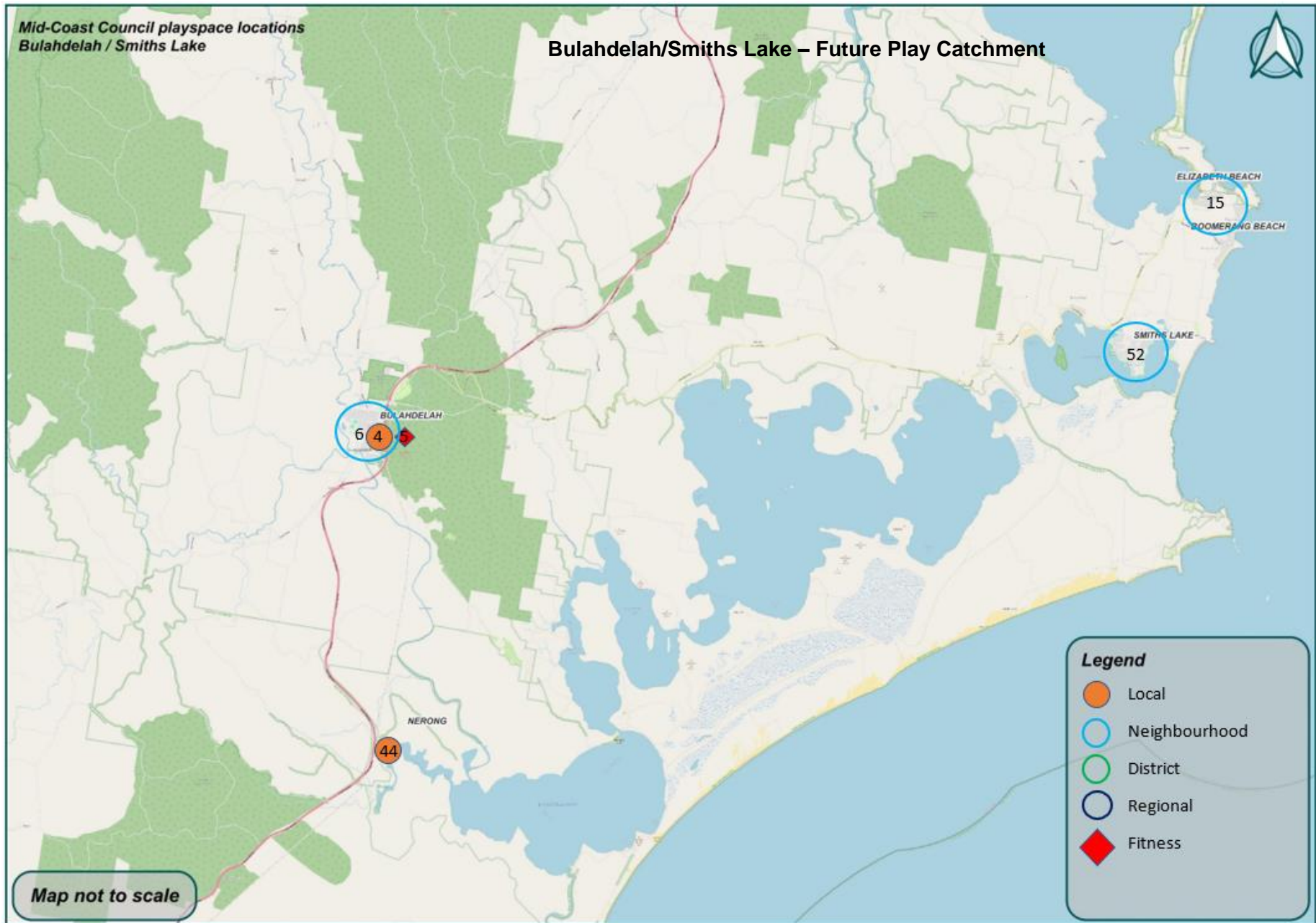














## Current and future provision representation

A simpler way of representing what we are seeking to achieve in the play portfolio is represented below. This is a pictorial representation of the current play portfolio and the future planned play portfolio. Each square represents a playspace. The top line of squares is the Regional, then District, then Neighbourhood and then Local. The Current graph highlights the preponderance of Local playspaces, and the lack of a Regional playspace. This is reflective of the traditional model for the delivery of playgrounds in the past, where a small group of play elements were placed in local parks in most towns in the LGA. A simple example of this is Horrace Dean Park in Tinonee, where there are two swings, but nothing else. Even though swinging is a fantastic play activity the provision of just two swings in a park represents poor planning and delivers poor community outcomes. Imagine that you are the child waiting for the swing.

The aim of this Strategy is for our play portfolio to look like the Future display. This image highlights that play value is best obtained by an interlocking system of play facilities, where visitation is activated by both the category and its embellishments of the individual facility and the unique play offering at each facility. In short, the playspaces work as an interlocking system, with each play experience locking into a higher play experience.



## Changes snapshot

Following is a table indicating the changes from the existing play portfolio to the planned future portfolio.

Current				
Local	Neighbourhood	District	Regional	Fitness
71	3	5	0	12
<b>Total</b>				<b>79</b>

Future				
Local	Neighbourhood	District	Regional	Fitness
43	16	9	3	13
<b>Total removed</b>				<b>10</b>
<b>Total new</b>				<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>				<b>71</b>

Below are the prioritised new and upgraded facilities.

	S	M	L
<b>Total New and Upgrades per priority</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>18</b>

A future conversation between a parent and their child could be “can we go to the playground”, with the parent responding instead of “sure”, rather “which one”. Which would then result in a conversation about the different experiences offered at individual facilities.

## Future Supply Breakdown

The table below is the supply projections if all recommended projects are undertaken. This shows that there are no longer any locations in the area that are Under Supplied. It also shows that the supply capacity of many of the locations are increased through upgrades and new playspaces being added to a specific location.

The table shows that there is still an Over Supply issue in many of our smaller towns, but due to the diverse nature of MidCoast locations this is acceptable. There has also been a strategy to provide higher level facilities in larger settlements, that can then service smaller villages. Stroud Road and Stroud are good examples.

<b>Total Number of Projected Locations with playspaces = 33</b>		
<b>Over Supply &gt; 1:1000 Total Locations = 20</b>	<b>Good Supply 1:1000-1500 Total Locations = 13</b>	<b>Under Supply &lt; 1:1500 Nil</b>
Allworth	Cundletown**	
Black Head**	Diamond Beach*	
Bulahdelah+	Forster + ** #	
Coolongolook	Gloucester**	
Coomba Park	Harrington**	
Cooperbrook	Nabiac	
Elizabeth Beach*	Old Bar*	
Green Point	Smiths Lake	
Hallidays Point*	Taree**	
Hawks Nest* ^	Tea Gardens** ^	
Killabakh+	Tuncurry #	
Krambach	Wallabi Point	
Lansdowne*	Wingham**	
Limeburners Creek		
Manning Point*		
Nerong		
North Arm Cove		
Stroud**		
Tinonee*		
Wards River		

## Notes:

+ - Indicates a new provision which has increased catchment and supply to that location

\* - Indicates a minor upgrade to one or more facilities which has increased catchment to that location

\*\* - Indicates a major upgrade to one or more facilities which has increased supply to that location

^ - Due to their co-location Hawks Nest and Tea Gardens have been combined for play planning purposes. This means that their playspace provision has been combined as it is expected that they both have the same visitation. The upgrades at both locations will result in a Regional level provision overall.

# - Due to their co-location Forster and Tuncurry have been combined for play planning purposes. This means that their playspace provision has been combined as it is expected that they both have the same visitation. Tuncurry has not seen significant changes to their provision as it was in the Good Supply category. However, there have been major changes to Forster, with major upgrades and new provision. The Tuncurry catchment will directly benefit from this.

## Playground removal breakdown

Playspaces are vital community infrastructure, which provide critical community outcomes. However, they are also very expensive to provide, and more importantly to maintain. This strategy sets out why we provide playspaces, with a view to providing outstanding community outcomes, but also ensuring that these facilities are where they need to be, and that we can maintain them. As noted previously, some of our play facilities are not in the right locations.

As outlined in the Action Plan there are two fitness facilities and ten existing playgrounds earmarked for removal. The table below lists those to be removed, the rationale for removal, and what is being provided to replace them.

Park #	Site	Suburb	Type	Action	Priority			Rationale
					S	M	L	
5	Mountain Park	Bulahdelah	Fitness	Remove. At end of life.			X	This fitness facility is recommended for removal at the end of its life in approximately 10 years. It will be replaced by Inter-generational fitness at the new Neighbourhood playspace at Wade Park. This is viewed as being a better outcome for the community.
11	Craven Reserve	Craven	Play	L. Remove. At end of life.			X	The population of Craven (104 in 2023) does not justify upgrading this playground, which is in poor condition. There will be new provisions in Gloucester that this small community can access.



Park #	Site	Suburb	Type	Action	Priority			Rationale
					S	M	L	
18	Forster Town Park	Forster	Play	L. Remove. See 98		X		The small number of play elements are not providing the play value expected from such a centrally located park. It will be replaced by the new District playspace at John Holland Park, which is only 100m away. This will also free up more room for passive activities such as the markets and leisure. This will be a good outcome for the community.
23	Pilot Hill Park	Forster	Play	L. Remove. See 98		X		Like Town Park this facility is not delivering the play value expected from its location. It is in poor condition and needs to be removed. The new District at John Holland will replace. This will be a good outcome for the community.
35	Jimmy's Beach Reserve	Hawks Nest	Play	L. Remove. At end of life.		X		This facility will reach the end of its life within 10 years. Due to the new District at Providence Park a new Local this close is not needed.
56	Scenic Park	Stroud Road	Play	L. Remove. At end of life.		X		This play facility, along with 57, are both in poor condition. They will be covered by new provision in Stroud; however, they will be left in place until the Stroud actions have been implemented.
57	Taylor Park	Stroud Road	Play	L. Remove. At end of life.		X		This play facility, along with 56, are both in poor condition. They will be covered by new provision in Stroud; however, they will be left in place until the Stroud actions have been implemented.
61	Debrecency Park	Taree	Play	L. Remove.	X			This play facility is in very poor condition. With the recommended actions for Taree implemented, including the upgrade of Martin Reserve, the new playspace at Endeavour Reserve and the upgrade to Fotheringham Park it is not necessary to replace this facility.

Park #	Site	Suburb	Type	Action	Priority			Rationale
					S	M	L	
71	Taree Park	Taree	Play	L. Removed	X			The play equipment was removed in 2023 due to its poor condition. It was not providing play value to the community. With the recommended actions for Taree implemented, including the upgrade of Martin Reserve, the new playspace at Endeavour Reserve and the upgrade to Fotheringham Park it is not necessary to replace this facility. In addition, Taree Park has been earmarked for youth-based facilities such as a new skatepark.
74	Wrigley Park	Taree	Play	L. Remove	X			This play facility is in very poor condition. With the recommended actions for Taree implemented, including the upgrade of Martin Reserve, the new playspace at Endeavour Reserve and the upgrade to Fotheringham Park it is not necessary to replace this facility.
77	Horrace Dean Reserve	Tinonee	Play	Remove (swing). At end of life.			X	The play facility is one swing. Even though it is getting use, especially from children leaving the school in the afternoon, it has very limited play value, with only one person being able to use it at one time. With the upgrade to both the Tallships and Tinonee Recreation Grounds play facilities this facility is not needed. However, it will be left in place until its end of life.
88	Central Park	Wingham	Fitness	Remove			X	This fitness facility is poorly located. Usage data shows that it is not attracting the level of use to justify it being in such an important park. The upgraded Central Park playspace will include inter-generational fitness facilities. Action to be reviewed in the Wingham Central Park Master Plan.





# MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE



## Management and Maintenance

***It's no use building it and then forgetting it, you must maintain it. Our community wants well maintained parks and facilities.***

Our playspaces do not exist in isolation, but rather they are one component of many different types of infrastructure that are located in our parks and reserves. Therefore, it is just as important that we manage the park that the playspace is in, as it is to manage and maintain the playspace itself.

In alignment with the MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035 (OSRS) we will seek to manage our parks and playspace facilities in the face of uncertainty, created by climate change and increasing impacts from overuse, through the impact assessment model. Maintenance of our eco-systems is by far the most critical component of providing high quality spaces for our community. It is fairly easy to build something, but far more difficult to maintain it, especially something that is living, and which requires a certain set of parameters to be met for its sustainability.

All of the open space in the MidCoast local government area, and their associated buildings and infrastructure are maintained and managed by MidCoast Council. The high level of visitation to our reserves and the use of any infrastructure in them requires careful management and intensive maintenance of infrastructure and resources. Feedback from the *Draft Open Space and Recreation Needs Analysis 2023* indicated that visitors are generally satisfied with the cleanliness and maintenance of the individual parks and reserves. However, the community expect the assets to be maintained to a high standard.

This section of the Strategy details the services that we provide in managing and maintaining the sites to ensure that they are well maintained and therefore will be available for future generations.

In maintaining and managing our public open spaces the following activities are considered:

**Activities and Events:** Some of our reserves are also used for 'one-off temporary events' – the approval for events is assessed on the potential impact and time of the proposed activities, detailed under our Use and Hire of Public Open Spaces.

**Waste Services:** Garbage is collected from individual bin collection areas throughout the parks. Bins are collected by garbage trucks daily, both garbage and recycling trucks enter the neighbouring streets around each reserve. A number of our reserves do not have bins.

**Maintenance:** We oversee all the maintenance requirements of the individual reserves. Council work crews have a program of maintenance seeing them do routine maintenance on a park roster basis. We are generally responsible for maintaining assets such as turf, gardens, paving, roads, fences, handrails and cleaning. We are also responsible for cleaning any facilities and amenities throughout the reserves. A service level review of all maintenance being provided by us is to be conducted in the short term, with a view of developing a Desired Standards of Service model.

**Playground Maintenance:** We maintain the playgrounds in our public open spaces where they are located. The playspace rubber softfall surface is routinely patched and cleaned. Equipment is maintained and parts replaced from time to time. We audit playspaces annually to ensure they meet safety requirements. Further play maintenance considerations are found later in this section.

**Building Maintenance:** Any buildings located in reserves are maintained and repaired by Council

**Environmental Services:** We are responsible for identifying and putting in place energy, water savings and renewable opportunities within reserves. This includes identifying ways to reduce

waste to landfill; encouraging visitors to use sustainable transport options; educating the community on the environmental significance of the area; and preparing for the future impacts of climate change.

**Safety and Regulations:** Our rangers patrol the individual parks on a regular basis, enforcing regulations to promote safety and equitable access for visitors. Activities that adversely affect other patrons' pleasure of reserves are regulated. On occasion rangers and other Council staff need to manage antisocial behaviour across the reserves. Controlled activities include dog walking, consumption of alcohol, commercial training, ball games, bicycle riding, skateboard riding, use of portable barbecues and littering. Dogs are allowed off-leash in those reserves that have been chosen for the activity. Where off-leash is not chosen dogs must be on-leash at all times. Dogs are prohibited within 10 metres of children's playgrounds and the barbecues. Dog regulation signage is provided where required.

The following regulations are enforced in those public open spaces where indicated:

- No alcohol
- No camping or staying overnight
- No un-authorized ball games
- No commercial activities without Council approval
- No skateboards or rollerblades
- No kites or kite activities
- No portable barbecues or open fires
- No alcohol
- No smoking on the beach

It is our aim to keep vehicular activity within our parks to a minimum. However, it is necessary for service vehicles to access our reserves. Oftentimes access is gated to individual parks. Vehicles that require access include the garbage truck and staff with utes. Occasional access is required by other agency vehicles. Emergency vehicles may require access to individual reserves. When service vehicles do access parks all care is taken, and public safety is paramount.

## **Playspace maintenance considerations**

Playspaces are unique. Even though they are a facility that is constructed in our open spaces, much like a sports facility, playspaces have a unique set of maintenance requirements. In addition, playspaces have more legislation and standards applied to them than any other recreation infrastructure, and as such therefore require a higher level of maintenance.

Below are detailed a comprehensive set of maintenance principles that MidCoast Council applies to playspace provision and upkeep.

Maintenance Consideration	Principle
Mowing	It is important to ensure that edging around soft-fall or any other structures provided at playspaces are able to be mown. Sharp and weird lines and angles may be funky for designers but getting a mower around them should be a long-term consideration.
Edging	Playspaces often have edging constructed around them to provide boundaries and barriers for soft-fall zones, ascetics, passive fencing, create play zones, seating, climbing elements and other purposes. The material provided for edging is varied. Planning should consider that materials used for edging, which may be concrete, grass, sandstone, metal, plastic, plantings or others, can be maintained, including that suitable equipment and plant are available for maintenance
Plantings	Advice should be sought from either Council’s horticulturalist or outside sources to ensure any plantings for the playspace conform with our planting policy and are suitable for the environment and locale. Before installation ensure that we have the necessary equipment required to maintain any new plantings, especially in the long term.
Inspections	All play equipment needs to be inspected periodically in line with AS4685. We bare the budget liability to cover these independent inspections. Ensure sufficient budget is available and who can do inspections. Independent companies exist that provide a regular inspection regime. Consideration should be given to contract an inspection regime, if budget allows or if internal capacity does not exist
Colours and Styles	We may have a standard colour and style palette for open space equipment. Planners should ensure that the playspace conforms with any standards policy
Playspace softfall	A number of different soft-fall options are available for playspaces. All provide different experiences, tactile interactions, budget implications and above all, maintenance requirements. Low maintenance softfall such as SBR, EPDM and TPV rubber products will need to be inspected for continued compliance with AS4422. More tactile softfall, which provides a more advanced play experience, require far more supervision and maintenance than the rubber options. Softfall such as play sand, wood shavings and other natural products need to be confirmed to ensure we have the capacity to maintain the surface at its AS4422 standard. Regular “top-ups” of tactile softfall will need to be covered by internal budgets and plant needs to be available to do these works.
Access and recreational paths	Playspaces are provided in open space. Often our open spaces are not adjacent to transport infrastructure. Therefore, both access and recreation multi-use paths will either need to be provided for within the playspace budget or will need to be provided through budget allocation.
Access for plant	Planners and designs should ensure that suitable access for heavy plant is provided. Often large trucks need to access the playspace, going over paths and edgings. Suitably constructed heavy use crossing points need to be constructed in paths and other infrastructure during the construction phase
Equipment replacement	From time to time play elements will need to be replaced, due to manufacturing faults or end of life replacement. We should ensure that we are aware of details for replacement, including country of origin and product name and service number



Maintenance Consideration	Principle
Shade	If shade is provided, we need to implement an inspection regime. We should confirm that we have the plant required to carry out inspections and to do any minor repairs or work
Council inspection checklist	Ensure we have a standard inspection checklist for playspaces?
Environmental integration	A contemporary play option is to integrate play elements within the natural environment. This primarily involves connecting play elements such as balance and climbing elements to trees and other natural objects, including rocks, in the site location. Construction of these integrated elements will be done by the tendered construction company in line with AS4685. However, ongoing maintenance and inspection of these integrations will need to be done by us to ensure the ongoing suitability of the natural object, the connections, and the equipment
Sun effect	If metal surfaces are to be provided, mainly as sliding elements, then these need to be shaded from direct sun. Metal surfaces become un-usable with direct sun. We will need to ensure, during routine inspection regime, that all metal surfaces are constantly in shade, whether natural or manmade
Chemicals	Council Operations need to ensure that chemicals currently being used for turf, plant and general open space maintenance can be used in proximity of playspaces
Vandalism and graffiti	All community infrastructure is subject to vandalism and graffiti. Playspaces are a major focal point for Council and Council's reputation is often set by how community infrastructure such as playspaces are presented. We have a graffiti policy and a graffiti removal regime.
Contemporary, state-of-the-art or bespoke play elements	Every council wants to provide a unique play experience for their community, and to be seen to be providing the latest in play experience. However, we need to ensure that play design and elements are able to be maintained, accessed and replaced within the resources available to us.
Public amenities	Where people go, they want amenities. No use putting in a contemporary playspace and receiving complaints that there are no toilets, no seating, you can't get a pram or a wheelchair near, no bins, no shade, no wind shelter, or no water. Facilities should be provisioned in alignment with their hierarchy. We need to ensure that provision of public amenities conforms with standard provision, can be maintained and can be accessed. At the same time, we need to be careful not to over-embellish playspaces beyond their intended classification. A major public toilet, provided with a Local playspace, would be an over-embellishment.
Can you add to it	Most playspaces are provided within a limited budget. Often the community's excitement may exceed the playspace provided. We need to ensure that there is capacity within the new design and construction to add in new elements in the future, and that we have the capacity to resource and maintain a more enhanced play provision



# FINANCIALS

## Financials

Funding for implementing this strategy will either be allocated for future upgrade works (capital works) or maintenance and management. Funding for the management and maintenance is currently provided through our annual budget allocation.

To fund the proposed new or upgrade works, we will set aside capital works funds in future years that will cover a percentage of the proposals in the strategy, which will be combined with any future grant funding.

Council's budget for the strategy is not expected to accommodate all proposals in the short- or long-term plan.

Additional funding options that may be investigated include:

- State and federal grants
- Voluntary planning agreements
- Section 7.11 development contributions
- Partnerships with community groups or businesses.

The amount of funding through these streams is difficult to anticipate as it is dependent on grant programs.

## Financial

The sustainable protection of our public open spaces, and the embellishment that we undertake on them to meet community need is expensive. The Action Plan in this strategy represents a significant investment by Council in the long-term viability of our public open space portfolio. The life cycle of this strategy is 12 years, and so the projects identified form a works schedule for that period. All projects have been given a time period priority, based on their importance to the community, and to ensure that infrastructure on our open spaces meet contemporary standards and remain safe and functional.

We do not bare all the financial burden of maintaining world class open space. Both state and federal governments acknowledge their role in protecting our environment, as well as ensuring that our communities are healthy, happy and active. They therefore provide contributing funds to the provision and upgrading of open space infrastructure. However, ongoing cost (OPEX – Operational Expense) is borne exclusively by us. Therefore, the projects identified in the Action Plan have been well considered and have been driven by feedback provided by the community, on what they want their open spaces to be.

Even though the projects in this strategy are meant to be delivered within the life cycle of this plan, it is anticipated that some may not. In these cases, those projects will be tested in future reviews of the strategy, and if confirmed that they are still needed they will be “rolled over” into future versions.



## How did we prioritise the actions?

We used four connected decision drivers to identify both the actions and their priority.

These are listed in the table below:

Decision Driver	Rationale
Evidence approach	Each action has been tested through community feedback, analysis of community need, analysis of current activity trends and its impacts on the environment. The priority placed on each action is a result of analysis of the impact on either the community or the environment if that project is not undertaken.
Equitable provision	Actions were also developed through an equitable lens, in that each location within the LGA was considered for what they have received in the past, how long since that location received a new facility and the feasibility of delivering their individual projects at a certain point in time (e.g., availability of funding).
Asset portfolio condition	As has been noted in the OSRS the state of our recreation portfolio is aged, and some of the individual components are no longer fit for purpose. In developing the actions and their priorities the condition of existing infrastructure, and its projected life was a strong determinant in setting its priority.
Financial Sustainability	The prioritisation of the actions in the Action plan, and the ability for projects to progress to delivery in the future, has also been influenced by considering the associated financial operating model and/or the long-term asset management requirements in minimising future financial burdens to Council. This financial planning of actions also includes the consideration of access to future potential funding programs, the funds of which the vast majority of the actions will require.

If circumstances change, such as new funding programs, changes within individual communities, or changes in community participation we will revisit the priorities. This might mean a community comes to us and asks for a project to be brought forward, which, when considered, can be done, we will.

Not all actions listed will be completed in the life cycle of the Strategy. The review process identified will re-consider each action to ascertain its continuing applicability.

## Estimated Costs

Even though it is not possible to predict the exact cost of a specific playspace until after procurement has taken place it is possible to provide an indication of a price range. This is based on past playspace provision, which aligns with the specific hierarchy of playspace.

In the table below are the estimated cost ranges:

Playspace Type	Estimated Cost (2023)
Local	\$150,000 - \$200,000
Neighbourhood	\$250,000 - \$300,000
District	\$750,000 - \$1,000,000
Regional	\$2,000,000 >

Considering these ranges and taking the upper of the range it is possible to estimate the total cost of all the projects indicated in the Action Plan.

The totals of new and upgraded facilities per hierarchy, and the total cost are:

Playspace Type	Number	Cost
Local	42	\$8,400,000
Neighbourhood	15	\$4,500,000
District	10	\$10,000,000
Regional	4	\$8,000,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>\$30,900,000</b>

These indicative costs are a guide for planning. As detailed in other places in the Strategy recreation infrastructure, including playspaces, often are not the sole responsibility of Council to fund. There are a number of agencies whose funding programs are designed to provide contributing funding towards playspace construction. It is our aim to utilise these funding programs to deliver as many of the new and upgraded playspace as we can

## Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) for Recreation Infrastructure

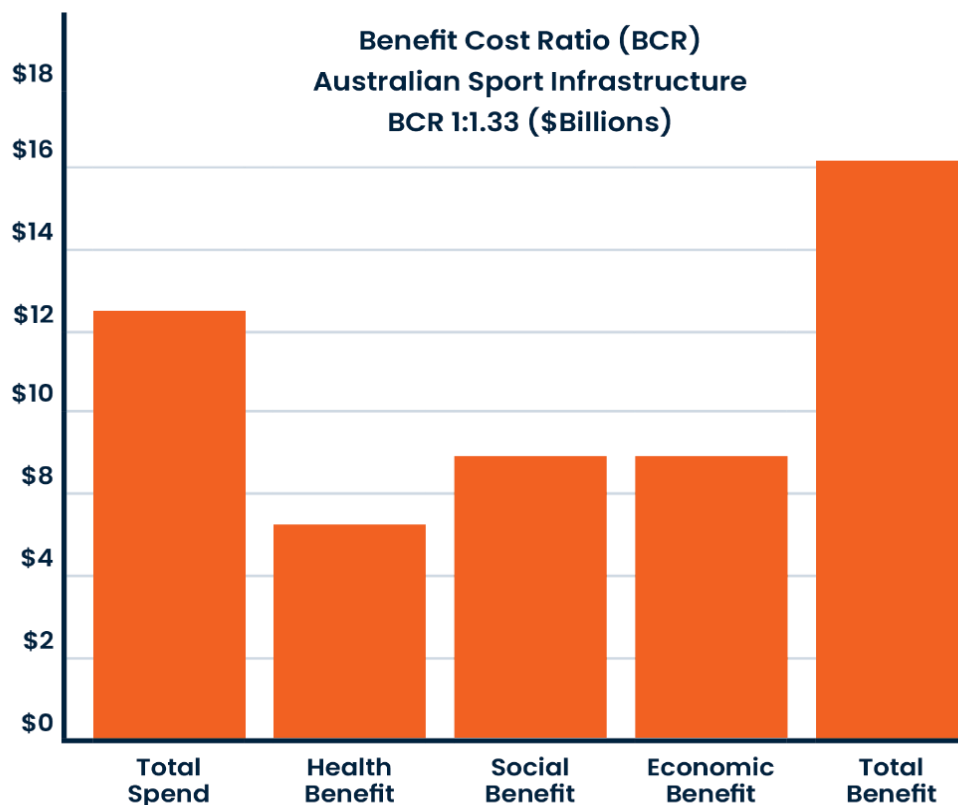
In 2021 the consultancy firm KPMG was commissioned by Sport & Recreation Victoria to produce a report on the value of recreation infrastructure to Australia, called "*The value of community sport and active recreation infrastructure*"<sup>10</sup> report. KPMG found that in any given year approximately \$12B is spent by all levels of government, and the private sector, on sport and recreation infrastructure in Australia. KPMG estimated that for this \$12B we receive a benefit of \$16B, broken into three distinct categories; economic, social and health benefits.

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<sup>10</sup> [https://sport.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0030/155685/Value-of-Community-Sport-Infrastructure-FINAL-REPORT.pdf](https://sport.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0030/155685/Value-of-Community-Sport-Infrastructure-FINAL-REPORT.pdf)

Infrastructure Australia (IA), the peak government advisory agency, tasked with prioritising infrastructure projects and funding use the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) system to identify the value that infrastructure projects bring to Australia, and to decide whether a specific project should or should not be funded. The BCR is a simple equation that shows whether the return from a project exceeds the capital expense of the project. To calculate the BCR they take the total cost, and then divide it by the economic gain from the project. If the BCR is greater than 1.0 then the return is greater than the expense, if the BCR is less than 1.0 then the expense will exceed the gain.

When we input KPMG’s work into the IA’s BCR equation the BCR for recreation infrastructure is 1.33. That means that for every dollar that we spend on recreation infrastructure there is a return, to the community of \$1.33.



### Case Study

Council receives a \$1M grant to build a new Regional playspace. Council contributes \$1M, giving a \$2M budget. Once the project is completed the entire \$2M has been spent. The value of that project to the community is \$2,266,000.

### Ongoing financials – Maintenance

Recreation infrastructure is often highly dynamic, technical, innovative and bespoke. Open spaces themselves, unless they are national parks, being preserved in their natural state for ecosystem and diversity protection, require regular maintenance to maintain them to a standard that is acceptable to the community. Our ultimate outcome is for our open spaces to be visited by the community, to achieve that outcome the open spaces must be maintained. However, that comes with costs.

These costs are ongoing and are often referred to as OPEX (Operational Expense). Maintenance forms one component of OPEX, but which is the most visual, with Council staff often seen in our



open spaces doing maintenance. These operations come at a cost. Below is an indicative table for general maintenance of public open spaces. It should be noted that MidCoast Council has an open space portfolio of 1600ha (16,000,000m<sup>2</sup>).

## Ongoing financials – OPEX

Recreation infrastructure involves a substantial upfront cost, commonly referred to as CAPEX (Capital Expense). This is often funded through a combination of state and federal government grants and council contributions. However, there are also significant ongoing costs, commonly referred to as OPEX (Operational Expense). OPEX is always borne by Council, as there are no funding programs that provide grants for OPEX. OPEX can include costs such as ongoing maintenance to the facility, insurances and depreciation. It is the depreciation cost that is the most significant, but which also is the most unconsidered. Depreciation is a figure calculated on the life of the asset. If an asset costs \$2m to provide (CAPEX) and its life is 20 years, then a depreciation cost needs to be carried by Council’s budget for each year of the asset’s lifecycle. Many councils do not calculate depreciation, assuming that the money will be found when the asset needs replacing.

The table below shows the depreciation for the standard range of recreation infrastructure.

Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Financial Analysis - OPEX										
Financial	Regional Playspace Upgrade	Local Playspace Upgrade	Sport Amenity Building	District Sports Facility Upgrade	Regional Sports Facility Upgrade	BMX Facility	Skatepark	Sports Lighting	Synthetic	Courts
Cost	\$2,000,000	\$250,000	\$1,200,000	\$3,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$750,000	\$500,000	\$2,000,000	\$60,000
Depreciation – future	\$133,000	\$16,600	\$40,000	\$100,000	\$166,667	Nil	\$20,000	\$416,667	\$860,000	\$3,000
<b>Total future costs</b>	<b>\$133,000</b>	<b>\$16,600</b>	<b>\$40,000</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>	<b>\$166,667</b>	<b>Nil</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>	<b>\$416,667</b>	<b>\$860,000</b>	<b>\$3,000</b>
	Assume life @ 15 years		Assume life @ 50 years					Assume life @ 20 years	Assume life @ 10 years	

## Project Assessment

An open space and recreation infrastructure scoring matrix has been developed to help assess future projects and inform Capital Works programs. The matrix can be used for two specific purposes, namely, to ascertain if a project should proceed, and to compare one potential project with another. It is not required to be used for projects already endorsed by Council through adopted master plans, developer contribution plans or similar strategic plans. The matrix is an assessment model that details key criteria and includes an associated scoring mechanism. This tool will assist us in comparing one project against another when funding is limited.

Each question has been given a weighting, as some questions carry more importance than others. For example, priority 1 “*Identified as a high need in the Open Space & Recreation Strategy*” carries more significance as projects identified in the Action Plan of this Strategy have been tested with the community, against Council internal priorities and have been considered in our long term financial planning. Likewise, priority 8 “*Existing facility is at capacity*” demonstrates a higher need for the facility improvement to go ahead over priority 20.

To calculate the weighting on each criterion they have been placed in order of importance, with a percentage weighting allocated to each depending on importance.

## Scoring Matrix for Prioritising Open Space and Recreation Facility Projects

Priority	Criteria	Value	Score
Essential	Is project permissible under the Transport and Infrastructure SEPP	Y / N	N/A
Essential	Has Native Title been considered	Y / N	N/A
Essential	If on Crown Land is it consistent with the Plan of Management	Y / N	N/A
Essential	Is there a current land claim on the land	Y / N	N/A
1	Aligns with the Open Space & Recreation Strategy	Y / N	20
2	Project identified in Playspace Strategy	Y / N	15
3	Part of an endorsed master plan	Y / N	15
4	If not addressed, there is a high-risk exposure to Council	Y / N	10
5	Addresses safety and risk management issues	Y / N	10
6	Has lower impact on future Council operating expenditure	Y / N	5
7	Identified as a high need in other Council strategies	Y / N	5
8	Has minimum impact on sensitive environmental or cultural areas	Y / N	5
9	Improves participation opportunities for people with disabilities	Y / N	5
10	Facility is situated within high growth area	Y / N	2
11	Existing facility is at capacity	Y / N	2
12	Improves the functionality of land (drainage, lighting, amenities, parking)	Y / N	2
13	Benefits multiple community user groups	Y / N	2
14	Addresses lack of facility provision	Y / N	1
15	Is eligible for council funding or has high potential of partnership funding	Y / N	1

Note: Pass score is 65. This does not mean that the project will proceed, dependant on funding and approvals

### Grant Management

The majority of recreation infrastructure provided on public open space by local government is funded, either jointly or fully, by grants. These grant programs are administered by either the NSW or Federal governments, through numerous funding programs. MidCoast Council does not have the financial resources to be able to fund all projects that need to be undertaken on our public open spaces, and so relies upon grants. Both Council and community groups are often eligible to apply for grants.

