

Playspace design and maintenance guidelines

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 require a higher level of maintenance.

These maintenance requirements are directly impacted by how the facility is situated, designed and constructed. It is therefore important to consider maintenance requirements during the scoping, design and construction phase of each play facility.

These guidelines have been developed by play planners and designers, as well as council operational staff who are experienced with play design and maintenance.

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



Design & Maintenance Consideration	Principle
Siting	<p>The siting of the play facility is critical, both to the play value that the facility provides, as well as for the ongoing maintenance of the asset. Considerations such as making use of natural shade, topography, proximity to built structures, including houses, should be part of the scoping process.</p> <p>Parks are often subject to over-land flooding. Play facilities should be situated away from areas that regularly flood.</p>
Sympathy to the site	<p>It is important that we protect and enhance the natural environment of the park in which the playspace is provided. During the design phase contractors should be encouraged to make use of the natural environment that the park presents. For example, if a park is heavily vegetated the use of natural products in the play elements should be sought, rather than the over-use of metal features, especially with bright colours. Natural and tactile features and materials should be favoured.</p>

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Nature Play	Where opportunities present nature play should be considered within the design of the facility. If there are natural features within the park these can be used and be incorporated into the design.
Mowing	It is important to ensure that edging around soft-fall or any other structures provided at playspaces can be mown. Sharp and weird lines and angles may be funky, but getting a mower around them should be a long-term consideration. Mowers used by Council should be able to effectively maintain the turf around edging.
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 and that any existing trees can still be accessed and maintained when the new playspace is constructed
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	Several 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. In addition, tactile softfall, such as play sand, will need to be raked on a regular basis to both provide a quality play experience, and to ensure that levels and compaction fall within AS4422.

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Access and recreational paths	Playspaces are provided in public 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. Likewise, maintenance of these paths will need to be identified and budgeted for within the work schedule
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
Shade	<p>Where possible natural shade is preferred to manmade. The facility should be sited to take advantage of natural shade.</p> <p>If shade is provided, in accordance with the guidelines set out in our Playspace Strategy, 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</p>
Council inspection checklist	Ensure we have a standard inspection checklist for playspaces?
Environmental integration	<p>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.</p> <p>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</p>
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.

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Contemporary, state-of-the-art or bespoke play elements	Every council wants to provide a unique play experiences 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 can 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