

# Open Space Strategies

Planning Practice Note | 70

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This practice note provides guidance to councils on preparing an Open Space Strategy (OSS). It covers the reasons for preparing an OSS and the possible inputs and outputs of the process. An OSS is a strategic approach for planning the current and future uses of open space within a municipality.

## Open space

Public open space provides significant benefits to communities. These benefits include protecting biodiversity, improving psychological health and wellbeing, improving physical fitness, facilitating social interaction and cohesion, promoting community pride, and enhancing child development through play. Open space also provides a location for participating in civic life.

The importance and value of open space is likely to increase over time as a result of emerging pressures of population growth, demographic change, urbanisation and climate change. Urban change means access to private open space may alter over time and appropriately located, well designed and maintained public open space will become more important for future communities. Preserving existing open space is also important as it can be modified over time to perform different open space roles in response to changing community needs. Land that may appear to be of marginal benefit to one generation may be of critical importance to the next.

## Open space strategies

All open space planning and action should be based on the preparation of a comprehensive OSS.

Preparing an OSS provides an opportunity for councils to take into account all of the current open space assets in their area and actively consider future needs for additional open space. It also encourages an examination of how existing open space could be managed more effectively.

An OSS should:

- provide an overview of existing open space resources and future needs
- provide a basis for decision making about future open space provision and development
- assist financial and resource planning and asset management

- identify areas of under-provision of open space and articulate strategies for how land could be acquired or disposed of for the purpose of open space
- facilitate a co-ordinated approach to open space planning
- articulate community and local government aspirations in relation to open space provision and development.

An OSS is generally prepared on a municipal basis by the council. It examines all open space assets in the study area and should be reviewed every 10 years. Regardless of the location of the municipality (coastal, inland, inner city or growth area), the process for preparing an OSS is the same.

## Defining open space

For the purpose of an OSS all types of open space (both publicly and privately owned) in an area should be considered.

Privately owned land can, and does, play an important role in providing open space to a community. For example:

- a private school may share its fields with the community, or
- a shopping centre may provide an urban piazza where people can gather.

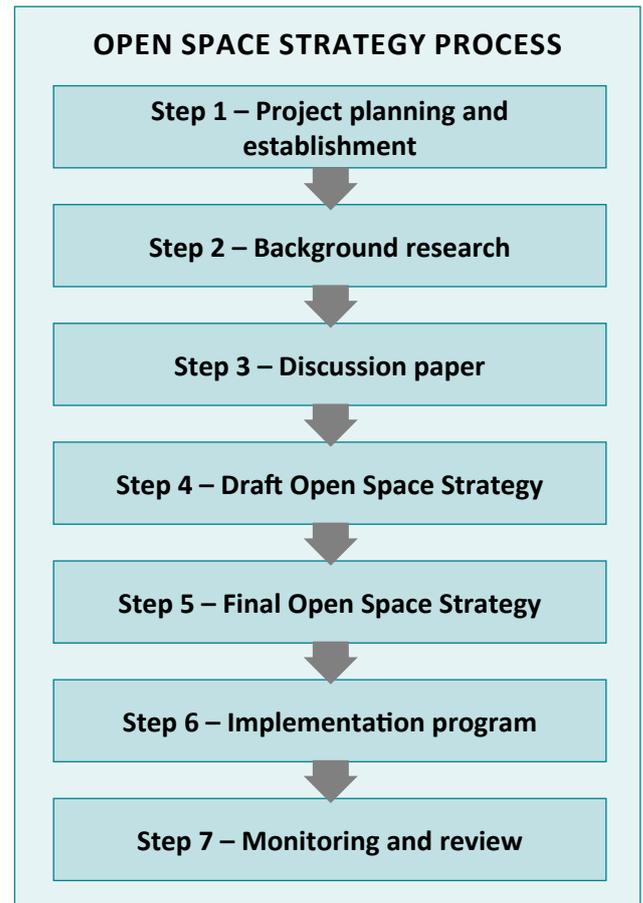
Although not in public ownership, these assets provide a recreational and leisure benefit to the community and should be considered as part of the overall mix of open space assets within a municipal area.

The strategies and actions set out in an OSS should, however, generally relate to publicly owned and/or managed open space.

The following definitions are provided for the purpose of this document:

- **open space** – land that provides recreation and leisure benefits
- **public open space** – land in public ownership and/or under public management that provides recreation and leisure benefits
- **private open space** – land that is privately owned and provides recreation and leisure benefits.

## The process of preparing an Open Space Strategy



### Step 1: Project planning and establishment

This stage is one of the most important in the open space strategy planning process because it involves:

- establishing desired aims for the OSS
- identifying key stakeholders including those from within council
- determining how the OSS relates to the other council plans and strategies
- identifying the project team and manager.

Key questions to consider include:

- What is the OSS seeking to achieve?
- Who should be involved?
- Will a consultant be involved and what will their role be?
- Who will champion the strategy?
- Who will be responsible for the strategy's implementation?
- What is the budget for preparing the strategy?
- What is the timeframe for completion?

## Engagement

The engagement process of preparing an OSS provides an opportunity for stakeholders and the community to provide their views and feedback. Councils are encouraged to provide a variety of ways for stakeholders to contribute to an OSS.

In the early stage of strategy preparation, it is worthwhile preparing an engagement plan to identify key stakeholders. The degree to which they become involved in the OSS can influence the outcome.

### INTERNAL PROJECT TEAM

It is important that the internal project team include representatives from open space, strategic and statutory planning. This will ensure that the final strategy is a useful implementation tool and has a practical framework for inclusion in the planning scheme.

## Step 2: Background research

Background research forms a critical component of the preparation of the OSS. This is the stage when all relevant data is collected, consultation is undertaken and the current and future open space needs are identified.

### Situational analysis

This stage is about understanding the policy and planning context in which the strategy needs to sit. It should consider any previous plans, policy gaps and known issues that relate to open space across the municipality and consider regional and cross boundary issues. An understanding of the physical and social context, as well as any municipal or site-specific issues, will help provide a broad picture of open space within the study area.

### Analysis framework

This stage encapsulates the core philosophies that underpin the strategy. It will define the:

- **Study precincts:** the municipality is typically broken into smaller areas such as localities, study precincts or suburbs to assist with assessment and planning
- **Open space classification:** a way of differentiating between catchments, landscape character, function and settlement types of open space (see table on page 4)

- **Core service levels:** identification of set standards for how and where the different types of open space will be managed and improved
- **Principles:** based on the outcomes of the situational analysis and any trends, a number of key principles will emerge that should be used to guide policy development and priorities for implementation.

### Existing supply

The supply of open space is best analysed at the local level (for example by precinct or suburb), as well as at the municipal level. Undertaking an evaluation of the existing supply requires an assessment of the current distribution, capability and suitability of open spaces to serve likely demand and specific functions. This analysis will typically include:

- preparing an inventory of open space, including land ownership
- preparing a GIS open space mapping layer
- applying an open space classification system on the existing assets
- identifying walkable catchments around the open space – use actual walking, not just circles (for example PedShed).

### Demand analysis

All open space planning processes need to include some assessment of the current and likely future demand for open space. This will typically include:

- existing demand and use
- analysis of possible changes in the population from projections, demographic and socioeconomic profile, cultural mix and review of dwelling densities/development pressure
- determination of the likely participation in organised sporting activities and demand for these and other types of facilities and open space.

## Classification of open space

There are various ways to decide on an open space classification system that suits the needs of your OSS. A classification system generally covers the catchment (who will use the open space), landscape character (what the open space looks like) and function (the role of the open space), but can also include settlement type (the environment the open space sits in). A classification system provides the framework for analysing existing open space, potential future needs, and determining the future open space requirements of the study area.

### EXAMPLE OF OPEN SPACE CLASSIFICATIONS

#### Catchment

Local	Spaces that are predominantly provided to serve an immediate local catchment.
District	Parks that generally serve a neighbourhood or group of suburbs.
Regional	Areas that serve regional catchments (that is, the whole of, or broader than, the municipality).

#### Landscape character

Open grassy area	Open areas of exotic grass that may not be specifically cultivated as turf for sports.
Specialised sports surfaces (for example, synthetic or enclosed)	Areas of synthetic turf or specialised playing surfaces used for sports such as tennis, bowling, athletics, hockey.
Native grassland/wetland	Indigenous grassland or wetland.
Waterway /creek/ river corridor	A corridor of open space including a waterway, typically including a riparian zone and vegetation.

#### Function

Access way/trail	Primarily a green space trail, link or walkway between streets, neighbourhoods or areas of public open space.
Flora/fauna conservation	Areas protected and managed for the significance of the flora and fauna. They may include recreational opportunities associated with interpreting these features.
Social family recreation	Small areas that are primarily for play and have no other recreation facilities.
Sport	Areas reserved for sporting pursuits (for example, baseball, soccer, cricket, football and other active/organised sports).

#### Settlement type

Mixed use/ medium/ high density	Areas that typically don't have any, or very limited, private open space. These areas are often multistorey and may be located in activity areas.
Suburban (built up area, urban fringe)	Mix of housing types in urban areas.
Coastal village (bay)	Coastal villages or seaside settlements.
Low density/ rural living/ rural hamlets (foothills)	Outer suburban or fringe areas with large blocks (that is, greater than one hectare). These areas are still generally residential rather than working farms.
Rural (farm)	Farms or agricultural properties that also have residences.

## Gap analysis

Once there is an understanding of the existing supply and demand for open space it is necessary to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement. This includes:

- analysis and mapping of distribution, diversity, quantity, quality and location of open space
- assessment of the implications on open space provision and design of participation projections, expressed/ latent demand and benefits sought as a result of demographic profiles, population growth and dwelling density.

### ESTIMATING A GROWING POPULATION

Understanding the demand created by anticipated future population growth is an important component of an OSS. It helps to justify open space contributions as part of the development process.

Demand for open space in yet to be developed areas or existing areas can be assessed based on the likely numbers of dwellings or subdivision yield to be achieved in an area. By applying a number of persons per household you can estimate the population of an area yet to be settled.

### TYPES OF DEMAND

**Latent demand:** future or potential demand.

This is often assessed by projecting future participation, using existing participation rates, of organised sporting activities, and applying this to projected population figures.

**Expressed demand:** that which is evidenced by current participation in sporting or other recreational activities. It is assessed through data such as current participation and usage figures and membership of clubs.

**Optional demand:** the demand for open space the community is likely to want, or want an option to use.

## Community and stakeholder engagement

Common methods for engaging residents and stakeholders include opportunities to make verbal or written submissions, telephone interviews, workshops, and household surveys.

The provision, use and management of open space affects a wide range of Victorian Government agencies and departments.

It is worth obtaining input from key agency and department representatives, and conducting a workshop to identify relevant shared projects as well as discuss policy gaps and opportunities for closer co-operation and partnerships.

The key output of this stage of community and stakeholder engagement is identification of gaps in supply and demand and opportunities to improve future provision for the municipality as a whole, as well as by locality/precinct.

## Step 3: Discussion paper

A discussion paper presents the open space issues and objectives for the council. It is determined from the findings of the supply, demand and gap analysis. Issues are identified and a mix of tools are devised to address each one individually. The discussion paper also outlines preliminary directions for future open space provision, policy and key issues, both for each precinct and the overall municipality. Several possible actions may be presented that consider different scenarios.

A discussion paper offers the opportunity to identify innovative delivery options for new open space. Challenging the current understanding and pursuing creative opportunities are best considered early in the strategy development process.

A discussion paper is best distributed to a wide range of people involved in the strategy preparation and exhibited for stakeholders and residents to comment on. The paper can pose questions and seek specific feedback.

A discussion paper presents only preliminary directions and usually generates more feedback than a draft plan, which may be perceived as 'said and done'.

## Step 4: Draft Open Space Strategy

The transition from the discussion paper to the draft OSS should be straightforward after community and stakeholder feedback. This stage often involves summarising key issues and identifying specific objectives, actions and policies to address each one. Further consultation on the draft OSS is recommended.

## LAND CONTRIBUTIONS

As part of the strategy development process, gaps in the open space network will be identified, along with an understanding of the type of open space required. There is an opportunity to rectify gaps through public open space contributions but it is important to:

- specify the locations where a land contribution is sought (this could be shown as a map in the strategy); and
- provide criteria that define the types of land sought as land contributions.

## Step 5: Final Open Space Strategy

The final OSS represents the culmination of the discussion paper, consultation and draft strategy. It should be a concise representation of the open space issues and opportunities for the municipality and as a minimum include the following:

- introduction of the brief and methodology
- vision
- overview of supply of open space
- overview of existing and future demand for open space
- key issues and opportunities
- actions.

Some OSSs are prepared on a thematic basis, others focus on planning precincts, or a combination of both. A lot of valuable analysis, data and maps may inform the final conclusions of the OSS.

However, much of this information is best placed in background reports rather than the main OSS so it can be referenced easily if required.

## Step 6: Implementation program

An OSS must have an implementation plan. This may form part of the main strategy or be a separate document that provides more detail on each of the implementation tasks, responsibilities, cost estimates and priorities. The OSS should be adopted by council and be linked to council's corporate plan and annual budget to ensure a whole-of-council approach to the implementation.

It is important for the implementation plan to consider the statutory implementation of the OSS through the planning scheme. This may include:

- changes or inclusions to the Municipal Strategic Statement
- changes or inclusions to Local Planning Policies
- preparation of a Clause 52.01 schedule for open space contributions
- referencing the OSS in the scheme
- rezoning specific sites to reflect accurate open space use and purpose.

## OPEN SPACE CONTRIBUTIONS

Open space contribution tools are designed to help councils provide new open space or improve existing open space in response to needs created by new residents or employees.

In Victoria, local government has a number of legal mechanisms (or tools) available for obtaining open space contributions as part of the development process. These are:

- *Subdivision Act 1988*, sections 18-20
- Schedule to Clause 52.01 of the *Victoria Planning Provisions*
- Development Contributions Plan (DCP) Overlay
- negotiated legal agreements.

An OSS should consider which open space contribution tool is best for its municipality.

## Step 7: Monitoring and review

It is important to establish processes for monitoring progress towards achieving the OSS vision and objectives and to regularly review documents. Council should nominate a responsible person to oversee the review process. Regular review of the OSS will ensure it remains current and relevant. A review should take into account, amongst other things, up-to-date ABS data, demographic analysis, VCAT decisions, panel reports and revisions to State policy.

## IMPLEMENTATION STATUS UPDATE

Include a status column in your OSS implementation plan and update this quarterly. This makes the job of determining what has been achieved at the end of the plan's life easier and also means you can create an update on progress at any time.

## Planning publications

The following department publications may be helpful:

- *Using Victoria's Planning System*
- Planning Practice Note 46 – *Strategic Assessment Guidelines*
- Planning Practice Note 4 – *Writing a Local Planning Policy*
- Planning Practice Note 10 – *Writing Schedules*
- Planning Practice Note 13 – *Incorporated and Reference Documents*
- *Creating Liveable Open Space: Case Studies*, (Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure 2013).

Copies of the documents are available at:

[www.delwp.vic.gov.au/planning](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au/planning)

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