

Mr Ray Brownlee  
Chief Executive Officer  
Northern Beaches Council  
council@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au

[council@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au)

27<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Dear Mr Brownlee,

**Re: Draft Northern Beaches Open Space and  
Outdoor Recreation Strategy and Action Plan**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Northern Beaches Council's *Draft Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Strategy and Action Plan*. Northern Sydney Local Health District (NSLHD) Health Promotion is committed to ensuring that the built environment has a net-positive impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and the wider community.

Health Promotion commends Council for drafting the Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Strategy and Action Plan. It is a comprehensive and well thought out plan. It takes stock of existing open space and recreation, and puts in place strategies to address gaps that have been found in providing equitable access to the whole Northern Beaches community.

Health Promotion provides the following general recommendations in relation to the plan.

**Recommendations:**

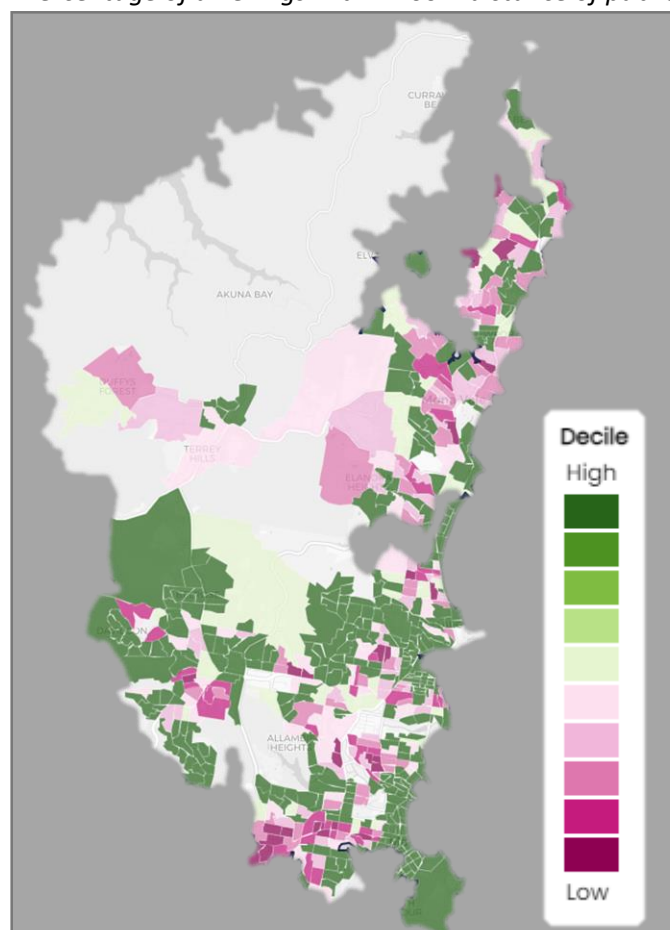
1. Delete 'Harbord' from the Brookvale - Dee Why catchment suburbs (p.8), as the suburb has been renamed 'Freshwater'.
2. Review the figures and maps in the plan and ensure they are correctly numbered and correlate with the body of the text. For example:
  - Figure 2 (referred to on p.23) appears to have been omitted.
  - Reference is made to 'Brookvale - Dee Why Figure 3' (p.29), however Figure 3 relates to the Manly catchment area.
  - There are multiple Figure 4's (p. 31 and p.35).

**Public Open Space Access**

The Northern Beaches community as a whole generally has quality access to public open space, with an average of 88.5% of dwellings located within 400m<sup>1</sup>. However, the Australian Urban Observatory also highlights the disparity of access to public open space within the Northern Beaches LGA<sup>1</sup>. Figure 1 highlights that dwellings in particular neighbourhoods, particular in Seaforth and Balgowlah, have some of the furthest distances to travel to public open space compared to all Australian Urban Centres. This indicates a need to prioritise public open space investment in these particular locations.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Urban Observatory website, RMIT University. Available at: <https://auo.org.au/> (cited 3 August 2022)

Figure 1: Percentage of dwellings within 400m distance of public open space



Source: The Australian Urban Observatory (2022)

Planning for public open space should incorporate multipurpose facilities such as community gardens, performance spaces, playgrounds, outdoor dining areas, green spaces dedicated to passive and active recreation, and exhibition spaces. Designs which are accessible to users of different age groups and abilities are important to ensure equitable access to public spaces.

An emerging subgroup of public open space users are those who work or study from home (WFH) as a result of COVID. Therefore, the Northern Beaches Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Strategy and Action Plan should foster local incidental activity and social interactions to support this cohort of the population requiring increased access to public open space.

#### Recommendations:

3. Prioritise public open space investment in neighbourhoods identified as having the least access.
4. Engage with local schools and encourage participation in the *Share our Space* program, providing opportunities for community members to use school outdoor facilities during holidays for a wide range of activities.
5. Create multipurpose open spaces by co-locating community facilities that encourage intergenerational recreation.
6. Incorporate more evidence-based 'nature play' design features where possible, using the experience of current 'nature play' playgrounds that challenge and connect with nature.
7. Identify opportunities to encourage incidental activity and social interactions within public open space.

## Resilient Open Spaces

Greener and more resilient public spaces are key features in DPIE's Public Space Charter<sup>2</sup>. Public spaces that are softer, greener and more connected to nature can cool towns and cities, providing relief and respite and reduce the impacts of extreme weather conditions. Public spaces can also provide a network of essential hubs that bring communities together and provide refuge and escape, while building our capacity to withstand shocks during times of crisis.

Whilst the existing tree canopy cover for Council managed lands (community centres, playgrounds, sports fields, parks and bushland reserves) is already high, we encourage Council to continue to prioritise and improve the tree canopy in public open spaces. An Australian study of 46,786 adults indicated that exposure to 30% or more tree canopy was associated with a lower incidence of psychological distress<sup>3</sup>. In addition to maintaining the quality of our natural environments, local bush care groups can play a role in enhancing social connectedness through volunteerism.

### Recommendations:

8. Use the NSW Government Architect's Draft Greener Places Design Guide<sup>4</sup> when planning, designing and implementing green infrastructure.
9. Prioritise street tree planting to improve amenity and provide shade, which reduces urban heat stress, helps prevent skin cancer from UV radiation and encourages walking<sup>5</sup>.
10. Plan for flood mitigation of recreational areas especially parks and sports fields.
11. Future proof play grounds and sports fields using climate smart design and surfaces that reduce heat impacts as per the Cool Schools Guide<sup>6</sup> and Guide to Climate-Smart Playgrounds: Research Findings and Application<sup>7</sup> reports.
12. Acknowledge and promote the mental health benefits of trees for the community and the positive health impacts of engaging with nature.
13. Promote and support the recruitment of residents to local bush care groups.

NSLHD Health Promotion thanks Northern Beaches Council for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Strategy and Action Plan. Should you have any queries about this submission please contact David Morrissey at [david.morrissey@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:david.morrissey@health.nsw.gov.au). I look forward to continuing our work with Council to support projects that benefit the health and wellbeing of the community.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Klarenaar  
Director Population and Planetary Health  
Northern Sydney Local Health District

---

<sup>2</sup> NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment website, NSW Public Spaces Charter. Available at: [https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/public-spaces-charter#:~:text=The%20NSW%20Public%20Spaces%20Charter%20\(PDF%207.3MB\)%20has%20been,space%20experts%20and%20community%20members](https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/public-spaces-charter#:~:text=The%20NSW%20Public%20Spaces%20Charter%20(PDF%207.3MB)%20has%20been,space%20experts%20and%20community%20members) (cited 3 August 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Astell-Burt, T. and Feng, X., 2019. Association of Urban Green Space with Mental Health and General Health Among Adults in Australia. JAMA Network Open, 2(7), p.e198209.

<sup>4</sup> NSW Government Architect, Draft Greener Places Design Guide. <https://www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/policies/greener-places> (cited 3 August 2022).

<sup>5</sup> NSW Shade Working Group, Shade - A planning and design priority to help prevent skin cancer. December 2019. Available at: <https://www.cancer.nsw.gov.au/getmedia/be5ca26a-3755-4487-a698-fa843cfaf023/WR-MR0010096-A4-ShadePlanning-CI-0002-01-20.pdf> (cited 19/07/2022)

<sup>6</sup> Madden, A.L., Arora, V., Holmes, K.A., Pfautsch, S. 2018. Cool Schools. Western Sydney University. 56 p. Available at: <http://doi.org/10.26183/5b91d72db0cb7> (cited 5 August 2022)

<sup>7</sup> Pfautsch, S., & Wujeska-Klaue, A. (2021). Guide to Climate-Smart Playgrounds: Research Findings and Application. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.26183/2bgz-d714> (cited 5 August 2022)