Public Open Space Network Supporting Plan Summary

2025-2035

Community Infrastructure Strategy

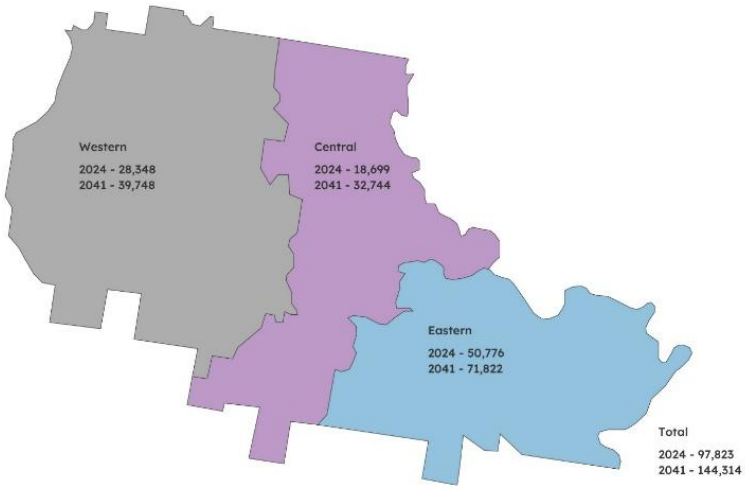
The Community Infrastructure Strategy (CIS) provides a pragmatic, feasible, achievable roadmap for the equitable long-term provision (20 years) of community infrastructure over which council has primary responsibility, plays a role in delivering, or seeks to advocate for on behalf of the community.

The CIS guides a holistic, integrated and evidence-based approach to the prioritisation, planning, design and provision of community infrastructure to meet the changing needs of a growing population efficiently, effectively and responsibly, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The five strategic priorities from the CIS are community identity, thriving communities, partnerships, shaping a shared future and delivering quality services.

Planning precincts

To plan and manage future growth within the city, three distinct local planning precincts have been identified and used across all supporting plans. These are the central, eastern and western precincts.



The local precinct approach will be guided by walkable neighbourhood principles where our residents can access most of their daily needs locally, without using a car. This approach aims to gradually shift away from a continuously expanding urban footprint to a focus on revitalising our existing centres and neighbourhoods.

Maitland population profile

PLANNING PRECINCT	2024	2041	DIFFERENCE	COMPOUNDING ANNUAL GROWTH RATE
Central	18,699	32,744	14,045	3.4%
Eastern	50,776	71,822	21,046	2.1%
Western	28,348	39,748	11,400	2.0%
TOTAL	**97,823**	**144,314**	**46,491**	**2.3%**

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Provisioning hierarchy

Hierarchy based planning guides where and what type and scale of community infrastructure is most needed. The hierarchy includes Local, District, Citywide and Regional. It is used alongside industry standards and guidelines, as well as service catchment and demand analysis.

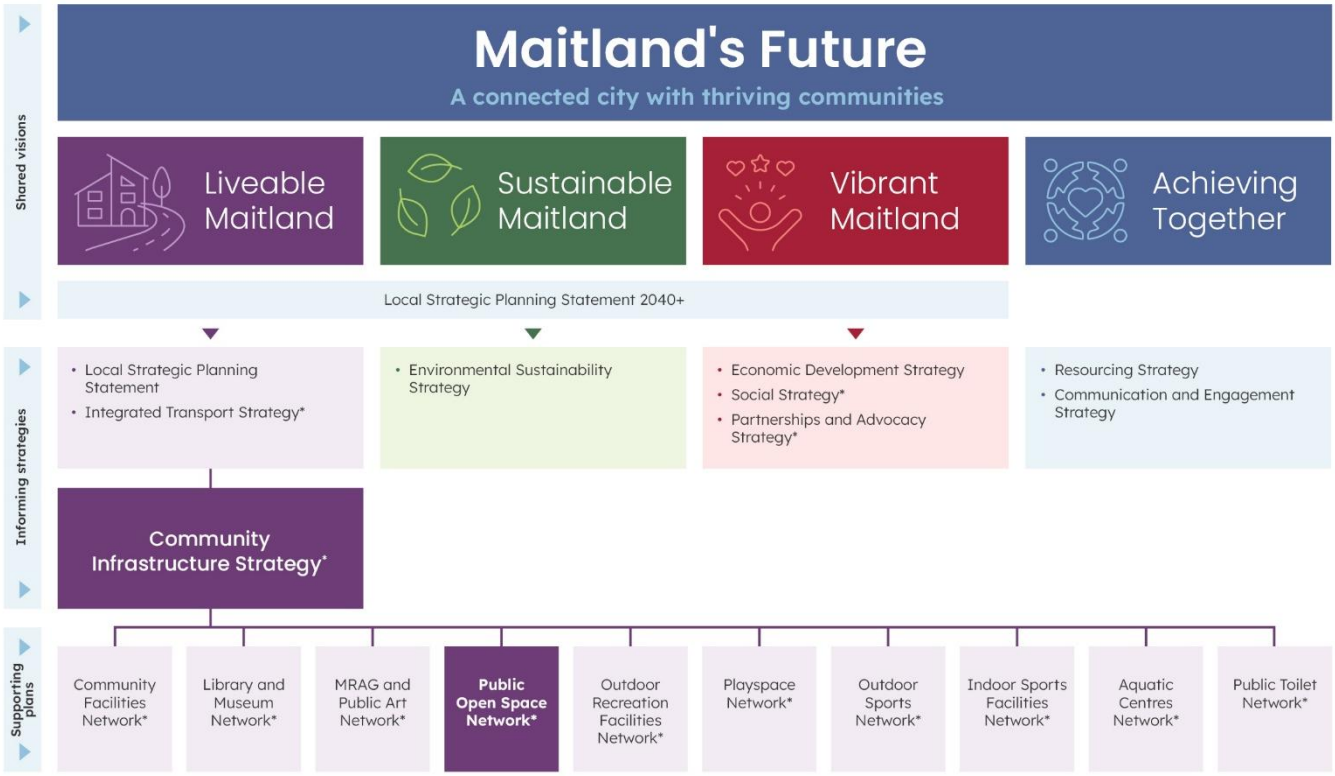
This approach ensures local facilities remain accessible whilst higher order facilities are strategically placed to meet evolving community needs. Most importantly, the hierarchy supports transparent and effective planning and serves our communities by:

- Distributing community infrastructure equitably
- Aligning provision with sound planning principles
- Meeting community expectations and demand
- Aligning current trends and guidelines
- Allowing consolidation and upgrades
- Reducing long-term asset maintenance by addressing oversupply
- Ensuring community infrastructure is sustainable and resilient long-term.

HIERARCHY LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
Local	• Located within a 5-15-minute walk of residences
District	• Located within a 3-kilometre radius or a 10-15-minute drive of most residences
Citywide	• Serves the whole Maitland Local Government Area and is a 30-45-minute drive of most residences
Regional	• Key destination spaces that serve our communities and attract visitors from outside the Maitland Local Government Area

Strategic alignment

The Public Open Space Network Supporting Plan underpins Council's Community Infrastructure Strategy. Its relationship within the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IPR) framework and with Maitland's Future, the Community Strategic Plan, is depicted below.



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Public Open Space Network Supporting Plan purpose

To provide an evidence-based approach to planning, prioritising, designing, delivering and managing Maitland City Council's network of public open space to ensure it contributes to our shared vision of a connected city with thriving communities.

The public open space network provides the foundation upon which our community infrastructure facilities are placed, providing green, healthy places to live, exercise, play, socialise, relax and engage with nature. It supports provision for playing fields, playspaces, informal recreation areas, parks, outdoor recreation areas and aquatic centres.

Public Open Space Network Supporting Plan inclusions

- Community parks - settings for informal recreation, relaxation and socialisation.
- Sport and active recreation – settings for organised sport
- Natural areas and linear open space – areas dedicated to protecting and enhancing environmental and cultural heritage
- Civic spaces – play a vital role in urban life by fostering social inclusion, cultural expression and recreation.

Council's role

Council's role is to provide an inclusive and accessible public open space network that:

- is consistent with legislation and policy provision rates is sufficient to provide multiple landscape settings to support a range of functions
- is of a quality that supports active lifestyles, and enhances neighbourhood liveability
- is fit for purpose and is equitably distributed
- is, connected and safe
- is valued as a community natural asset by identifying, managing and protecting the rural and environmental land.

Current state – where we are now

Council's public open space network operates within a broader network distributed within and beyond the Maitland LGA.

PUBLIC OPEN SPACE COMPONENT	CURRENT TOTAL (HA)
Community parks	104.2
Sports and active recreation	157.0
Civic space	1.9
Linear open space, natural areas	329.7
Other	1.5
Total	594.3

The current provision of public open space has not been audited for quality. To fully understand the quality of existing land provision for the community, an audit of existing sites will need to be completed.

Community engagement - what we heard

Between May and July 2025, Council engaged with over 670 community members, generating more than 1,100 contributions across surveys, mapping tools, and face-to-face pop-ups. Key insights included:

- outdoor recreation and green space matter. Families, young people, and older residents strongly value accessible parks and nature reserves
- green and natural spaces are vital. Parks, reserves and tree planting were seen as crucial for wellbeing, biodiversity and community connection
- there is strong support for preserving and expanding green spaces across Maitland local government area

Industry standards and trends – what we know

To meet demand for public open space by 2041, Maitland Council will need to review the quality of current supply and move our focus to both quantity and quality for future provision.

Planning for public open space will be guided by the establishment of minimum land supply criteria, complemented with performance criteria (quality) that ensures land is fit for purpose and a diverse range of opportunities are provided equitably, and reflects the demand arising from a development.

Traditional planning models—such as allocating hectares per 1,000 people or prescribing a fixed percentage of land—are increasingly ineffective in delivering high-quality, functional open spaces.

A performance-based approach offers a more responsive and accountable framework. A performance-based approach shifts the focus from rigid spatial formulas to the actual outcomes required—encouraging tailored, flexible, and cost-effective strategies that better serve growing and diverse communities. Priorities will include:

- increasing access and diversity in public open spaces to meet varying community needs
- assess and respond to demand in existing and new communities, ensuring open space provision keeps pace with growth
- invest in quality, not just quantity, to deliver more fit for purpose open space
- reconnect people with nature through well-integrated open space planning
- link open spaces into wider networks of green infrastructure for enhanced ecological and community benefit
- promote active, healthy lifestyles by improving amenity, accessibility and safety
- ensure public open space is flexible and multi-use, supporting a broad range of uses

Public open spaces are undergoing a significant transformation as cities respond to changing social, environmental, and technological demands. No longer limited to traditional parks or passive green areas, these spaces are evolving to become more inclusive, sustainable, and multifunctional. Some key trends insights include:

- **Changes in participation:** there is more pressure on public open space to provide a wide range of activities, with less free time, people are preferring more flexible recreation opportunities
- **Multipurpose, flexible and adaptable:** there is a growing emphasis on multipurpose and community centred use across public open spaces, with a focus on these spaces becoming dynamic social hubs rather than static recreational spaces. These spaces need to be flexible and adaptable, allowing them to meet changing community needs

- **Resilient:** a well-designed open space network supports ecological health, social wellbeing, and disaster preparedness through multifunctional landscapes. In Australia, open space planning increasingly integrates natural systems and climate adaptation strategies
- **Technology:** public open spaces are being integrated with smart technologies to enhance user experience, sustainability and accessibility
- **Innovative funding and partnerships:** innovative approaches like joint ventures, public-private partnerships (PPPs), and collaborative funding models that involve multiple stakeholders—including government agencies, private developers, not-for-profits, and community groups are being used by local governments to support sustainable development and management of public open spaces
- **Safe, secure and inclusive:** public open space must be safe, welcoming, and accessible to people of all ages, abilities, and cultural backgrounds. Achieving genuine inclusivity involves not only removing physical barriers—such as uneven pathways or inadequate accessible parking—but also addressing broader design considerations that impact comfort and use.

Future state – where we want to be

Given the increasing pressure on our public open space network as population grows and demand for access to outdoor areas increases, additional public open space will be required in the future to service our population by 2041. Detailed planning for future growth of each planning precinct is required to ensure that the focus is on the quality of open space and not merely the quantity. The performance indicators will be applied for assessing the quality of land based on:

- distribution: the geographic distribution of open space is critical to access and equity. Ensuring that all residents have nearby, safe access—typically measured by walking or travel distance—is essential for fair and inclusive use of open space
- land size: directly affects the functionality of public open spaces. Parks that are too small limit active play, restrict multiple users, and often fail to meet community needs. For sports facilities, adequate size is essential to meet standard field dimensions, allow proper orientation, and provide space for amenities and circulation
- shape of the land: shape can influence how an open space can be used and is critical when assessing if the site is fit for purpose. Land shape must provide sufficient length and width for the intended activities and community infrastructure planned for the site
- slope of the land: this impacts how an open space is used and maintained. Slope has a major impact on the use of the land for sport and can significantly increase the size of land needed.
- accessibility and connectivity: ease of access is critical for the community to be able to enjoy and use public open space and recreation facilities
- diversity: The variety of open space types in an urban area determines the diversity of recreational options available to the community. A diverse open space network should reflect the community's varied needs by providing multiple landscape settings and a broad mix of activities.

Funding

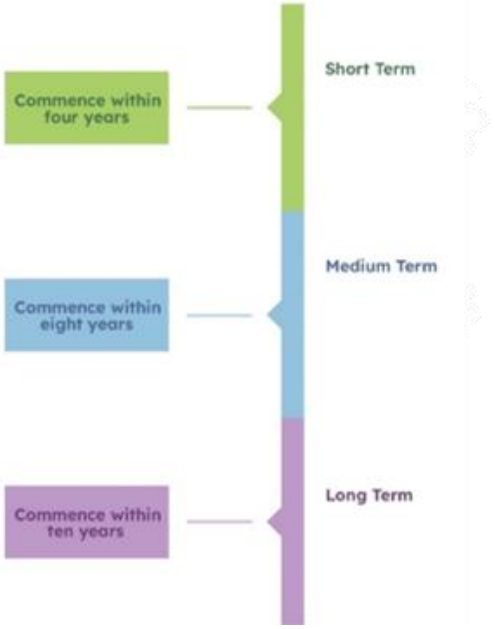
Funding for the delivery of future Maitland's public open space will include:

- council revenue
- development contributions
- voluntary planning agreements
- Australian Government grants
- NSW Government grants
- sale of surplus council land or assets
- establishment of a Community Infrastructure Reserve Fund.

How we get there

To achieve the planning objectives in the supporting plan, a staged approach will be applied over a 10-year period. An indicative schedule of works for the short (one to four years), medium (five to eight years) and long-term (nine to ten years) will be developed. It is anticipated that a number of actions or activities will be simultaneously undertaken, subject to resourcing.

The planned actions will be published in our Delivery Program and Operational Plan each year. The timeframe of actions being completed will depend on resourcing and funding availability.



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