

Emerald Lake Precinct Master Plan

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1. Introduction

Project Aim

The aim of the Emerald Lake Precinct Master Plan is to undertake a strategic assessment of the precinct in order to produce a Master Plan to guide development, maintenance and management of the parks for the long term.

Project Objectives

The Master Plan is based on a strategic review of use and assets within the precinct, and the key themes from the Cardinia Shire Council's Strategic Plan (2020-2030). The Master Plan aims to respect the heritage and unique qualities of the park whilst creating a solid foundation on which the future of the precinct can build. Key considerations include:

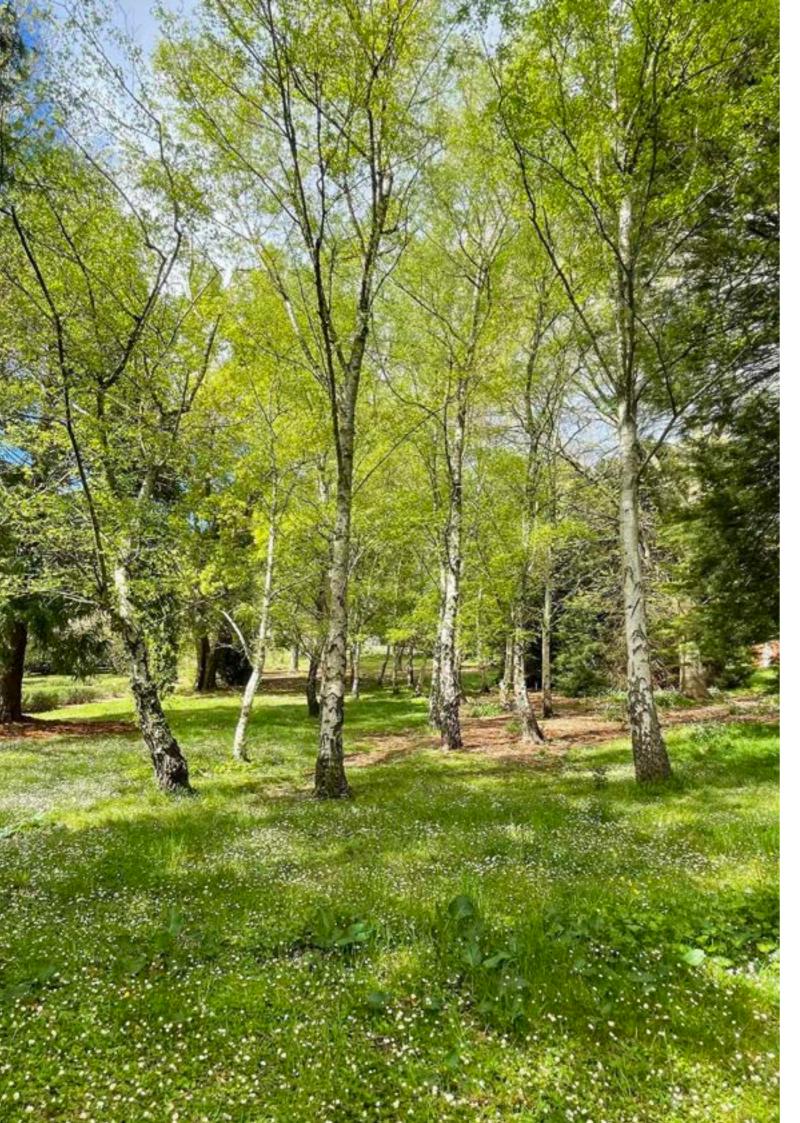
- A new regional scale playground including a zero depth water play facility
- Provision of two new shelters to replace those that were removed as part of Lakeside Visitor Centre development
- An upgrade to the Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail to comply with shared path standards where possible
- Improvement of accessibility and DDA compliance where practical throughout the precinct
- Review and potential upgrade of the existing performance area and amphitheatres to suit the events across
 the site
- Exploration of opportunities to further beautify and enhance the park's presentation to reflect the history of the precinct and meet contemporary expectation
- Improve and upgrade signage and wayfinding

The Master Plan will guide investment priorities at Emerald Lake Precinct to help facilitate opportunities at Emerald Lake Park and Nobelius Heritage Park.

Community Consultation

Extensive community and stakeholder consultation was undertaken in 2018 and 2019 as part of the Emerald Lake Precinct Strategic Plan 2020-30. Of the responses received, 74% were from Cardinia Shire residents and 26% from respondents who resided elsewhere. Results from this consultation are detailed in the Strategic Plan and have formed the key deliverables for this Draft Master Plan.

Further consultation has since taken place with key stakeholders in 2021 in preparation for this Draft Master Plan. Refer to Chapter 4 and Appendix A for details.



Background

Close to the Dandenong Ranges, and 45 kilometres south-east of Melbourne to east of Emerald township, are two distinctly unique parklands – Emerald Lake Park (52ha) and Nobelius Heritage Park (4ha). These parks, including the Puffing Billy Railway facilities, are known as the Emerald Lake Precinct (ELP).

ELP is Cardinia Shire Council's premier regional open space and the precinct's attractions traditionally draw large numbers of local, regional and international visitors.

The precinct is owned and managed by Council, however, the Puffing Billy Railway, Packing Shed and Railway Siding, Lakeside Station and new Visitor Centre are owned and operated by Emerald Tourist Railway Board in conjunction with the Puffing Billy Preservation Society.

The Master Plan is an action from the Emerald Lake Precinct Strategic Plan (2020-30), which builds on previous strategic documents that created a foundation on which the future of the precinct can build.

The following objectives, drawn from the Emerald Lake Precinct Strategic Plan (2020-2030) highlight Council's vision for the Precinct:

- The precinct is recognised as a regional park offering a unique blend of natural, historical, recreational and cultural experiences for local, regional, national and international visitors.
- The precinct is accessible for all ages, abilities and cultures and hosts a range of opportunities for social and economic exchanges.
- The precinct is well maintained and comfortable and offers appropriate amenities and infrastructure expected in a regional open space.
- Visitors are engaged in a range of events, activations, recreation and leisure activities and the precinct supports both public and private functions.
- Through sustainable management and practices, the precinct balances development with the natural environment.

History

Prior to European Settlement, the land was home to members of the greater Kulin nations. The recognised Traditional Owners for the Emerald Lake Precinct are the Wurundjeri People (https://achris.vic.gov.au/weave/wca.html).

The area was settled in 1835 following which, the Gembrook Nursery (now the Emerald Lake Precinct) was established by Swedish immigrant Carl Axel Nobelius in 1886. The Gembrook Nursery, more commonly known as Nobelius Nursery (after its proprietor), became one of Australia's foremost plant nurseries in the early 20th century, selling exotic plants and fruit trees locally, all over Australia and overseas.

Emerald Lake Park was established in 1939 after the Shire of Fern Tree Gully compulsorily acquired 47 hectares to develop the park. Emerald Lake (later named Lake Treganowan) was constructed in 1940 in the location of Nobelius' dam along with a swimming pool, dressing sheds, kiosk and caravan park. Many of these structures still exist today.

This rich history contributes to the Precinct's notable landscape character, with mixed forest comprising of remnants of exotic nursery trees and an understorey of regrowth and planted indigenous vegetation alongside well used facilities for a pubic recreation park.



Diving Tower, Emerald Lake c. between 1920-1954 (source: State Library of Victoria)



Emerald Lake pool, c. between 1920-1954 (source: State Library of Victoria)



Nobelius Packing Shed and Nobelius Nursery c.1906 (source: Emerald and District Museum)



Workers budding cherries at Nobelius Nursery c.1890 (source: State Library of Victoria)

2. Existing Conditions



Within the Precinct, the two parks have their own distinct identities with shared landscape characteristics that link the two.

Emerald Lake Park is defined in the north by Emerald Lake Road and on the east by the railway line with an additional area to the east of the Lakeside Station. The western boundary abuts Nobelius Heritage Park.

The eastern end of Emerald Lake Park has established facilities for public recreation. Elements include Lake Treganowan, Lake Nobelius, Lakeside Office, picnic shelters, walking tracks, bridges, board walks and carparks. A number of buildings within the parklands have heritage significance including three rubble stone picnic shelters and the Lake Treganowan toilets. Additionally, there are barbecue facilities, seating, amphitheatres, playgrounds and fitness stations. Unknown service locations, in particular water, is a significant barrier to upgrading and consolidating these facilities.

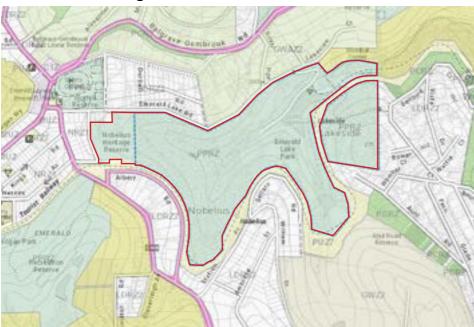
The recently constructed Puffing Billy Lakeside Visitor Center and upgraded carparks are not included in this Master Plan. The Visitor Centre, owned and managed by Puffing Billy has unisex, ambulant, and disabled toilet facilities as well as a Changing Places facility. This project included an upgrade of nearby Council owned and managed carparks which now have lighting, disabled parking bays and DDA compliant paths.

The western end of the Emerald Lake Park is a dense mixed forest comprising remnants of exotic nursery trees, an understorey of regrowth and areas of revegetation. Several walking tracks throughout this area provide recreational opportunities and pedestrian connections to destinations.

Further to the west, is the Nobelius Heritage Park. A 4.5 hectare parkland within a small valley, dominated by exotic mature trees. It contains the historic Packing Shed, the Emerald and District Museum and the Blue Hills Lapidary Club Inc. who utilise Linton's Cottage.

Formed in the year 2000, Friends of Emerald Lake Park (FELP) continue to carryout important maintenance works in the park including weed removal, planting and creek restoration. FELP have been instrumental in securing funding to assist with enhancing and preserving the bushland.

Land Use Planning Zones



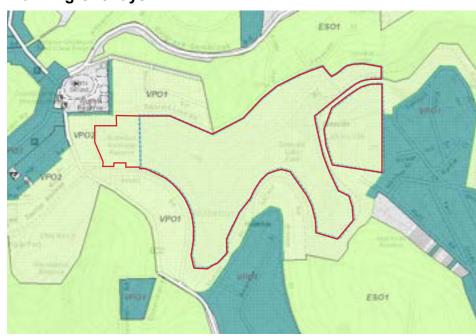
Emerald Lake Precinct Site Boundary

PPRZ - Public Park and Recreation

PUZ7 - Other Public Use

Emerald Lake Precinct comprises primarily as a Public Park and Recreation Zone. This includes both Nobelius Heritage Park and Emerald Lake Park. Adjacent to the site is the Puffing Billy railway, Public Use Zone 7 (Other Public Use), recognised for public utility and community services and facilities, which bisects the Precinct on the eastern side.

Planning Overlays



HO106

DDOT Our

Emerald Lake Precinct Site Boundary

SLO1 - Significant Landscape
Overlay

Environment and Landscape overlays seek to protect vegetation or landscape features of an area and are used to recognise areas of environmental or landscape significance. The SLO running through Emerald Lake Precinct, is to ensure any development is compatible to the conservation and enhancement of the character of the significant landscape. Areas within an SLO can require a permit to construct a building or construct or carry out works, construct a fence, and remove, destroy or lop any vegetation.

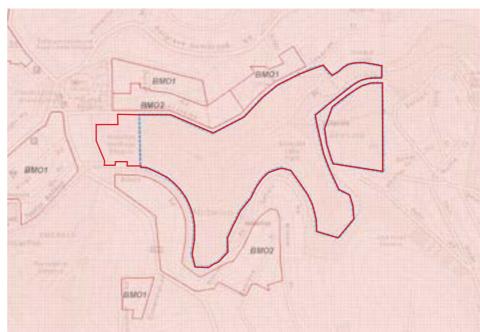
Emerald Lake Precinct Site Boundary

HO106 - Heritage Overlay

DDDt

HO273 - Heritage Overlay

The heritage overlay is in place to ensure that development does not adversely affect the significance of heritage places. Additionally, Nobelius Heritage Park, including the Former Nobelius Nursery, Packing Shed and Railway Siding is part of the Victorian Heritage Register (# H2285), which is subject to the requirements of the Heritage Act 2017.



Emerald Lake Precinct Site Boundary

BMO - Bush fire Management
Overlay

The BMO is a planning control which regulates development in areas where there is extreme bush fire hazard. The entire Precinct and surrounds have a Bush fire Management Overlay which triggers permits requiring mandatory bush fire protection measures such as defendable space, water supply, access and ongoing vegetation management requirements.



Emerald Lake Precinct Site Boundary

Area of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Sensitivity

The majority of the Emerald Lake Precinct is considered to be of cultural heritage sensitivity. These areas are defined under the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018 and require a 'cultural heritage management plan' to be prepared where a listed 'high impact activity' is proposed.

Source: Planning Maps Online

3. Strategic Context Review

Background Documents

Below is a summary of key background documents and existing strategies that may influence future directions and priorities for the master plan

	Environmental significance and sustainability	Playgrounds	Events and Activation	Parking and road access	Cultural and Historical significance	Built infrastructure, venues, shelters and toilets	Maintenance
Emerald Link Precinct Strategic Plan 2020-30	ELP is a leading example in sustainable operation and management.	Upgrade the swimming and water play options • Potential zero depth water play opportunities, • Increase playspace options to incorporate accessible and nature play options	A desire to have an increased number of events and activations within the precinct	Desire for improved pedestrian walkways including to the Emerald Township Clearly signed wayfinding between parks General concerns regarding Emerald Lake Road.	Recognised and celebrated for its distinctive cultural and historical significance and offerings. The Wurundjeri with neighbouring Bunurong/Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation are the First Peoples of the land and area currently known as Emerald. Swedish immigrant Carl Axel Nobelius establishes Gembrook Nurseries on the site (late 1800's)	 Provide accessible and inclusive facilities and trails where appropriate, recognising that not all areas in the precinct can meet all abilities due to the natural topography of the landscape. Disappointment in food delivery opportunities within the precinct Desire to have more options, including healthy options Expanded service hours More inviting spaces available to park visitors 	Need for a long-term maintenance program for the precinct Desire for an increased level of service standard to be implemented.
Project Brief for Design Services	 Local community is passionate about their park and have resisted development in the park with preference to retaining bushland areas and exotic trees The Master Plan needs to demonstrate that any development and infrastructure considers the environment and the protection and enhancement of the existing bushland The aquatic flora and fauna needs to be protected whilst ensuring the banks of the lakes are stabilised to cope with the recreation activities 	Potentially integrated into the same area as the playground Accessible options included and a preference in design that incorporates interchangeable parts with other waterplay facilities in Cardinia	Desire to have an increased number of events and activations in the precinct servicing the local community. Some current events are held in spaces that are not ideally suited to the events or their size (eg. Lakeside Sounds family music event, and Christmas Carols). The precinct is becoming popular for wedding ceremonies, but facilities and services are not all suited to this use.	Vehicle and truck access through the main Emerald Lake Park thoroughfare is necessary to carry out regular and emergency functions. The regional shared path, Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail (EDRT) crosses through the Precinct yet there are no bike facilities (parking, repairs) A formal path connection between Emerald Lake Park into Nobelius Heritage Park will link the two parks.	There is an opportunity to showcase indigenous flora and fauna and be inclusive of Aboriginal culture and the needs of the CALD and other underrepresented communities. The history of the park has a European focus reflected by the exotic flora and European settlement in the area.	During the week when the park is quiet, ELP is popular with carers and people with disabilities Park is popular on weekends and holiday periods with large groups who like to picnic and bring their own food.	The large amount of leaf fall and leaf litter impacts paths, making them slippery and needs to be carefully considered in the maintenance and operation costs of an upgraded playspace or waterplay area.

Continued	Environmental significance and sustainability	Playgrounds	Events and Activation	Parking and road access	Cultural and Historical significance	Built infrastructure, venues, shelters and toilets	Maintenance
Emerald Lake Park and Nobelius Heritage Park Conservation Management Plan	precinct including: Large remnant nursery		Entry and gateway signage A lighting strategy should be considered for any areas subject to pedestrian use in connection with after-hours events.	 Paths with high pedestrian use should have asphalt (or concrete) surfaces to minimise both slipping and maintenance. Recycled plastic edges or steel edging should be provided for asphalt. The steep section of path from Princess Avenue (in NHP) has an erosion problem. The gravel surfaced path and the crushed rock to the roadway is moved by heavy rain and washes in grass areas. The steep top section of this path needs to be replaced with a sealed surface. 	Protect and enhance heritage of primary significance including:	 Retain heritage rubblestone toilet block and picnic shelters (sympathetic alterations/ additions possible if they enable appropriate adaptive re-use) Upgrade Lake Treganowan toilets to meet current standards, including disability access. Maintenance shall be carried out by contractors with demonstrated experience in heritage restoration. The Park's setting should be retained including the open sloping lawns around Lake Treganowan. Consideration should be given to the selective removal of small trees to enable specimen trees to expand and be fully appreciated. The view from the Puffing Billy Railway Line towards the lake or the western forest should not be obscured by new landscape elements or features. There have been multiple kiosks in the park - the first one built in 1941 in the Lakside car park, a second one built at the south end of the lake in the 1950s and a third one 1962 overlooking the southwestern end of the lake. The fourth one, currently the home of the cafe was built in 1982 	General maintenance can be carried out in accordance with the conservation policies of this report and without the assistance of a conservation specialist.

Continued	Environmental significance and sustainability	Playgrounds	Events and Activation	Parking and road access	Cultural and Historical significance	Built infrastructure, venues, shelters and toilets	Maintenance
Assessment of trees at Emerald Lake Precinct (2020)	 All trees meeting significance criteria are protected through addition to a municipal or state tree protection register or significant veg. overlay Consideration be given to recognising NHP as a collection of botanical specimens, with further research to determine the cultivars of the significant fruit tree varieties A Tree Management Plan, focusing on the maintenance of significant trees be prepared All pruning works and tree removals are carried out by qualified arborists and conform to the Australian Standard, Pruning Amenity Trees (AS4373 2007) Trees that are removed should be replaced to ensure the ongoing landscape contribution and to retain the landscape character. Onsite propagation facilities are recommended to assist with succession planning A walkover assessment of the trees is carried out every 12 months to assess condition, risk and to determine any further works requirements 						
Playspace Strategy (2014)		Investigate the feasibility of a 'regional' playspace at Emerald Lake Park		Safe and convenient access to playspaces that are centrally located and connected to a pedestrian / cycling network			
Buildings and Facilities Feasibility Study				 Carparking needs to be considered with anticipation of larger visitor numbers Emerald Lake Rd is not suitable for pedestrians (Existing access lacks wayfinding to encourage people to use it) 		Lakeside office building opportunity: pursue the idea for a waterside restaurant and/or cafe.	
Recreational Open Space Strategy (2000)				Develop an interconnected trail system to cater for informal walking, bike riding and greater public access to waterways and Open Space facilities (Emerald to Gembrook) Establish an open space linkage between Cockatoo and Emerald through Wrights Forest and Emerald Lake Park			

Continued	Environmental significance and sustainability	Playgrounds	Events and Activation	Parking and road access	Cultural and Historical significance	Built infrastructure, venues, shelters and toilets	Maintenance
Aboriginal Cultural Herita Report	ge				Wattle Creek identified as an area of Cultural Heritage sensitivity Likely that Aboriginal cultural heritage is in locations: in lower elevated land form areas along Wattle creek and surrounding Emerald Lake and Nobelius Lake, in gradual moderately sloping land form areas within 200m from Wattle creek and Emerald Lake and Nobelius Lake.		Aboriginal cultural heritage contingency plans would be of value for civil maintenance contractors engaged within the Emerald Lake Precinct
Actions to be considered in Master Plan	Master Plan to preserve and enhance significant natural environmental assets in the precinct Scope for additional Tree survey - further identification of trees and tree groups adjacent to the tracks in the western forest Prepare a strategy for long-term replacement planting of exotic trees, particularly for significant species in the two arboreta. Prepare a strategy for new tree and shrub planting in addition to tree replacements Install labels to identify both National Trust Significant Trees and all mature trees within the two arboreta Complete a fire management strategy for the site. Strategy to consider protection of heritage aspects of the precinct & museum contents. Any path network connection or upgrade needs to ensure the structural integrity of lake edges are maintained or improved Action recommendations outlined in the CMPs Action recommendations outlined in the Arborist Assessment.		Master Plan to outline areas to offer a range of programs, including educational programs, organised recreational activities and classes, arts and cultural events, festivals and markets. • Master Plan should consider provision of power, lighting, shelter and stage area(s). • Upgrade signage with entry "statement" or gateway.	Master Plan to establish safe and accessible path network, trails and facilities: Potential of additional connecting trails to maximise potential of spaces Create a connection with Emerald Township Defined and safe access for pedestrians/cyclists and cars (including bike parking) Improve path connection between Emerald Lake Park into Nobelius Heritage Park Design the EDRT crossing safely through Lakeside carpark Replace section of trail from Princess Avenue with sealed surface Access Roads and routes The main entry road embankment north-west of Lake Treganowan requires stabilisation – possibly with a retaining wall. Additional flights of steps,in conjunction with a barrier fence to the top of the embankment, should be constructed to provide controlled access to the Gus Ryberg arboretum Provide wayfinding signage to direct pedestrians and cyclists to use the EDRT rather than Emerald Lake Road.	 Master Plan to protect and enhance heritage significance of precinct. Interpretive and wayfinding signage for visitors on the precinct's historic significance (including Aboriginal, post settlement, economic and industrial themes). Expression of local Aboriginal culture and significance through public art, interpretation signage, events etc Proposals must be aligned with a CHMP (any proposed civil or recreational infrastructure works that are 'High Impact' within the 'Area of Cultural Heritage Sensitivity' of Wattle creek may trigger a CHMP) The 'Areas of Cultural Heritage Sensitivity' overlay within Emerald Lake Precinct could be updated to include the overall extent of the 	Master Plan to include updated facilities and infrastructure where necessary Easily accessible, personable and welcoming information and customer service Maintenance to be carried out by contractors with demonstrated experience in heritage restoration Consider upgrading picnic tables in the three picnic shelters. Tables should have extended ends to allow for wheelchair access. Upgrade toilet facilities to meet current health and council standards, including disability access, or consider replacement of toilet blocks if necessary.	All repairs and maintenance should be carried out with regard to the significance of the place and the conservation policies of the CMP.



4. Consultation Summary

Key stakeholder consultation was completed as part of the background research phase for the Master Plan project in October and early November 2021. Staff workshops and interviews were conducted with members from the Cardinia Shire Council, who raised a number of issues and considerations. These included:

- · Maintaining site character
- Playground and waterplay
- Site amenities
- Access in and around the site
- Signage and wayfinding throughout the site
- Designated fishing areas
- The activation of spaces through organised events.

Stakeholder contributions from the Friends of Emerald Lake Park, Wombat Corner, Puffing Billy, Lakeside Paddleboats and Emerald and District Museum reiterated these ideas with an underlying push for improved accessibility throughout the site. These user groups highlighted issues and opportunities within the reserve specific to their needs, which have been considered in the Draft Master Plan. The stakeholders advocated for upgraded and shared facilities that improve overall connectivity and wayfinding at the site whilst maintaining its distinct identity.

A summary of key comments, issues or priorities is identified in Appendix A.

5. Issues and Opportunities

The following is a summary of issues and opportunities identified during the stakeholder consultation, desktop analysis, strategic document review and site investigation phase.

Key Considerations:

Emerald Lake Precinct (ELP) will be reinforced as Cardinia Shire Council's premier regional open space. Key considerations for ELP include:

- A new regional scale playground
- Improvement of accessibility, wayfinding and DDA compliance where practical throughout the precinct
- · Improve opportunities for community use including event space activation, walking, play and community gatherings

Accessibility and Wayfinding

- Opportunity to improve the Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail (EDRT) particularly through the Lakeside carpark, around the lake and to Nobelius Heritage Park, to improve user safety and experience
- 2 The extensive path network throughout the precinct requires renewal and rationalisation which presents the opportunity to improve accessibility and connections
- Opportunity to improve connectivity and engage the community through wayfinding and interpretive signage/ artwork. This may include information/ expression on:
 - the precinct's history and heritage around first nations, post settlement, economic and industrial themes.
 - local Aboriginal culture and significance in relation to the site
 - the precinct's identity through the definition of 'zones' to assist with legibility of the precinct.

Parking and Road Access

- 4 Opportunity to improve the condition of the embankment north-west of Lake Treganowan along the main access road to improve safety and access. This could include additional and improved access points to destinations north of the embankment such as the Gus Ryberg arboretum and paths
- Opportunity to modify the existing Lakeside Carpark to provide additional parking spaces through embankment stablisation.

Note: bus access is provided at the Lakeside Visitors Centre and is not required at the Lakeside Carpark

Shelter and Facilities

- 6 Establishment of the recently completed Lakeside Visitor Centre involved the removal of two key picnic shelters. Opportunity to provide two new shelters within the precinct to cater to the community and visitors
- Opportunity to upgrade existing furniture, particularly seats, bins and picnic tables throughout the precinct to achieve a consistent suite of materials and to improve accessibility. Consider use of sustainable materials and products in line with Council's environmental commitments
- 8 Opportunity to provide lookout/ viewing areas around Lake Treganowan. Consider photo opportunities for weddings and events that take place in the precinct
- Opportunity to consolidate the number of toilet blocks and upgrade existing toilet facilities to bring them into line with current health and council standards, including disability access

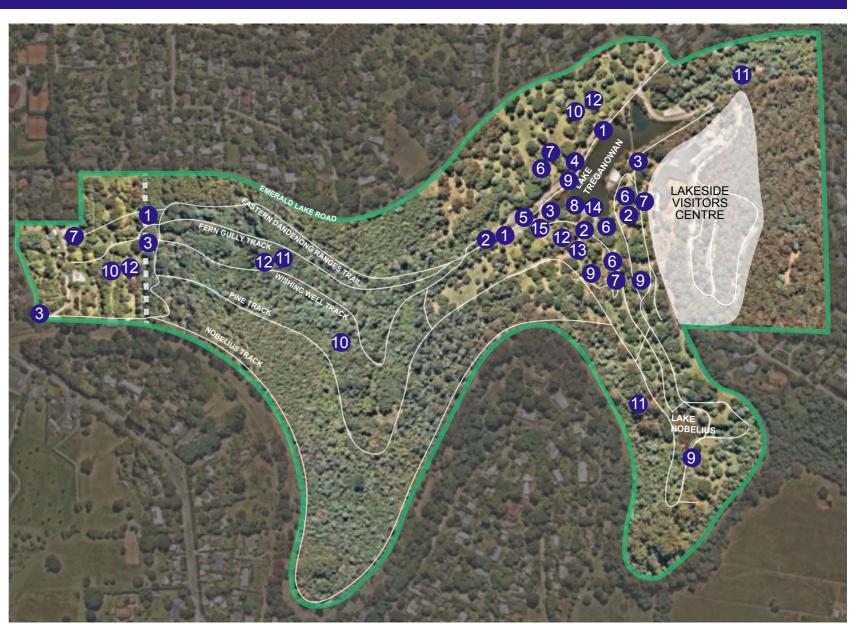
Landscape and Environment

- The reserve is home to a selection of significant trees and remnant vegetation, which should be conserved and protected
- The reserve is dominated by a 'bushland' parkland' character, which should be reinforced
- Opportunity for implementation of succession planting plan for trees

Playgrounds

The existing playground facilities are outdated and in need of upgrading.

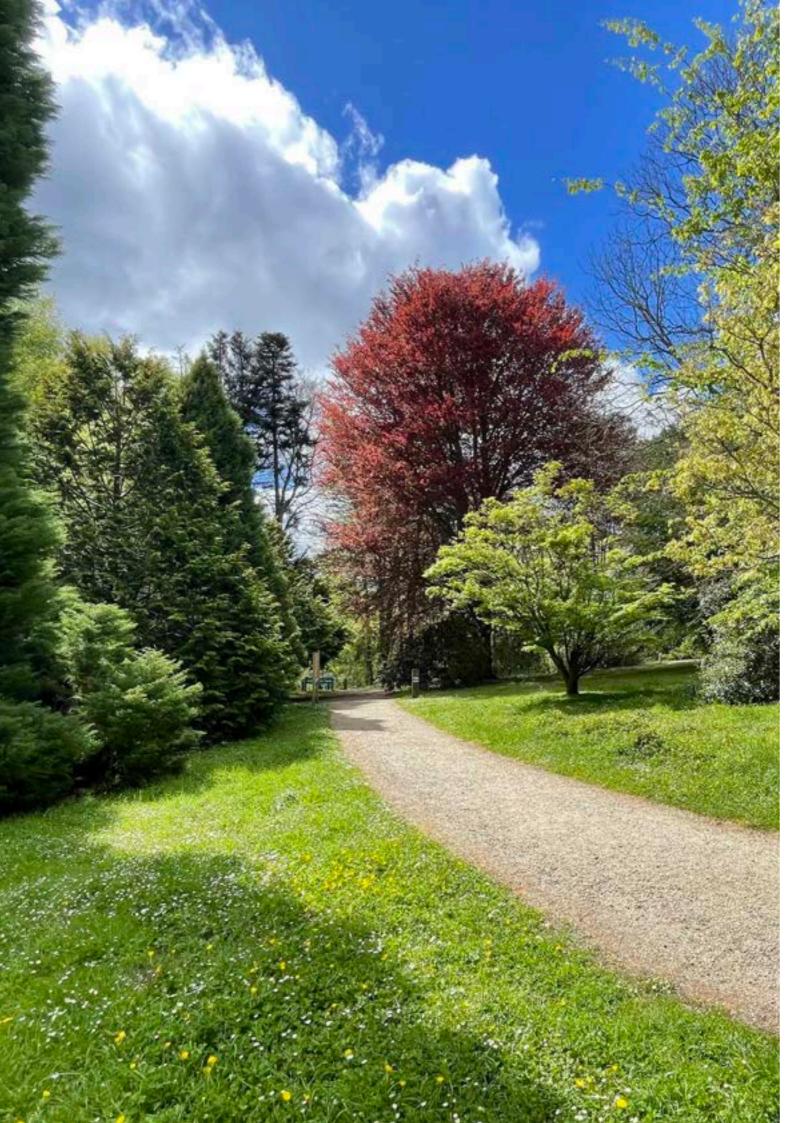
Opportunity for a new 'destination playspace' that is an accessible, regional scale playspace that compliments the Precinct



Opportunity to upgrade water play facilities in line with community expectations and current standards whilst reducing maintenance and resource requirements

Activation

Opportunity to activate the precinct by providing appropriate facilities and services to accommodate a range of programs and events to take place in the precinct including educational programs, recreational activities, arts and cultural events, festivals and markets



6. Master Plan

The Master Plan has been developed to assist in guiding the future development of Emerald Lake Park. The plan has been informed by Council's objectives, strategic documents and plans, in particular the Emerald Lake Precinct Strategic Plan (2020-2030), internal consultation with Council and stakeholder engagement.

A set of key principles have been developed to guide the Master Plan and to provide direction on the future development at Emerald Lake Park. The key principles are:

- 1. Preserve and enhance significant natural environmental assets in the precinct.
- 2. Ensure the existing views from the Lakeside Visitor Centre are retained and not obscured by new landscape elements or features
- 3. Protect and enhance heritage significance of precinct
- 4. Ensure all repairs and maintenance should be carried out with regard to the significance of the place and the conservation policies of the Conservation Management Plan (CMP).
- 5. All works must be aligned with a Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP), noting that any proposed civil or recreational infrastructure works that are 'High Impact' within the 'Area of Cultural Heritage Sensitivity' of Wattle creek may trigger a CHMP.