

Greater Sydney Parklands

Year in review 2020–21





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Acknowledgement of Country

Greater Sydney Parklands acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands, waters and sky upon which the parklands are located and pays respect to the Elders of these lands – past, present and emerging.

We recognise First Nations peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society. We acknowledge the rights and interests of First Nations peoples to be involved in the ongoing management of these traditional lands.

We will work in a respectful manner with traditional custodians, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and the First Nations communities of Greater Sydney to support their custodianship of the natural and cultural heritage of parklands so that these are places where First Nations people feel socially, culturally and economically included.

From the Chair

In the first year of the agency's operations, the staff of Greater Sydney Parklands faced not only the challenge of bringing together the resources of several associated trusts, but also the pressures of increased visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the last year, the number of visitors to our parks increased by 20%. This amounts to more than 40 million separate visits.

The role of Greater Sydney Parklands is to protect and conserve the unique environmental and cultural heritage of the parklands. The Board is also responsible for focusing on each park's future as both a custodian and as an advocate for parklands across Sydney. Our role is to work with other government agencies and the community to care for, manage and provide for our parks in a sustainable, thoughtful and coordinated way.

People use parks in many different ways. Our aim is to balance the different needs of recreational, sporting, cultural and community users of our parks while providing quiet and reflective spaces people need and love.

Over the last year, Greater Sydney Parklands management and board members have engaged with park users and community groups and we've heard consistently that people are passionate about using, protecting and enhancing these spaces.

Our parks are community assets. We will continue to call on community input through forums and public exhibition processes as we consider the future of Greater Sydney's parklands in the context of our growing city.



Michael Rose AM
Chair
Greater Sydney Parklands





From the Chief Executive

In one of the most challenging 12 months for Sydney, Greater Sydney Parklands was established as a single agency to advocate for the city's green, open spaces.

This meant that when more and more people were using our open spaces than ever before we brought together teams from our different iconic parklands into one organisation.

Together, we set our sights on the vision for a city within a park, while working to keep everyone safe – staff and visitors alike.

Our achievements are a testament to the people who work for Greater Sydney Parklands – especially those on the frontline who every day worked to maintain these outstanding open spaces so that people could enjoy them safely.

Despite the challenges, we made record levels of investment across our portfolio, in restorations and upgrades to paths, tracks, playgrounds, heritage assets and new sport and recreation facilities; in protecting endangered fauna and flora; and in restoring First Nations interpretation trails in both Parramatta Park and Centennial Parklands.

We consulted with community organisations and individuals from all backgrounds about what they want to see in their parklands, including around the release of the Callan Park Landscape Structure Plan, and welcomed people to come and enjoy the parks, including through the 'Stay and Play' campaign to bring visitors back to Western Sydney Parklands.

What I see now is a strong team that can reinforce the NSW Government's renewed commitment and long-term vision for the protection and enhancement of Greater Sydney's parklands, while fully respecting and protecting what makes each of them unique.



Suellen Fitzgerald
Chief Executive
Greater Sydney Parklands

Achievements at a glance

 **Bush regeneration works**, including

60,000 trees planted

at Western Sydney Parklands, and

species protection,

including for the
Regent Honeyeater at
Fernhill Estate.



Economic sustainability

with partnerships such as
Eastern Creek Speedway operator
agreement and the
Light Horse business hub.



 Protected unique

heritage

from gatehouses to memorials
at Parramatta Park and Centennial Park,
and created the Burramatta Landscape
trail at Parramatta Park and
Guriwal trail at Centennial Park
to promote understanding of
First Nations culture.



Released a groundbreaking report on
nature play

that will see more kids connecting with nature.

 **Community involvement**

in planning for Fernhill Estate, the People's Loop in Parramatta Park and the Landscape Structure Plan at Callan Park, and a variety of ways to get involved, from surveys, webinars and information sessions.

 **\$62 million**

in capital works across the Parklands Estate.

 **20% growth in visitation**

more than 40 million visitors and continued operations despite COVID-19 restrictions.

 **Planning for enhanced connections**

within the Parklands Estate and to the rest of Greater Sydney's Blue and Green Grid, including the revitalised waterfront at Callan Park that will link in with the Bay Run, and the planned removal of cars from Upper Kippax (Moore Park).

Strategic thinking

for the future of Greater Sydney's open space and parklands with our work guided by the

50-year Vision for Open Space and Parklands.



about

About Greater Sydney Parklands

Greater Sydney Parklands is a NSW Government agency established in July 2020. We are part of the Place, Design and Public Spaces Group of the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. We are led by an independent board and use a combined administration model to care for Greater Sydney's iconic parks, maintain park infrastructure and employ park staff.

The iconic parks that form our Parklands Estate are Centennial Parklands (Centennial, Moore and Queens parks), Callan Park, Parramatta Park, Western Sydney Parklands and Fernhill Estate.

The key reason for our establishment as a city-wide parks agency is to take a strategic view of what the city

and its community need in terms of open space and parklands. We will have a seat at the table when major decisions are made for Greater Sydney's future parks.

We will continue to advocate across government for the 50-Year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands, taking a metropolitan view while embracing the local perspective.

We will champion the expansion of open spaces and parklands in partnership with local communities and local councils.

And we'll consistently elevate open space and parklands as being just as important to Greater Sydney as the transport, utilities, centres, housing and other elements that make it a great place to live, work and visit.



what we do

Our work is driven by the 50-year vision.

We're charged with championing this vision, to create Greater Sydney as a 'city within a park'.

In helping to create a legacy for the future we also seek the knowledge and wisdom of First Nations people to create connections to Country that will benefit everyone.

Our work aims to:

- protect, respect and care for the natural environment
- ensure best practice community involvement in parkland planning, activation and management
- keep a local focus and a metropolitan perspective
- nurture important and unique heritage and special landscapes
- advocate for contemporary and holistic strategic planning for Sydney's network of parklands
- build our reputation as a recognised leader in design excellence for the community
- create and manage a sustainable network of Sydney's iconic State-owned open space and parklands
- help the NSW Government to realise city-wide objectives for a green, cool city



Who we are

Board

Our Board brings together a group of experts across public policy, business and parklands management. Some members have been on the boards of our associated trusts and each member has the knowledge and skills to advocate to communities and government for the Parklands Estate. Their expertise guides our work to improve how we plan for, manage and enhance open space and parklands.



Michael Rose AM
Chair
BA LLB



Ceinwen Kirk-Lennox
BBus (Land Economy), GAICD



Dr Robert Lang
PhD, BE (Hons), BSc,
FAICD, FIE(Aust)



Lyall Gorman
BEd, MBA



Julie Bindon
BTP, DipLE



Patrick St John
BCom



Siobhan Toohill
BSc(Arch), BArch,
GradDipUrbDes



Suellen Fitzgerald
Chief Executive
BSc(Ecology), MLandArch,
FAILA, MAICD

Who we are



" I love working for Greater Sydney Parklands because our parks and connection to nature is what makes our city really special. "

Megan Parker, planner

" Greater Sydney Parklands is a unique agency – we promote design excellence in all our design and planning work, resulting in award-winning project outcomes. It's amazing to be a part of this! "

Oriana Senese, landscape architect

Our people come from a range of backgrounds and form a professional group of individuals dedicated to parks and open spaces.

Our team of around 80 staff – plus our partners and contractors – range from those working in visitor services, events, education, sport and recreation, heritage protection and planning and design, asset and property, to our park rangers, horticulturalists and environmental officers.

Around a quarter of our staff has been recruited since the agency's formation – we're both a young team with fresh ideas, and an experienced team with expertise and knowledge. Together, we're drawing from a diversity of skills that will help us to achieve the strategic directions of the 50-year vision.



The Parklands Estate

Greater Sydney is cradled by green – encircled by national parks and intersected by diverse open spaces, parklands and waterways.

Across government, we will be working towards the creation of a Greater Sydney Blue and Green Grid – an interconnected network that will keep the city cool, encourage healthy lifestyles, protect waterways, enhance biodiversity and ensure ecological resilience.

Anchoring the Blue and Green Grid are Sydney's national parks and the iconic Greater Sydney Parklands Estate – the regional urban parks that are owned and managed by the NSW Government. Now, we're focused on connecting the Greater Sydney Parklands

Estate and the variety of open spaces and parklands across Greater Sydney, many in the care of local councils, from smaller pocket parks and footy fields to longer cycling trails, bushland walks or spaces along rivers, the harbour or the ocean.



Western Sydney Parklands

At 5,280 ha and stretching 27 km, Western Sydney Parklands is Australia's largest urban park. Sitting on the traditional lands of the Gandangara and Darug people, the parklands offer a variety of things to do, from the 200 ha play space at Bungarribee to 60 km of tracks and trails, picnic and BBQ areas.

Fernhill Estate

The 423 ha Fernhill Estate near Penrith is on Darug Country, close to Gandangara Country. At its heart is Fernhill House, one of the most significant Greek revival houses from the early colonial era, surrounded by rural open parklands and now open for weekend walking trails. We'll work with the community to optimise this lovely asset while protecting the legacy and stories of the past.

Centennial Parklands

Centennial Parklands covers 360 ha and includes Centennial Park, Moore Park and Queens Park. Envisaged in the 19th century on the traditional lands of the Gadigal and Bidjigal people, today it is a much-loved mix of world-class sporting and entertainment events, local community sports or a place for casual get-togethers and vast walking and cycling options.

Callan Park

Callan Park on the Parramatta River sits on the traditional land of the Gadigal and Wangal people. Once home to Sydney's first purpose-built mental health facility – with these 1870s buildings still intact today – it is a place where we'll work to celebrate the area's unique heritage and picturesque waterfront.

Parramatta Park

Parramatta Park was dedicated as a park in 1857. Across 85 ha, it is home to World Heritage-listed convict historic sites and sits on the traditional land of the Burramattagal people. Today, the community can enjoy a variety of activities, while exploring ancient Aboriginal history as well as convict and colonial history.

Working with the community

We know we'll be able do more for the Parklands Estate by proactively collaborating with Greater Sydney's communities, councils, state agencies, industry and others.

In particular:

- We're engaging with local communities and listening to local voices – as we get to know more, we can better respect and embrace each park and its community.
- We're looking to talk to a true diversity of people: people from different cultural backgrounds, people with disability, older people, younger people and families.
- We're working closely with local councils and community stakeholders, so that we can translate their local perspective when we're working at a city-wide level.
- We'll consistently partner with First Nations people and communities – ultimately, so that shared decision-making and co-design practices can help us to realise Caring for Country principles.



By embracing the values and memories of the city's parklands and open spaces, we can reflect, honour and celebrate these values and stories for future generations.

We want to reach both new and existing audiences – to understand the breadth of needs, aspirations and priorities, then translate these into practical ideas and solutions for the Parklands Estate.

Already, several messages from our engagement processes are clear:

- People support a strong voice for open spaces and parklands, as expressed through the 50-year vision, and see the uniqueness of each park as integral to how we will advocate for Greater Sydney's open spaces and parklands.
- People support the implementation of the Greater Sydney Blue and Green Grid.
- The community loves their parks, and engagement that recognises local and diverse voices will be vital – essentially, people want the type of involvement that can shape how we achieve the 50-year vision.
- People want to know that those making decisions, including at board level, are skilled in best-practice park management, with experience relevant to each park's attributes and challenges.

“ Seeing the community using and enjoying our facilities is the best part of being in the Greater Sydney Parklands team.”

Sarah Christie, project manager

Our engagement will continue to cover the many aspects of enjoying and caring for Sydney's open space and parklands across nature and the environment, sport, health and recreation, culture and creativity, learning and education, philanthropy and heritage.

“I know with lockdowns it’s hard to get the community involved with the plans for Callan Park, but thank you for such a refreshing and considered vision for Waterfront Green and hearing the community’s views. ”

Callan Park waterfront Webinar feedback



Over the past year, we undertook or reported on several engagement processes:

- We consulted on a proposed link – the final piece in the full connection from Lizard Log to Plough and Harrow via The Dairy – in Western Sydney Parklands.
- We exhibited a draft plan of management for Fernhill Estate after extensive stakeholder and community consultation.
- We held a pop-up session with more than 300 people, using their feedback on the future of Fernhill Estate to inform the development of a landscape master plan.
- We held a 2-month trial of the People’s Loop in Parramatta Park, making the West Domain a car-free space, and received detailed feedback through social media, a hotline and an online survey of nearly 1,000 respondents.
- We developed a Companion Animal Management Plan for Callan Park following consultation with the community, and our work to revitalise the waterfront area at Callan Park included webinars around how people used the waterfront and the kind of facilities they wished to see.
- We sought community input through online and in-person surveys on the future of Callan Park’s heritage buildings, with the community offering a wide range of suggested uses including cafes, arts spaces and sport amenities.
- We released a draft Centennial Parklands Flying-fox Camp Management Plan to seek feedback on the decisions we’ll make about managing the Nationally Important Flying-fox Camp at the Parklands.

“Thank you for trialling this car-free area. I think it’s clear that in the long term, the whole loop road needs to be car-free so that runners, walkers and cyclists can do their exercise safely. ”

Feedback to the People’s Loop trial, Parramatta Park

Key achievements

The 50-year Vision for Greater Sydney’s Open Space and Parklands is essentially our blueprint for how we’ll work and what we want to achieve.

We will report on the achievements of our first year under the 4 strategic directions laid out in the vision.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1:
Growing parks for people**

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2:
Connecting people to parks**

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3:
Keeping Sydney green and vibrant**

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4:
Caring for the environment**

Growing parks for people

Use of Centennial Parklands' sports fields and facilities
up 115%
including
94,300
rounds of golf (up 30%)
and tennis court hire
up 35%

We want Greater Sydney's open spaces and parklands to always meet the needs and aspirations of residents and visitors. If we want to encourage people to be active, get healthy and feel good, we need to work with councils, the community and other partners to help make these places accessible to everyone, with flexible and multipurpose spaces for a range of experiences.

Visitors

In a period hindered by lockdowns, visitors flocked to the Parklands Estate. We opened the Murray Gardens Amenity Building at Parramatta Park and finished landscaping and other works at Parramatta Park Café. As we revealed Fernhill Estate to the public, growing numbers of visitors enjoyed the self-guided weekend walking tour.

Our 'Stay and Play' campaign for Western Sydney Parklands supported local tourism and brought more people to the Parklands' numerous attractions such as Sydney Zoo and Raging Waters.

Health and wellbeing

At Western Sydney Parklands, we partnered with Athletics Australia for the August 2020 Get Back on Track Running Challenge, and with Transport for NSW and Liverpool City Council on the \$13.5 million relocation of the 86-ha Wylde BMX and Mountain Bike facility. We upgraded several of Centennial Parklands' sporting facilities including a complete upgrade of Moore Park tennis courts and new lighting at E.S. Marks Athletics Field and Centennial Parklands Sport Centre. At Parramatta Park, we improved the grass surfaces at West Domain, Cattle Paddock, Coleman Oval and Old Kings Oval for youth sports and informal recreation.

As a leading provider of nature play programs, we finalised our groundbreaking *Nature Play for NSW – Insights and Recommendations* report, which aims to increase nature play – a growing movement within communities, education, active recreation and place design that can see more kids connecting with nature and with each other.

We developed the Eastern Creek Motor Sports Precinct Draft 50-year Vision and Master Plan, with the NSW Office of Sport, and liaised with our colleagues at Transport for NSW on the construction of the new Sydney International Speedway at the Sydney Motorsports Precinct, while we secured new operators for the finished facility – Speedway Promotions.

“ Centennial Park has given me a calming connection to nature during the pandemic. Watching the ponds fill, the gardens green, the birds, turtles and fish thrive after the drought, gave me hope that we and our earth can recover from any crisis. ”

Centennial Parklands Foundation donor

More than
40 million visitors
20% growth in visitation

Strong use of the
60km
of tracks and trails
at Western Sydney Parklands



Connecting people to parks

We are also focused on how people get to and from open space and parklands. This is about the provision of high quality open space near where people live and work and how we can help to provide better connections to and from the Parklands Estate – especially when these connections can be safe, sheltered green hubs that form part of the Greater Sydney Green and Blue Grid.



\$43.9 million
in Western Sydney Parklands improvements

13,000 participants
in Centennial Parklands education programs

650 students
planted
2,800 trees
and shrubs at Western Sydney Parklands

Walking and cycling

Along the 27 km corridor of Western Sydney Parklands we're working to connect the area's many spaces and places, consulting with the community on a proposed new walking and cycling track at Abbotsbury to fully connect Lizard Log to Plough and Harrow via The Dairy, and investing in recreational facilities, track and trails and environmental improvements – including the connection between the parklands and Blacktown International Sports Park and the 2.3 km Hearts Crossing Loop.

We transformed Parramatta Park during the 2-month trial of the People's Loop – a car-free space in the West Domain for walking, running and cycling.

At Centennial Parklands, we opened the Kensington Pond footbridge to the light rail stop and commenced work on the new cycle path at Queens Park.

We're gearing up for the revitalisation of the Callan Park waterfront, with new green space, new amenities, car parking, and improved paths and lighting including along the Bay Run.

Community connections

We're connecting communities with ongoing initiatives and annual events and activities or one-off surprises. The Horsley Park Urban Farms precinct in Western Sydney Parklands, for example, continued to thrive as many Sydneysiders 'looked local' for their fresh food.

Our annual Parklands Food Fest went virtual in 2020, with locals buying nearly 50 fresh produce baskets direct from the farmers and 61,000 people watching the livestream cooking shows with celebrity chef Matt Moran.

“ One of the best events showcasing western Sydney lifestyle I've seen. ”

Parklands Food Fest feedback

For the 15th year, Parramatta Park hosted Sydney Symphony Under the Stars, attracting nearly 3,000 attendees over 2 nights. At Centennial Parklands, 35,000 visitors enjoyed 6 events over 105 event days, including the ever-popular Moonlight Cinema. 'April in Callan Park' invited the local community to events and activities to mark the opening of the newly restored Summerhouse.

Western Sydney Parklands welcomed more than 4,000 runners and walkers at RunWest in March 2021 after the event was cancelled due to COVID-19 in 2020.

“ We have had amazing feedback from our parents and community members, saying their children came home from the excursion and wouldn't stop talking about how much fun they had. They are excited to visit the park in the future and see their plants grow. ”

Assistant Principal of a participating school in the Bringing Back the Bush education program

Keeping Sydney green and vibrant

Our work is shaped around the city's landscapes, its complex natural processes and unique heritage stories. As a combined agency, we are well placed to understand the significance of how people feel about natural and cultural landscapes and where these places sit in people's hearts and minds.

We want to keep working towards remarkable, memorable and distinctive parklands and help to expand the Parklands Estate that suits the outdoor lifestyle and attracts people from around the world.

\$4.9 million
heritage restoration works

across Parramatta Park,
Callan Park and
Centennial Parklands

Creating public spaces and places

Our draft plan of management for Fernhill Estate and early work on a landscape master plan will guide the Estate's transformation.

The release of the Landscape Structure Plan for Callan Park will see this become an iconic urban parkland while bringing life to the many heritage buildings.

In recognition of our work, both Parramatta Park and Centennial Parklands won Green Flag Awards for excellence in quality open spaces.

Heritage

In addition to our work at Fernhill House, we restored the heritage buildings of the Summerhouse, Bonnyview and Repatriation Ward at Callan Park to bring these back to life.

These efforts continued in the Dairy Precinct, the gatehouses, Boer War Memorial, Bathhouse, Bandstand, bridges and palisade fences around Parramatta Park, and the Moore Park Toll House, one of the oldest and most significant heritage buildings in Centennial Parklands.

We restored the Burramatta Landscape Trail to preserve Parramatta Park's archaeological subsurface layer by planting hundreds of yam daisies, chocolate lilies and vanilla lilies using traditional methods in partnership with Darug traditional custodians.

We unveiled the Guriwal Bushtucker Trail at Centennial Park, helping more people to learn about the area's native plants and animals and their importance to ancient and continuing First Nations culture.

“ I think for Darug people this gives us an opportunity to continue to come here, reconnect to this country, reconnect to the park, to the community. ”

*Julie Jones, Chair,
Darug Strategic Management Group*

“ I really appreciate working for an organisation that showcases horticulture and arboriculture and sets a standard for the rest of the industry. ”

Javiera Bolivar, Horticulturalist



60,000
trees planted

Western Sydney Parklands

400 trees

Fernhill Estate

240 trees and grassland improvements

Centennial Parklands

Caring for the environment



Greater Sydney's parklands support native vegetation in urban and suburban places as habitats for animals. They are the lungs of the city and we are focused on how we can use these areas to respond to changes in the climate as they support and sustain biodiversity. This also requires a focus on healthy waterways to cool the city.

We are continuously looking to smart and resilient solutions as we plan, manage, and maintain adaptable open spaces and parklands.

Bushland protection

The Parkland Estate's native bushland gives us an insight into what these places were like before colonisation.

Our work this year ranged from plantings to regeneration or removing weeds in Western Sydney Parklands to controlling invasive lantana and privet along Littlefields and Mulgoa creeks in Farnhill Estate.

Species protection

We're already seeing the return of native flora and fauna at Farnhill Estate, including

sightings of echidnas and gliders. Our ongoing site investigations will inform how we manage the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater and other woodland bird habitat.

We also removed feral pigs and commenced planning work on a deer control program with Local Land Services at Farnhill Estate. We're looking to cool the trees at the Grey-headed Flying-fox Camp in the north of Parramatta Park to help prevent future heat stress, while at Centennial Park, our Flying-fox Camp Management Plan was adopted following community consultation.

**Regenerated
2,000
sqm**

of endangered
Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub
around Kensington Pond,
Centennial Parklands

**1,500 ha
bushland
regenerated**

at Western Sydney Parklands –
creating a 2,000 ha
bushland corridor

“ Working for Greater Sydney Parklands means we can work at so many different levels – from broad brush to critical detail. And you get to be ambitious – let's bring back the platypus to Western Sydney! ”

*David Kirkland,
environmental scientist*



Looking ahead

In the next 12 months, we're looking forward to solidifying our work – and our position – as a city-wide urban parklands agency.

Many will feel the positivity of emerging from the uncertainty of COVID-19 lockdowns and we will capitalise on this to advocate for parks and to ensure a unified voice that will drive the *50-Year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands*. This year will see a refresh of the major strategic planning that shapes Greater Sydney, and we will have a seat on the table.

Foremost on our minds will be protecting and enhancing the environment and cultural heritage of the Parklands Estate, including the ongoing enrichment of Fernhill Estate and Callan Park, which formally became part of Greater Sydney Parklands in the past year.

That additional 438 ha will, we hope, be just the start of an expanded Parklands Estate. Looking ahead, we will identify new parks that will benefit from inclusion in the Estate, while also working across different levels of government to improve the blue and green grid connections between Greater Sydney's open spaces and parklands.

While those efforts will require a metropolitan perspective, we will be steadfast in our local focus, so that we can see more people enjoying the parklands and more people involved in their management and care through community consultation.

We will also continue to seek out the right opportunities for First Nations people to connect to Country, and for First Nations heritage and culture to be fully integrated into people's experiences of the parks.

“ I love being able to share incredible stories with our local communities – championing the work of our passionate staff, our environmental custodianship, and the ways we are enriching young minds. I'm inspired by Greater Sydney Parkland's vision and am proud to be part of the team making Sydney's parklands even greater. ”

Kim Cullen, marketing

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