

Weinam Creek Wetlands District Park, Redland Bay Technical Report 2010

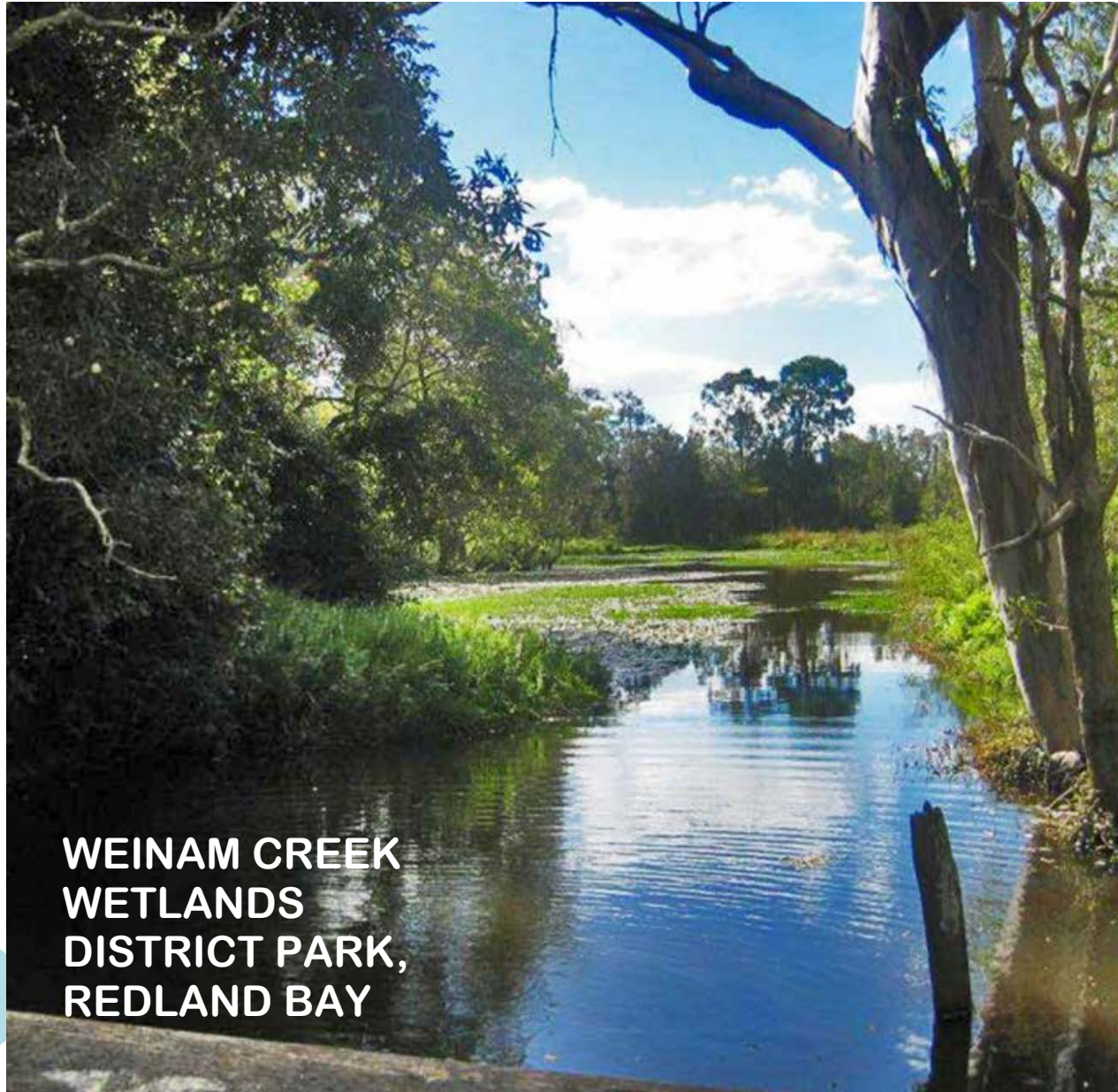


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Weinam Creek Technical Report



**WEINAM CREEK
WETLANDS
DISTRICT PARK,
REDLAND BAY**

1. Project Parameters

1.1 Approach to project

Weinam Creek lies in a narrow corridor offering recreational use for both local residents and visitors. In 2009, Redland City Council commissioned Griffith University to assist in the development of a *Child Friendly City Strategy*. This is a report of the Weinam Creek Wetlands District Park case study that informs the *Child Friendly City Strategy*.

In May and June 2010, a series of site visits and observations were made by Play Environment Consulting Pty Ltd to assess the current play facilities and to make recommendations as to how the site potential could be maximised for children, young people and their families. This report is the result.

Objective

The play value of existing play facilities in this public recreational area were assessed taking into account:

- each area's site characteristics
- the appropriateness and structural attributes of individual play elements
- the demographics of users

In making this assessment, Play Environment Consulting Pty Ltd draws on in-depth understanding of how and why children play, and research into design safety etc.



The key components used in assessing the PLAY VALUE of the facilities (consistent with the *Draft Redland City Child and Youth Friendly Planning and Design Guide*) were:

- getting there and getting around (**Access**)
- designing for all ages and abilities (**Appropriateness**)
- playful environs/places (**Play opportunities**)
- get the basics right/essential services (**Shade, supervision**)

The report canvasses design ideas which will improve the usability of the Weinam Creek recreation areas.

1.2 Project area description

Weinam Creek Wetlands District Park is 60has of naturally occurring swamplands dominated by native vegetation and fresh water which is a habitat for birds, fish and other life forms. The creek forms a long, meandering strip (some 4.3km long) and for the most part is less than 1km from the east coast beaches.

It is a designated conservation area with open space access which is providing a rich, natural environment of considerable beauty to the community. In the last 25 years, rapid urban development has meant that the majority of the community accessible area is bound by urban development. At present there are five publicly listed accessible focal areas:

- A. the strip of land to the north of Valencia Springs Drive bound by Unwin Road to the west and Donald Road to the east
- B. extending north from the roundabout @ Donald & Sapium Roads, bound to the east by Bankswood Drive and, by what appears to be an extension of Donald Road to the west, terminating at Unwin Road
- C. the most western section of Weinam Creek bound by Muller Street to the south and School of Arts Road to the north, comprising of two adjacent areas to the east of Grevillea Street and Denham Boulevard
- D. bound by School of Arts Road to the south, Moores Road to the north, Habitat Drive to the west & The Boulevard to the east
- E. the most northern section of the creek precinct spreading north from Moores Road to the boat harbour bound by Meissner Street to the west and The Esplanade to the east.

From a children's usage perspective, the creek precinct offers outstanding potential in most areas and by its very nature creates a sensory-rich environment which is conducive to play. This particularly applies to the untouched wetlands and the less developed public accessible playspaces.

Current facilities are limited to fixed equipment-dominated play areas which stand as testimony to good intentions to meet children's needs without regard to the beauty of the space, and the natural attributes it brings to play provision.





2. Section A Location: The strip of land to the north of Valencia Springs Drive bound by Unwin Road to the west and Donald Road to the east

2.1 Attributes of the current area

This area is an outstanding example of skilled landscape design and high quality implementation. It results in:

- Visually enticing enrichment of natural watercourse vegetation.
- A series of interconnected ponding systems.
- Outstanding enhancement of natural environment creating a more accessible space for the community.
- Pathway system created out of well placed, meandering pathways with views; it combines boardwalks and concrete surfaces, fencing, wheelchair access and disability ramps, and handrails.
- Timber shelter lookout areas with excellent choice of adjacent tall, long plants and a number of low level plants so that views are not blocked.
- Natural wildlife enticed back into the area.

From a usage perspective

Whilst children's experiences and understanding of the environment can be visually enriched by visiting this area, there are in fact no specific facilities for child play. The area is more suited to children who are accompanied by adults—particularly younger children for safety reasons—and in reality is suited more to independent access by adults (including seniors or disabled members of the community).

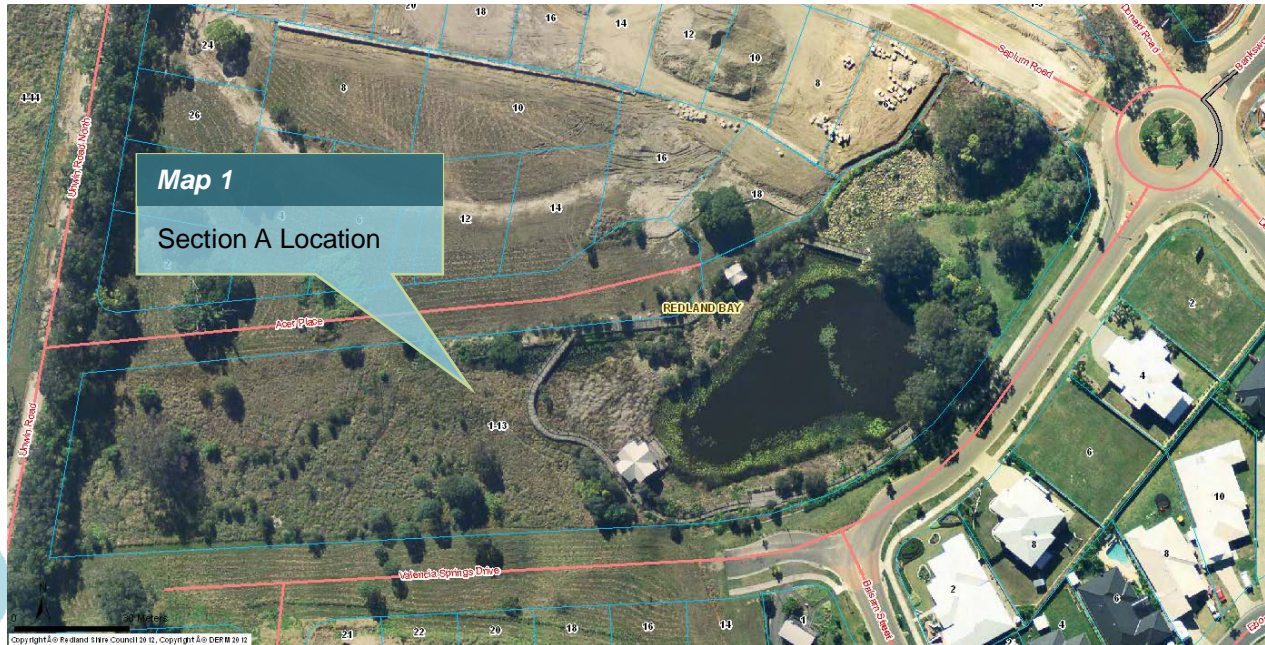
Access

Access is well designed from a pedestrian perspective on the eastern side; there does not appear to be similar access being developed from the new suburb immediately adjoining the western side. This is due to high, stone retaining walls without apparent ramp or stair access.

Use by the wider community is generally not encouraged due to only parallel street parking in Valencia Springs Drive.

Suitable Playspace

Suitable playspace is restricted to a sloping lawn embankment leading to the water and a larger lawn space adjoining the bridge. None of these sites are suitable for play purposes due to the proximity of the water and main road access in and out of the area adjoining the largest open space.





2.2 Recommendations

This outstanding, visually attractive landscape setting should be retained in its current form, and acknowledged as an area primarily for adults or children accompanied by adults.

Community access from the western side of the site must be addressed in the immediate future.

From a child perspective, it can provide an important opportunity for shared experiences with adults which ideally will enhance children's respect for the environment while enlightening their experience of it.

In the event of public pressure regarding wider public use, consideration could be given to a slippery slide down the embankment from the boardwalk pathway on the north-eastern section of the site to the largest open lawn space in the area.

The planning of this playspace stands as testimony to the need for earlier consideration of children's play provision within the context of site development and a deeper understanding of what constitutes effective play provision within it.



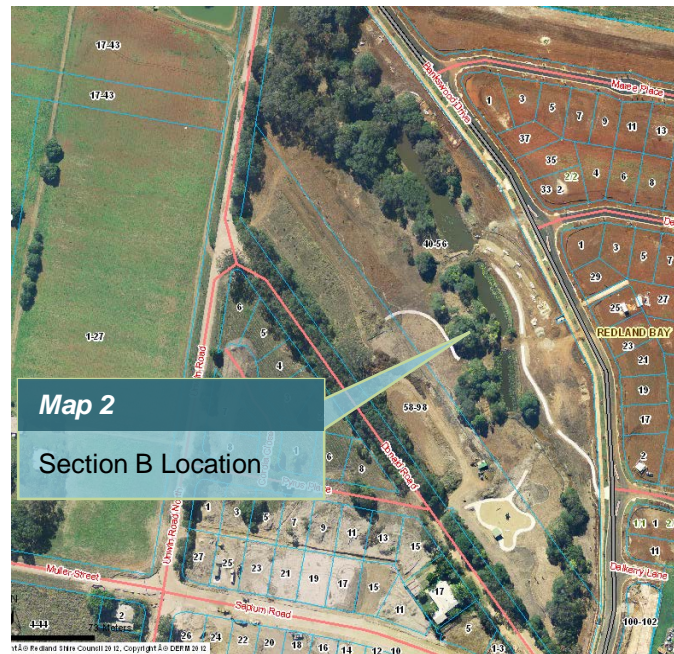
3. Section B Location: Extending north from the roundabout at Donald & Sapium Roads, bound to the east by Bankswood Drive and by what appears to be an extension Donald Road to the west terminating at Unwin Road

3.1 Attributes of the current area

The area presents as beautifully landscaped, visually attractive open space adjoining the waterway. The layout is exceptional and incorporates the following features:

- a series of integrated water catchment ponds with native vegetation extending as part of the creek
- an excellent walkway system comprising of:

- connections to the adjoining suburb to the west
- wide pathways (minimum width of 1.5m) to accommodate groups of people walking together and bicycles
- meandering pathways with approximately three bridges across the waterways
- small lookout point adjoining the waterways to allow for easy viewing of wildlife
- strategically placed, hardy, easy-to-maintain garden beds around the edge of the waterways which can effectively restrict small child access to some sections of the creek
- retention and extension of vegetation
- freeform spaces which create nooks and crannies
- large open lawn tracts of space.



Map 2
Section B Location

From a user perspective

Current play facilities are a contained, traditional playground space dominated by freestanding fixed equipment of relatively low play value (meaning they cannot sustain a child's interest for long). More specifically play facilities incorporate:

- Kompan climbing structure suited to middle childhood range
- Kompan spring animals and see-saw for younger children
- Kompan swings with a baby/toddler seat of insufficient height to allow independent child access.



While the use of *Kompan* equipment is to be applauded in terms of design and potential play usage, the choice represents a tokenistic acknowledgement of what children's play needs and skill levels are. This is compounded by the layout of the play area which has an ad hoc placement of equipment within a softfall surface area without different areas for older and younger children to accommodate their varied play/developmental needs. This shortfall is compounded by insufficient protective swing arc space and shade. It has limited play value (best described by John Evans of Deakin University in 1988, as *monuments to misunderstanding*). Implementation is not underpinned by an appreciation and understanding of children's play usage.

This is in contrast to the most heavily used item—a stockpile earth mound adjoining this area where evidence of intense children's play was indicated with the holes, planks, pieces of timber and greenery that was cast around the mound.



Other serious family/community deficiencies that need to be noted include:

- No provision for group activities (eg. barbecues).
- The shelter and seating area is badly located, in that the main pedestrian area cuts across it and interferes with the supervision of the playground.
- There is insufficient shade.
- The softfall surface appears not to be compliant with the Head Injury Criteria (HIC) set down in AS/NZS:4422:1996 Playground Surfacing—specifications, requirements and test methods—due to surface water washing the surface away.

Access

Despite the excellent provision of pathways, there are clear indications that additional pathway systems would have been advantageous, as evidenced by pathways tracking through vegetation noticed during visits. For example, the use of the area as a short-cut to the adjoining shopping centre should be factored into the layout. Current access is from the northern path to the adjoining section 1, cutting across the bridge (which is also a major arterial road) into this suburb. Indications of a road being established on the western side of the site will similarly inhibit independent child access from the adjoining houses.

3.2 Recommendations

Play value:

Extension and redevelopment of the existing playground area to create a more naturally integrated, landscaped play facilities setting.

Family usage:

Provision of facilities that address a wider range of play facilities that will accommodate a wider age/skill range of potential child users (ie. from early childhood through to early adolescents).

Provision of facilities which support wider family and adult accompaniment of children visiting the park—including shaded seating areas, barbecues and other infrastructure conducive to supporting combined family usage (eg. children's birthday parties, special occasions). These should be of sufficient scale that will support extended family and community usage (eg. playgroup, family day care).

Access:

Long term planning with more detailed consideration to the following access issues:

- Independent child access between different sections of adjoining parkland without having to cross main roads.
- Interconnected pathway system needs to be provided as part of a large pathway link between all public accessible sections of Weinam Creek.
- More detailed consideration to inhibiting child access to the waterways in the event of playgrounds being developed in the area in a non-obtrusive way that blends with the natural environment and the methods used already within the park.



4. SECTION C: Location: The most western section of Weinam Creek bound by Muller Street to the south and School of Arts Road to the north, comprising of two adjacent areas to the east of Grevillea Street and Denham Creek Boulevard

4.1 Attributes of the current area

C1...southern-most area bound by Grevillea Street to the west and Weinam Creek Wetland to the east.

C2...bound by Denman Creek Boulevard to the west and Weinam Creek Wetlands to the south-east.

A kilometre of land exists between both of these spaces through former farmland territory. During visits there were still some drainage problems due to its wetland origins.

4.1.1 The southern area [C1]

This is adjacent to an older urban area [with large blocks, established gardens and a visually attractive street] the backyards face the creek (about 5–10m distant).

From a usage perspective

While visually inviting, C1 is not very user-friendly; along the creek, it appears to support the occasional use by people in the adjoining houses (rather than out-of-area users). There is an established playground area (see below).



Map 3

Section C1 Location

Access

Whilst there are two access points from Banksia Street to the creek via the playground area and a cul de sac further to the south, only a narrow bare earth pathway exists between the backyard fencing and the creek and culminates in a dead end to the south in dense bushland.

Playground

This is on the second block down from the junction of Grevillea Street and is about 3300sqm. It is a sloping site with natural drainage down to the creek and has well-established, visually attractive native vegetation.

The play facilities are:

- a toddler climbing structure
- two sets of swings:
 - one designed for younger children
 - one sited further away and designed for older children
- a mound.

Of all these facilities, the mound is clearly the most heavily utilised. The shade trees create a visually attractive break up of space with evidence of children's preference as a play setting. A seating bench faces towards the main playground area to assist supervision.

Services are comprised of seating and taps. Play facilities in this area are old, tired and not heavily utilised fixed equipment. The senior swings do not comply with the freefall zone requirements of AS/NZS4422:1996: Playground Surfacing—specifications, requirements and test methods.

4.1.2 The northern area [C2]

This is adjacent to a new housing development to the west and the wetlands to the east. In this eastern area is a large what appears to be public oval space to the north-east, and a long, narrow playground (where at this point the creek turns in a north-east direction). There are larger tracts of land available between Denman Creek Boulevard and the creek.





From a usage perspective

The new housing is sited in smaller house blocks with larger houses. The area appears to be catering for young families who currently have need of facilities for young children and strollers. The potential of the wetlands for visual attractiveness and recreational use has obviously been factored into the housing market. It is assumed that, as the children grow up, the way they use the park will change; this means that any development undertaken should not preclude future works.

Access: External

External access is not particularly user-friendly:

- the access point at Denman Creek Boulevard is also the main suburb access route
- the access to the north leads directly to the School of Arts Road
- the southern access (adjoining Grevillea Street) can be quite damp.

Pathway access adjoining Denman Creek Boulevard has been well considered in terms of a wide main pathway suited to stroller and bicycle use.

Access: Internal

Internal access within the park has not been clearly thought-through. Children within the park were frustrated at not being able to ride their bicycles. Mothers felt restricted when moving through the park with a pram due to the lack of access pathways.

There was also some concern about the possibility of toddlers straying out of the area onto the road.

Playground

This is a long narrow strip (with long street access). The play components were limited:

- a large shade structure with softfall underneath and brightly coloured metal structures of:
 - a climbing structure/obstacle course geared more for middle childhood

- swing frame with seats suited to younger children

- a large shelter on the north-western corner, and
- a fitness course further to the south (obviously a play preference by most children).

Support facilities consisted of a large shade shelter with fixed tables/seating (scaled for adult use).

4.2 Recommendations [C1 & C2]

Strategic planning needs to be undertaken for this combined area to ensure effective community use in the long-term. This is important because the northern site services houses on smaller land lots indicating a higher need for open play spaces for children and extended community usage.

Factors that need to be taken into account are:

- access between Denman Creek Boulevard and Banksia Street through the provision of an extended pathway running parallel to the creek and with other sections linking directly to any future play facilities—particular care will need to be taken with the design of the pathway to ensure that it
 - interlinks with all major facilities
 - is designed in conjunction with approved road access to allow children from middle childhood onwards to independently access the area
 - allows for disability access
 - incorporates bicycle tracks separate from main play areas but still interlinked
- access should extend right down to the southern end of Grevillea Street



- provision of car parking space off the road with direct access to a community play facility area
- development of a larger urban community area ideally at the end of Denman Creek Boulevard taking advantage of the visual attractiveness of the adjoining large pond area, and
- integration of facilities for both community and play so that it will accommodate a full range of the community (eg. children, families, senior members of the community)

Facilities should take into account potential need of organisations such as family day care, playgroups and vocation care where additional play space will be needed to support children within the wider community. Consideration should be given to incorporating play facilities in the previous farmland area through:

- the integration of the oval, and
- possible inclusion of a series of courts.

To achieve this balance, further consultation with the community needs to be carried out. Specifically, consultation should be facilitated by parties experienced in play and child development needs, as well as speaking to local residents and people associated with local community services (eg. early childhood centres, family day care, play groups, disability groups). This more detailed process of community consultation should also involve not only the designer of the play facilities but parties with a specific knowledge of child-usage and play, to ensure that the translation of the community needs into practical design is addressed.

Ambience

The natural environment should be maintained as a dominant feature of the area by:

- maintaining trees in the Banksia Street end
- incorporation of native plants in the Denman Boulevard area, and
- building of a landscape compatible with creek area.

This will entail removal of introduced plants particularly in the southern end; notably, sword ferns, Singapore daisies and citrus trees. The natural creek land area needs to be maintained, and access down on the southern end should be more a space for viewing and appreciation of nature rather than a perceived play area.

Layout

The final layout should ensure clusters of trees and native vegetation in large clumped freeform garden beds.

Seating should facilitate supervising children and viewing of the natural parkland area.

Backup services should include:

- off-street car parking with direct pathway access
- water points in the playground and at key points along the access path/running area
- potential inclusion of barbeques in the main play community hub to support integration of facilities, and
- a large centrally located communal covered area.

This will require a more involved and in-depth evaluation of community needs to act as a basis for planning.

5. SECTION D Location: Bound by School of Arts Road to the south, Moores Road to the north, Habitat Drive to the west and The Boulevard to the east

5.1 Attributes of the current area

This section of public accessible space adjoining Weinam Creek Wetland area is approximately 4.2sqm and is the most effective current usage of space from both a community and child perspective.

Despite housing development on both sides of Weinam Creek, the area still retains the desirable dominance of a natural environment. This appears to be directly related to the generous allocation of space—both length and the width. It results in a less structured, more natural





provision than for instance the more recent developments to the south. By its very nature, it provides a space that can be used for a wide diversity of experiences.

There is a combination of large trees, additional planting conducive to the natural wetlands, ponded waterway, bridges across the waterways, free-flowing clumps of planting creating subtle subdivisions of space incorporating hardy easy-to-maintain native plants underneath or allowing for natural mulch from trees to accumulate. This creates a subtle demarcation of space, natural elements which provide shade, as well as natural playspaces for children.

From a user perspective

It means that there are places to hide, to run on open grass, sit underneath a tree or climb it, to gather around to overlook the pond and the ducks within it, to feel the crunch of natural mulch underfoot. There is space for children to kick a football and ride their bicycles and congregate with friends. The community and groups [mothers or playgroups] can set up and utilise the spaces—at the same time the dominance of planting in the area will constantly remind them of the natural wetland setting.

Play facilities

These are minimal and located on the southern and northern ends:



The southern climbing structures are of bleak metal with a shade shelter of an elevated height that does not provide adequate sun protection most of the day. During the three site visits, at no time was utilisation of this space observed.

The northern timber structure is slightly more conducive to play, but is not integrated with the setting.

Access

The current pathway system extending the length of the park meanders and provides important links between different spaces. It however needs to be wider to provide access to the east and west and made higher so that puddles do not develop in some sections of it, (as this was observed during site visits). Clearly there are drainage and landform long-term problems.

5.2 Recommendations

Ambience

The existing nature of this park should be retained with any further work aimed specifically at enhancing the natural ambience of the area. By keeping to its wetland heritage it will enhance enjoyment and understanding of the natural environment, in a setting where the tranquillity and calming activities can counterbalance current urban life.

Vegetation

All existing vegetation should be retained with the exception of any introduced plants in the area. Additional planting that creates user-friendly spaces through the demarcation of space and shaded provision need to be added to the southern and the northern entry areas. The

existing layout should be largely retained—particularly the large blocks of freeform planting that create an important break-up of space, shade provision and individuality to different sections of the space.

Internal access routes

Upgrading and extension of the existing pathway system should be undertaken in conjunction with master planning for the area, to provide direct links to all facilities by prams, wheelchairs and during wet weather. Bridged access and controlled pathway systems adjoining the walkway should be considered to allow for viewing across the water and the wildlife within it. Other features could be:

- consideration should be given to linking to a separate bikeway system
- possible inclusion of subsidiary pathway systems that provide controlled access into specific play areas, and
- possible inclusion of small meandering sensory pathways through vegetation linking different sections of the park; currently there are signs that children are creating access of this type already.

The existing pathway systems connecting the eastern and western side of the park should be retained and the ambience of the areas (particularly on the western side) assured. Consideration could be given to a sensory-rich but wet weather accessible pathway through these areas.

Any additional work that may be perceived as needed by the engineers on walkways should consider potential drainage provision of areas prone to pooling—particularly in the central section of the park. This will ensure that the large lawn areas can be used for play purposes.



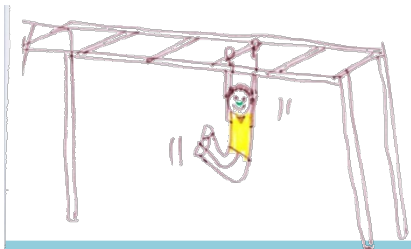
External entry

Upgrading of the entry points to the north and south of the park to provide invitational spaces dominated by greenery, strategic placement of pathway systems and focal point vegetation. Possible inclusion of small entry plaza areas surrounded by vegetation with seating areas would be conducive to people meeting and interacting with others.

Provision for off-street car parking spaces is needed with a main emphasis on the southern end where additional space exists. This must be strategically placed so that the dominance should be on greenery rather than cars. Care will need to be taken with the car park design so that children do not have to walk past the back turning circles of cars. Consideration should be given to special group parking (eg. after-school- hours-care, disability) to assist them to alight from buses and move into the park. Provision of these facilities should be seen as a proactive strategy to access the park in a manner that will not be intrusive to the park or create traffic jams in the adjoining roads.

Consideration should be given to strategically and carefully placed notices regarding the environment.

One or two art features could adjoin the entry areas, but be in a form that is child/play accessible and blends (not dominates) with the natural environment.



Play provision

Long-term planning should ensure the removal of the existing climbing structures and facilities on the southern end of the park due to their limited play value and usage. Consequently, this former farmland area should be developed primarily for facilities for older children. Should community needs indicate the need for items such as ball games area, additional courts or a skateboard ramp, consideration should be given to these facilities being incorporated and settings designed to accord with the dominant park vegetation.

Facilities for younger children need to move beyond the perception of fixed equipment dominated areas.

Should community needs dictate additional play facilities, consideration should be given to utilisation of one of the more central green areas bound by trees where children can be readily supervised. This is a particular advantage for younger children in groups such as playgroups and family day care. Facilities that should be incorporated in the event of this occurring are:

- varied mounds (single, clusters, grassed, vegetated, incorporating slides and stairs)
- sandpits
- open space
- swings
- possibly a flying fox
- sensory walkways through some of the larger garden bed areas
- potential inclusion of a gazebo to act as a main homing point with backup facilities for group usage

- small, quiet lookout points with clear viewing panels adjoining the water banks so that children can readily view birdlife.

In the event of high demand for additional facilities within this area, consideration could be given to the inclusion of a shallow, recycled wading pool of about 150mm deep. It should be of sufficient size to act as a cooling and play area in hot weather. Ideally this will be designed in a manner that will act as an alternative to children seeking use of the adjoining waterways.

Community consultation for use of this area needs to be extended. Any potential upgrading of this area must be integrated into a master plan for the whole park, so that it ensures an integrated and cohesive setting for both child and community use.

Safety

Needs to be considered within the context of a natural environment and entail close attention to detail in terms of design, planning and layout. For example, small sections of the waterway can be set aside for children to step down. This could involve boulder steps to provide easy access to a wide, shallow water area (extending at least 3m) so that children can easily get themselves in and out of the space. To achieve this, contamination effects will clearly need to be considered.

Planting adjoining the creek should be (as is already occurring) thick, dense planting which will act as an inhibitor particularly to young children's access.

Siting any specific areas geared particularly for younger children away from the main creek space.



6. SECTION E Location: The most northern section of the creek precinct spreading north from Moores Road to the boat harbour bound by Meissner Street to the west and The Esplanade to the east.

6.1 Attributes of the current area

Long-term use of this area by the community means that it has less resemblance to the naturally occurring area of Weinam Creek than any other section—with only small residual elements of the initial wetland area remaining.

From a children's perspective, the level of interest that an active harbour provides is a point of marked curiosity not only for younger children, but for active engagement by older children. By its very nature, it requires adult accompaniment and interaction initially for safety reasons but later for the sharing and development of skills such as fishing and boat handling.

Site planning within this area is limited—a melange of a small boat harbour, dominant car parking, and buildings set in to meet immediate and practical needs not within unison in the site and not maximising the natural attributes of the space.

Child usage in its current form is hazardous due to the cars, water and blind spots for supervision.

6.2 Recommendations

Master planning is essential to maximise the attributes of this potentially enjoyable and visually attractive area not only for children but for the whole community. The following should be taken into account:



- resiting and development of car park spaces defining short-term and long-term car parking which should be set well away from the main area
- provision of a wide access pathway system open to limited bike travel, trolleys and pedestrian access; it will link all main facilities while providing a visually attractive walkway that acts as an independent system away from main access roads
- possible inclusion of a bridge over the waterway for children to enjoy and to improve access between both sides of the harbour
- strategic placement of seating within the area with the emphasis on facilities which children can enjoy while with an adult
- open lawn spaces preferably with access to Moreton Bay so that people can informally gather, children can

access down to the bay but away from the main flow of traffic in and out of the harbour

- backup services such as taps, a barbeque; large amount of seating is not necessarily essential here—it is more a space where people will bring their own chairs if they need it, and where children can have access to a sandy beach while parents and caregivers can readily observe the children.
- potential inclusion of an area particularly geared to middle childhood and early adolescence where children can use small boats in a shallow area; this will allow children who live in an urban area to have the opportunity to handle boats and to fish.

No more play elements than this should be provided. A visit to the site in itself will arouse children's interest; the tokenistic use of fixed equipment should not occur. If community response clearly indicates a need for facilities, consideration may be given to:

- a slippery slide down an embankment to the beach
- a couple of swings
- open space for kicking footballs, and group games.

These should be strategically placed adjoining the open lawn spaces away from the main flow of harbour activities.

Part of the master planning must be the careful attention to detail in terms of planting. Ideally the entire area should be restored to natural vegetation in line with the adjoining creek area to the south where large fig trees and easy-to-maintain low-level plants dominate and restore a natural ambience to this junction of bay and creek.



7. Future direction from a play perspective

7.1 Approach

Play and play settings need to be an integral part of the planning of the Weinam Creek Wetland precinct. Within this, two aspects need to be stressed:

- (i) Play must be seen in context of the wider community— not as children separated from the community—but through provision of facilities which will support family, close one-to-one interaction between adult and children, and a multi-level of recreational use.
- (ii) The play needs to support more than busy physical play.

This means a variety of play components which will foster:

- social development by sharing through play, take turns, collaborate and consider others
- emotional development through the capacity to accept challenges, achieve successes and a sense of self-worth, and willingness to keep on trying
- cognitive development through the provision of play facilities which challenge thinking and involve problem-solving, and where children can explore, find out and test/try different activities and ideas
- physical development through the provision of play facilities which will extend all areas of a child's physical development; not only the gross motor skills (eg. running, walking, leaping, jumping, crawling) but also those which allow for fine motor skills and

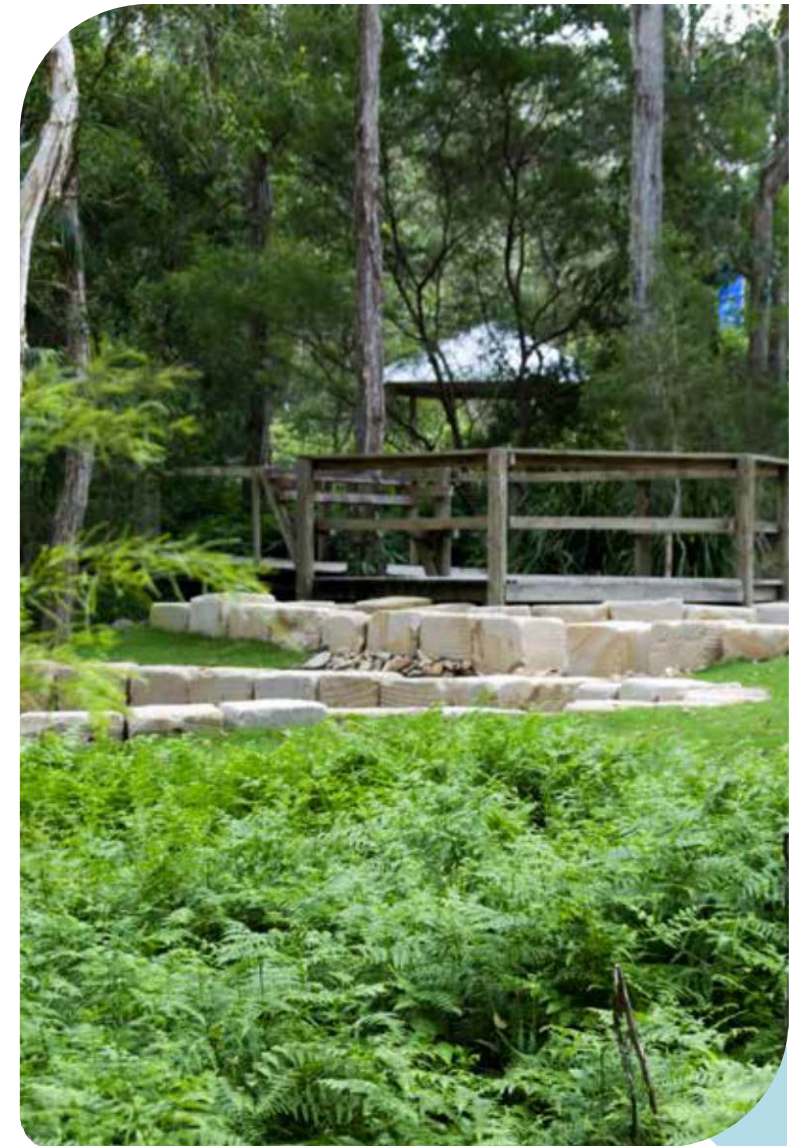
mastering of their overall body coordination (eg. proprioceptive skills: eye/hand control, balance, perception of space, spinning)

- creative development through open-ended play features (ie. non-prescriptive)

Defining the community expectations needs to be more thoroughly explored, and the data analysed carefully so that expectations can be matched more closely with the potential of the five playground areas. It is recommended that additional consultation is sought from:

- Local community representatives to establish their site- specific neighbourhood relevant community needs.
- Community groups servicing or representing children's needs within the community who are also potentially users of the space (eg. play group, family day care, kindergartens, schools, vacation care programs, groups representing children with disabilities).
- Community interest groups—parties with specific interests within the community on both a local and often a wider level (eg. environmentalists, specialists in plants, history of the area).

This will ensure that priority is given to children's responses, but that a balance is achieved between their individual needs and the other groups.





7.2 Planning process

To ensure that play perspective is embedded in the planning process, a multi-disciplinary planning team with play/child development representation is essential. Master planning of the playspaces is critical.

Ad hoc development of facilities should not occur, and perceptions of play in the context of the whole park should be seen to allow children to have a greater diversity of play experiences which will assist in the development of a wider range of skills.

7.2.1 Enhance play value

Play must prioritise the inclusion of facilities that have a high play value measured by the capacity of the items to sustain children's interests for long periods, even over several years. A few items that provide this are: natural settings, sandpits, mounds and cubby spaces. Non-prescriptive play components are essential.

High play value facilities will include:

- Invitational space that by its very setting ignites children's wishes to undertaken play activities within the park to a level that they will wish to explore, test out/try new ideas and to come to terms of a deeper understanding of the world in which they live to a dimension that covers all areas of development. To achieve these natural characteristics of Weinam Creek Wetlands need to be retained and extended with greater emphasis on play.
- Adaptability of settings through the use of materials that children can shape, mould and use to fit in with their play schemes (eg. sand, water, dirt, leaves) or facilities which suggest multiple and varied uses (eg. a low deck which can be a stage, a cubby, a boat

within the child's imagination, an area to jump on and off). This will exclude closed items—those items which only have one set usage; once children have mastered the use of these items, their interest wanes (eg. many fixed climbing structures, tick- tack-toe).

- Items that provide challenge and allow children to use the item to their current level of achievement, but offer a further dimension and depth of play when children are actively seeking the challenge of new experiences. In part this is provided by the use of flexible/adaptable items. In other dimensions, it allows children to explore greater areas and spaces than that designated as a play area. It will provide them with spaces that can be shared with older children with higher competency skills for them to observe, follow and learn from. Mostly it is the provision of unexpected layering of potential experiences within a given area; for example:
 - the changing patterns of plants or lights at different times of the day and in different seasons
 - the hidden dimensions of nooks and crannies developed through vegetation with a capacity to ride their bike further afield on varied forms of tracks and pathways
 - boulders that children can leap on and climb over
- Age / skill variation—the facilities in the park must first and foremost be sufficiently open-ended to accommodate a wide diversity of interest and skill levels whether dictated by child development, their moods at a particular time, and their temperaments during individual days/ times. Emphasis needs to be given to providing facilities which are less challenging in some areas but more suited to the early



explorations of the park by toddlers and early childhood years, whilst at the same time allowing for older children to share and collaborate with them

- Disabilities—play provision coupled with the use of the whole park must take into account children with disabilities. The range of disabilities means that careful design is needed to ensure benefits for these uses, while not disadvantaging others.

7.2.2 Play settings

The physical environment provided for play can act as a deterrent or as a catalyst to children's use and enjoyment of the space.

Integrated settings

Final design of the Weinam Creek Wetlands and park usage should emphasise an integrated natural setting with play facilities within it—rather than a fixed-equipment dominated structure. To achieve this, consideration needs to be given to subtle inclusions such as:

- Large boulders carefully spaced for children to climb and step along.
- Treed embankments with a slippery slide down through it.
- Inclusion of large trees with low, spreading branches for children to climb.
- Meandering pathways that open up the park but take the children through varied forms of park surfaces, levels of enclosure and changing plant life—remembering that richness of experiences (not tidy perfection) is the aim; this means that areas need to be left messy with leaves, twigs, seed pods for children to explore, or to shape into different forms or use to create hidey spaces to get away, tracks for

their toy cars, the final outcome must be a one of a symbiosis with the natural environment being a dominate factor.

Spatial variation

A notable attribute of Weinam Creek Wetlands playgrounds are the variations in spatial provision which suggest different forms of play; for example:

- open spaces for ball games and running
- nooks and crannies to share with friends
- hidey spaces under big trees
- free flowing garden beds in which to duck and hide, and
- copses of long, spindly trees to create a maze-like area.

Coupled with these can be the variations in the temperature and the climate the areas provide; for example, sunlit spaces and shaded areas.

Diversity

Each area or facility provided within the park ideally should offer a slight variation of experience to highlight it as a specific area—whether it be in the form of a tree, edging to a garden bed, the texture of paving, or the outlook to the water or the areas beyond. Care should be taken to avoid too much repetition in the plants/trees (otherwise it presents as man-made); consider variations in grouping and how play will utilise them.

The diversity of play materials needs to ensure that no or limited repetition of play structures occurs within a given park. For example, in the event of swings being





provided, there should be one for older children and one for younger children to meet their current developmental needs.

Access

From a child-user perspective, access to all facilities empowers the child to develop decision-making skills and select their own play activity. It is essential for adult caregivers (particularly with younger children) as access (both visual and pedestrian) underpins effective supervision and one-to-one handling of children. There are varying forms and modes of access which need to be carefully considered. For example: sections of pathway may have different sensory inputs, turning points, textured surfaces to encourage a less agile child to extend their enjoyment and use of the surface—whether walking, learning to ride a bike, or enjoying being independent.

Linkage and flow

Strategic placement of compatible play activities adjoining one another is critical to support a natural progression and flow of space. For example a sandpit should not be sited in isolation, but would be far more enriching if there was a low play deck on its edge, or a large shady tree with a paved area adjoining it, or a little gazebo which presents as a cubby house and suggests imaginary play. Alternatively, it can encourage greater participation in busy physical play through inclusion for instance of a mound with a flying fox leading onto a low play deck which links to an obstacle course, or a shallow watercourse to be enjoyed during the summer months that trickles and flows through and leads to a splash pool within the playspace.

7.2.3 Safety and challenge

Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision must respond to these needs and wishes by offering stimulating play opportunities, challenging environments to explore and develop their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury (Play safety forum 2004).

Play components which will feed into safety with challenge are:

- Minimising the potential for vertical falls; for instance, providing more slopes and embankments with varied access points.
- Provision of open running space.
- Shade provision provided by trees.
- Simple structures that suggest a wider range of potential play options, and suggest children's usage (as distinct from dictate it). For example, a low simple deck often offers more varied usage than a climbing structure. It is a place to jump from, have a concert, meet friends, pretend you're on a boat, and by its very form will suggest a much wider age/skill usage.
- Provision of facilities that offer challenge but at a lower level; for instance, low-level obstacle courses, net enclosed tunnels, side-stepping ropes strategically placed will provide alternative access to different parts of the settings and will be far more heavily utilised.



7.2.4 Access

Access must be considered as part of play usage. This is critical when meeting the needs of middle and later childhood where children are actively seeking independence. They need these areas as part of establishing a wider perception of life.

To achieve this, the following must be considered:

- A pathway system that extends the entire length of Weinam Creek (from the harbour to the far end).
- Possible inclusion of a more direct bicycle path access.
- Easy of access through tunnels, bridges or other ways over the roads so that independent access is assured.
- Linkages of this access path system to all different features of the park.
- Acceptance that the pathway system can and will be used not only by bicycles but skateboards, T-bars, roller-blades etc.
- The surfaces of these pathways should give an indication of the potential usage of the area: for example:

- challenging surfaces in open spaces so that children have to build up speed to go over humps
 - low speed bumps in some areas to slow down momentum where a conflict of use may occur, and
 - semi enclosed spaces with vegetation and textured surfaces on the base where slower use is desirable and less intrusive to adjoining houses.
- Provision of further sub-divisions ensuring that easier, independent child access can be achieved to public parkland area—particularly in areas of high density living.

By thinking in a lateral and creative way about these spaces, not only will children's awareness of the nature of the park be enhanced, but also the implications of potential usage within the community.

The provision of playgrounds which will have VALUE to all users is never simple.





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