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KOOLUNGA NATIVE RESERVE

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY REPORT & VALUES PLAN

Prepared for KNOX CITY COUNCIL | GroupGSA | April 2022

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, and pay our respects to their elders past present and emerging, recognising their continuing connection to land, waters and culture.

Issue	Title	Date	Prepared	Checked
1	Koolunga Native Reserve Engagement Summary Report & Values Plan	01/04/2022	RF	NM/ZC
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INTRODUCTION & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

01

INTRODUCTION & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Koolunga Native Reserve is located 40Km East of Melbourne CBD, in Ferntree Gully. It is located at the foothills of Dandenong Ranges and it is home to a wide range of fauna and flora species.

Koolunga Native Reserve is a 6 hectar (15 acre) site identified as a site of biological significance, and it hosts a considerable variety of fauna and flora, with a creek running through the middle. The reserve is recognise by its biological value due to the presence of many rare or threatened indigenous plant species.

The area has previously been used as a daffodil farm and daffodils still appear each year. It is also a very popular place for locals to enjoy the neighbourhood open space, walk their dogs and enjoy the existing creek. The reserve comes under the care of Knox City Council and Friends of Koolunga group, which has been established in 1994 and been active since. The creek is currently managed by Melbourne Water.

The present report outlines this project process which provided an opportunity to engage the community through a number of workshops and ensure that all members are heard and able to participate and provide their thoughts into the future of the reserve. The engagement helped understanding further meaningful and beneficial improvements to the Reserve and shape the vision, to ensure that the strategic direction of Koolunga Native Reserve will respond to the needs of the current and future community.

Some specific feedback relates to a previous proposal of a wetland. Although this consultation wasn't to address the inclusion/exclusion of a wetland, we acknowledge that there had been previous consultation about it. Feedback on this occasion has included support as well as opposition.

In the next stage, we will be looking at options for the reserve that align with the values feedback and further consultation will occur then.

Executive Summary

Group GSA was commissioned in September 2021 by Knox City Council to run a number of sessions of community engagement and set a holistic and strategic direction for Koolunga Native Reserve, by providing a framework on planning and delivering future upgrades.

Project Objectives:

- Protect and strengthen Koolunga Native Reserve as valuable native reserve and a public open space for the local community to enjoy currently and in the future;
- Understand and provide opportunities to bring together the local passionate community to have a say into the future planning for the Reserve;
- Enhance the sense of 'connection to nature' for visitors, respecting the biological significance and the wildlife creek corridor running on site;
- Facilitate the agreed Project Steering Group (PSG) workshops with internal council officers and interested community members;
- Provide input and material for the community consultation including the "Have Your Say' page;
- Develop a high level Values Plan that graphically represents and highlights the consultation feedback;
- Develop a high level Landscape Plan (Future Directions Plan) which articulates a collective vision for the site and the community values.









SITE AUDIT

02

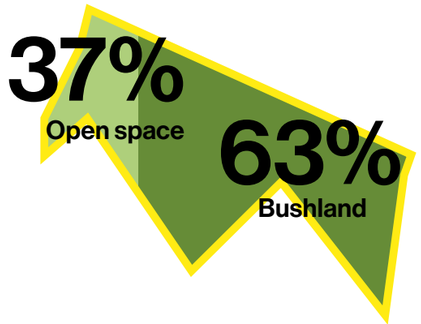
SITE AUDIT



SITE WALK & OBSERVATIONS

GroupGSA has undertaken a site walk to better understand current conditions and functioning of the site

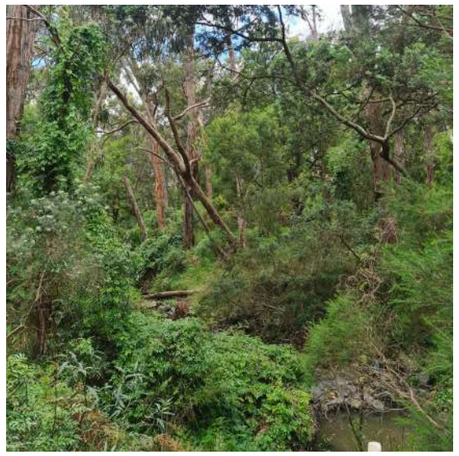
As mentioned previously, Koolunga Native reserve 15 acre reserve which consists of bushland and a few open areas of mown grass, with a variety of fauna and flora representing as a site of biological significance. The below diagram represents an approximate percentage of open space vs bushland:



Within the site, there are around two kilometres of walking paths and a creek that runs through it, with a cross over of two bridges. There are information boards throughout the reserve, mainly about the biological variety of the site.

The site offers good open space areas which make it flexible for a range of activities such as passive recreation, ball play, fly kite and dog walking.

The next pages show a visual record of the site audit and an interpretation of its condition and uses.









01/ Biological Significance

There are a number of natural assets in Koolunga Native Reserve which meet the Victorian Government's 'standard criteria for sites of biological significance': They summarise in the following:

Small populations of two globally-endangered plant species (Acacia stictophylla and Platylobium infecundum), growing in deteriorating condition;

Patches of endangered vegetation types (Valley Heathy Forest and Swampy Woodland) whose ecological condition is deteriorating;

Valuable patch of Graceful Fescue (Festuca asperula), with only nine other valid records of the species in the Port Phillip and Western Port region through history;

Powerful Owls (listed as Vulnerable in Victoria);

Approximately 60 wild, indigenous plant species that are threatened with dying out throughout Knox;

A total of approximately 130 wild, indigenous plant species, which is a large number for a single site in Knox.

02/ Daffodil Rd Entrance

Daffodil Rd currently holds one of the main connections and entrances to Koolunga Native Reserve.

Located at the North-East side of the Reserve, this area provides an open and visible access to the site, including gravel paths that lead the users to the West and Centre of the reserve.

There is a well visible entrance sign and open grass space that make it look inviting and safe.

In this area, there are a few bins and a seat bench along the path. This area connects directly to the existing concrete path along Daffodil Rd

03/ Pine Trees walk path

At the centre West of the reserve, there is a line of pine trees (*Pinus radiata*) that divide the two major open grass areas on the North side of the reserve.

This row of pine trees is also delineated by an existing gravel path which is a main connection from the Daffodil Rd entrance to the centre of the reserve.

The trees in this section, despite being exotic, represent historical value and provide a sense of identity to the site, as well as shade and shelter to the users and some of the animals on site.

Next to the gravel path, there are also a few existing Mat-Rush (*Lomandra longifolia)*.

04/ North-West Open space

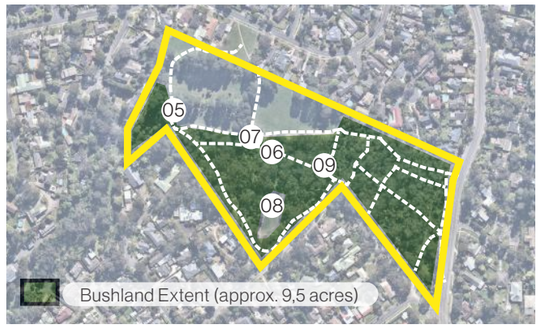
At the North-West side of the reserve, next to the pine trees, there is a large open grass area surrounded by trees and adjacent residents properties.

This area represents high value for the local community users as it holds great flexibility for activities and gathering opportunities.

Currently, this area is in lack of regular maintenance and the grasses are growing quite long in certain times of the year.

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SITE AUDIT













05/

Flagstone rock path / Creek overflow drain

At the very West side of the Reserve, there is an existing wire fence and an adjacent rock path stretch, which becomes apart of the creek and helps drain the water at the occurrence of an overflow.

This area represents a low point to the path and its function makes it uneven to walk on, as well as slippery and unsafe at times.

06/

Western steps

At the south of the flagstone rock path, there is a number of steps that connect up to the southern section of the gravel path in the reserve.

These steps are simple combination of timber slats risers and compacted gravel fill, with a hand rail to the left side.

These steps are an inevitable response to the existing topography on site and make it possible for users to walk through this area, but not accessible for motor impaired groups.

07/

Existing concrete path and signage

Approximately at the centre of the reserve, there is a portion of the path system that is made of concrete which connects of the existing bridges over the creek.

This is the only stretch of the path that is compliant with DDA accessibility requirements for wheelchairs, but is in need of an extension and connection to the park entrance at the South-East boundary of the site.

There is existing signage along the site, but is in need of upgrades.

08/

Existing timber bridge

Within the site, there are existing timber bridges that cross over the existing creek.

The bridges are made of timber slats and no balustrades. They provide a link between the North and South sides of the reserve and offer a good experience of the site.

These bridges are currently in acceptable condition but could be improved in terms of maintenance, cleaning and safety.

09/

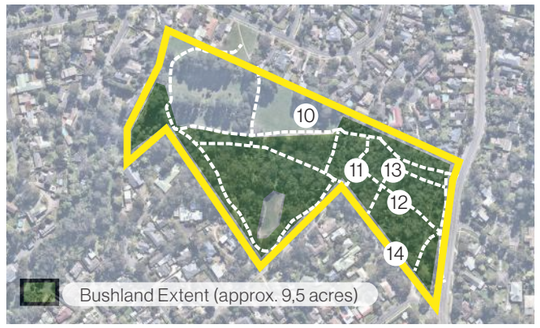
South-centre open space

At the South-Centre corner of the site, there is another opening in the landscape, with a flat grass area.

Similar to the other open but smaller areas, but smaller, it offers a variety of opportunities for activities and gathering events.

In proximity with this area, one can find St Elmo Ave entry and the aged care facility..

SITE AUDIT













10/

Secondary paths

Along the site, there are several secondary paths that connect to the main gravel paths and make it fairly easy to navigate through the reserve.

The secondary paths are somewhat informal and offer a more authentic nature experience to the users of the reserve.

They also allow users to wonder and explore the site in a more free way, which is seen as a very positive aspect of the reserve.

11/

North-centre open space

At the North-centre of Koolunga reserve, there is another large open grass area, which is one of the main spaces that local residents use for gatherings and other activities.

Due to its openness and size, this space becomes a valuable area of the reserve, which offer the aforementioned flexibility for activities and gatherings, as well as dog walking.

12/

Existing Creek

The existing creek along the reserve used to be a rubbish dump place for local residents.

Although this has been dealt with and no longer occurs in the reserve, the creek and its embankments have been left with a low water quality and erosion control.

For the above reasons, the creek is a main point of discussion and one of the elements in the reserve that needs future attention and recovery intervention.

13/

Existing amenities

Along the site, there are benches and seats that provide an opportunity for rest and contemplation of the reserve.

These seating elements are made of natural materials such as wood and fit well in the landscape and the environment.

Although discreet and well placed, they lack of arms and backrests, which can improve the safety and usage of these elements for elderly users.

14/

Existing Carpark

Along Old Forest Rd, there is an existing informal carpark which allow for approximately 10 cars to park at a time.

This access and parking consist of crushed rock and make the park accessible from Hutton Ave and Forest Rd.

The area presents in good condition but is in need of more signage and indication in order to be more clear for visitors who drive to site.

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

03

ENGAGEMENT RECORD & SESSIONS SUMMARY

ENGAGEMENT RECORD

GroupGSA and Knox City Council responsibilities in recording comments received

Unless otherwise stated, all feedback documented by Group GSA and Knox City Council and any person(s) acting on our behalf is written during our program/ consultation activities.

Input is from written submissions and notes from direct feedback during meetings. The notes capture the full range of ideas, concerns and views expressed during our consultation activities.

Unless otherwise noted, the views expressed in this document represent those of the participants and not necessarily those of our consultants or council.

All sessions have been carried out similarly, including Introduction to the project, understanding the engagement / connection of the group with the site presentation of a consultation panel and questions, followed by a discussion and expression of opinions.

SESSIONS SUMMARY

GroupGSA and Knox City Council have collaboratively organized a number of opportunities for community feedback

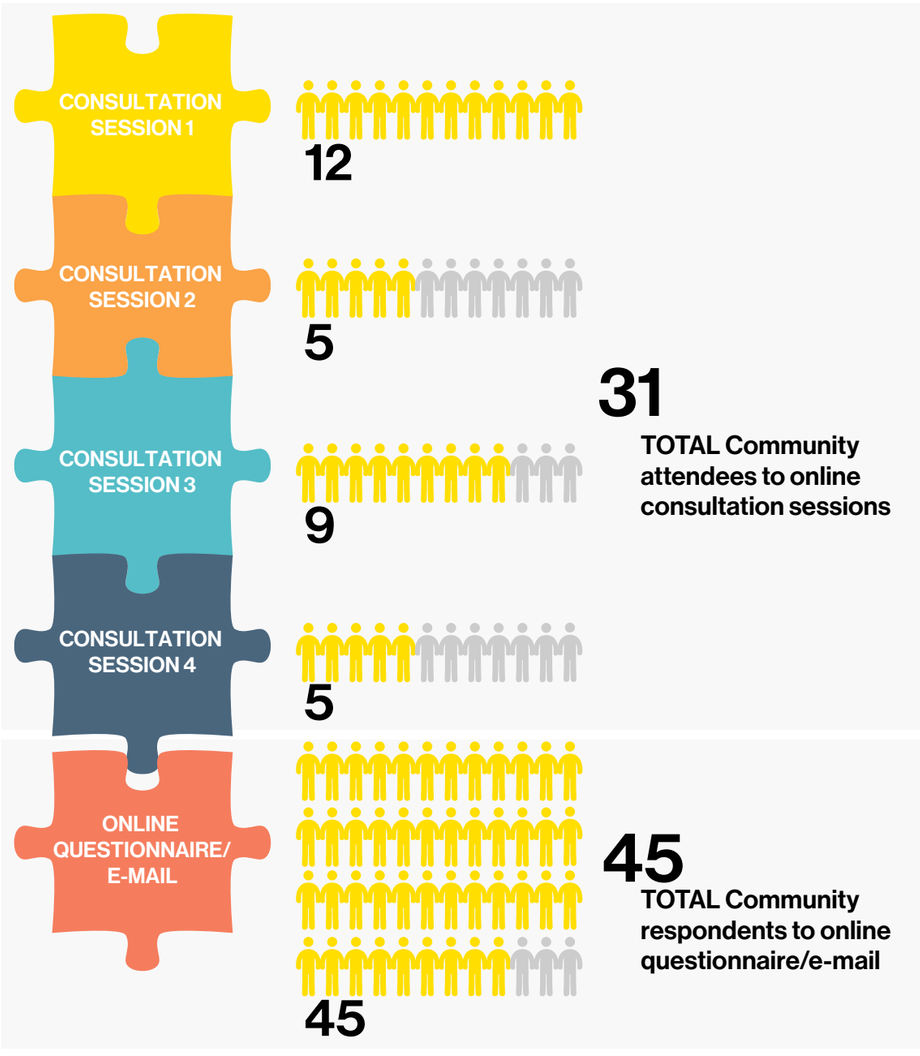
The sessions summarise in the following:

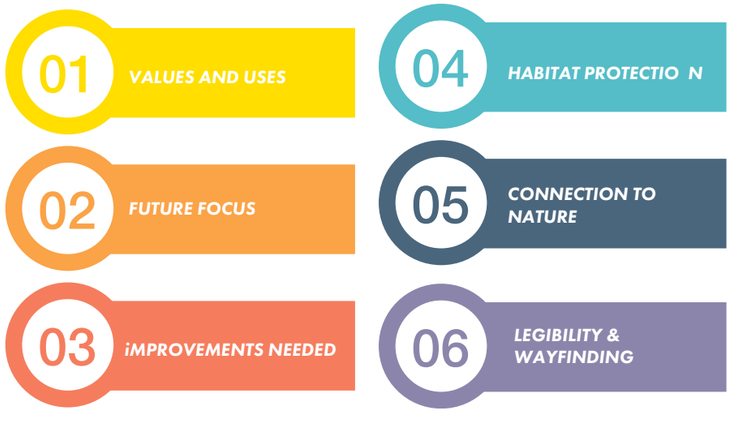
a. 4x Online Zoom consultation sessions;

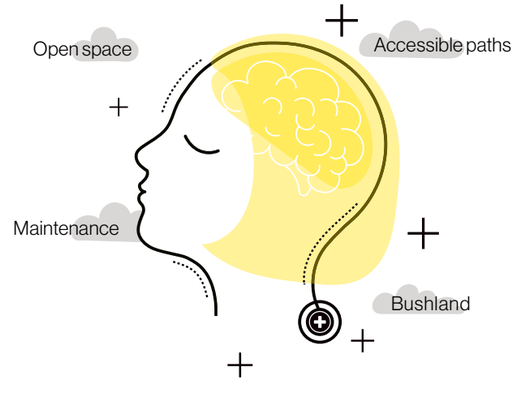
b. 1x Community Questionnaire provided online.

All sessions have been organised in line with government regulations with regards to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The community has also been provided with the opportunity to leave their comments through the online questionnaire uploaded on to the 'Have Your Say' page, as stated above, and to send through their opinions via e-mail and post if preferred.







ENGAGEMENT FORMAT & ONLINE SESSIONS

ENGAGEMENT FORMAT

The Community engagement sessions were planned in response to the interest shown by the community in having their ideas and thoughts put forward. These sessions were all held online, always following the Covid-19 government guidelines. Notification of the community engagement activities included direct email and letters.

The consultation structure included:

- Introduction and presentation of hosts,
- Acknowledgement of previous undertaken consultation and understanding of received feedback;
- Aims of the consultation
- Questions and discussion / community opinion.
- General discussion / any other thoughts or concerns,
- Next steps.

To facilitate the discussions and to prompt conversation, a number of specific questions have been put together as per below:

- What do you consider the current values and uses of the Reserve?
- What are the future focus and uses that you envision for the Reserve?
- In developing a plan, where do you think the most improvements can be made: Consider: accessibility, heritage, fauna & flora, water quality, open spaces, weed, fire and pest management.
- What measures do you consider relevant for the Reserve's habitat protection?
- What do you consider important to instigate people's connection to Nature in the Reserve? How do you connect to the environment?
- What are your thoughts on the legibility & wayfinding through the site?

ONLINE SESSIONS

GroupGSA and Knox City Council organised 4 (four) online sessions with the community as per below:

CONSULTATION EVENT 1

WHEN: Tuesday 7th December 2021, 7:00pm - 8:00pm

WHERE: Zoom meeting (Online)

WHO: 12x community attendees, 2x GSA attendees, 1 x Council's attendees

CONSULTATION EVENT 2

WHEN: Wednesday 8th December 2021, 6:00pm - 7:00pm

WHERE: Zoom meeting (Online)

WHO: 5x community attendees, 2x GSA attendees, 1 x Council's attendees

CONSULTATION EVENT 3

WHEN: Wednesday 14th December 2021, 3:30pm - 4:30pm

WHERE: Zoom meeting (Online)

WHO: 9x community attendees, 2x GSA attendees, 1 x Council's attendees

CONSULTATION EVENT 4

WHEN: Wednesday 16th December 2021, 6:30pm - 7:30pm

WHERE: Zoom meeting (Online)

WHO: 5x community attendees, 2x GSA attendees, 1 x Council's attendees

Figure 1 on the side shows the map and the key discussion questions used during consultation. These questions have also been provided for online feedback.



Figure 1. Consultation Map and discussion questions

Koolunga Native Reserve
For: Knox City Council



FEEDBACK FOCUS

04

FEEDBACK FOCUS THEMES

OBJECTIVES

For the development of a values plan and through the consultation process, we have defined 5 Focus themes that reflect the feedback received and key areas to lay focus on. The themes on the side will form the basis of the plan development.

In concurrence with these, all the background studies and the feedback summary included in this document will inform the next steps of this process, including another stage of consultation and presenting back the findings from the first stage of consultation accompanied by the values plan.











01/

Highlight existing nature & biodiversity values

HIGHLIGHT THE LOCAL IDENTITY OF KOOLUNGA BY ENHANCING THE BIOLOGICAL VALUES THROUGH A MANAGEMENT PLAN, EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

02/

Create a maintenance plan

DEVELOPMENT OF A MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE PLAN FOR BIODIVERSITY CARE, RE-VEGETATION, WATER QUALITY CONTROL AS WELL AS FIRE, PEST AND WEED CONTROL

03/

Retain bushland & open spaces

MAINTAIN FLEXIBLE AND MULTI-USE AREAS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES AS WELL AS BUSHLAND TRACKS THAT ALLOW FOR A BALANCE OF PASSIVE AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES

04/

Improve water quality

REHABILITATE AND PROTECT THE CREEK THAT RUNS THROUGH KOOLUNGA RESERVE BY IMPROVING THE WATER QUALITY AND MAINTAINING THE BANKS HEALTHY

05/

Accessibility, Wayfinding & Parking

PRIORITISE SAFE AND CLEAR PEDESTRIAN FLOW AND INCLUSIVE ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL LOCAL AGES AND NEEDS, WHILE ENSURING PARKING CAN SUPPORT USERS NEEDS

Koolunga Native Reserve
For: Knox City Council



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

05

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

This section includes the summary of feedback and main topics from the community consultations ran over a total of four (4) sessions in December 2021.

This, as well as the online comments received, have formed the basis of the Values plan and subsequently will inform an action plan on implementing long term improvements to Koolunga Native Reserve through a strategy and supporting framework guided by project objectives.

The goals of this consultation is to understand the relevance of the site to the community, as well as how they use it and the opportunities and constraints that it offers to the users.

FEEDBACK SUMMARY

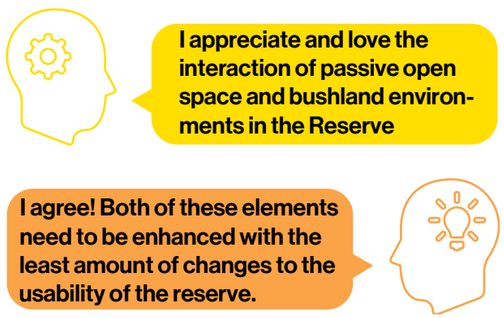
During the individual consultation meetings with the community, they expressed a number of opinions, suggestions and improvements to the site.

The following wordclouds show a summary of the highlights and ideas on the discussion points undertaken during consultations and on questionnaires.

For more detailed feedback, please refer to the Appendix 01 at the end of this document.









COMMUNITY FEEDBACK SUMMARY











VALUES PLAN

06

VALUES PLAN & PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

The following plan graphically highlights the values of the reserve, as well as the observations and opinions stated by participants and will create the design base as the project progresses



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KOOLUNGA NATIVE RESERVE © GROUPGSA

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NEXT STEPS

07

NEXT STEPS & ROAD MAP

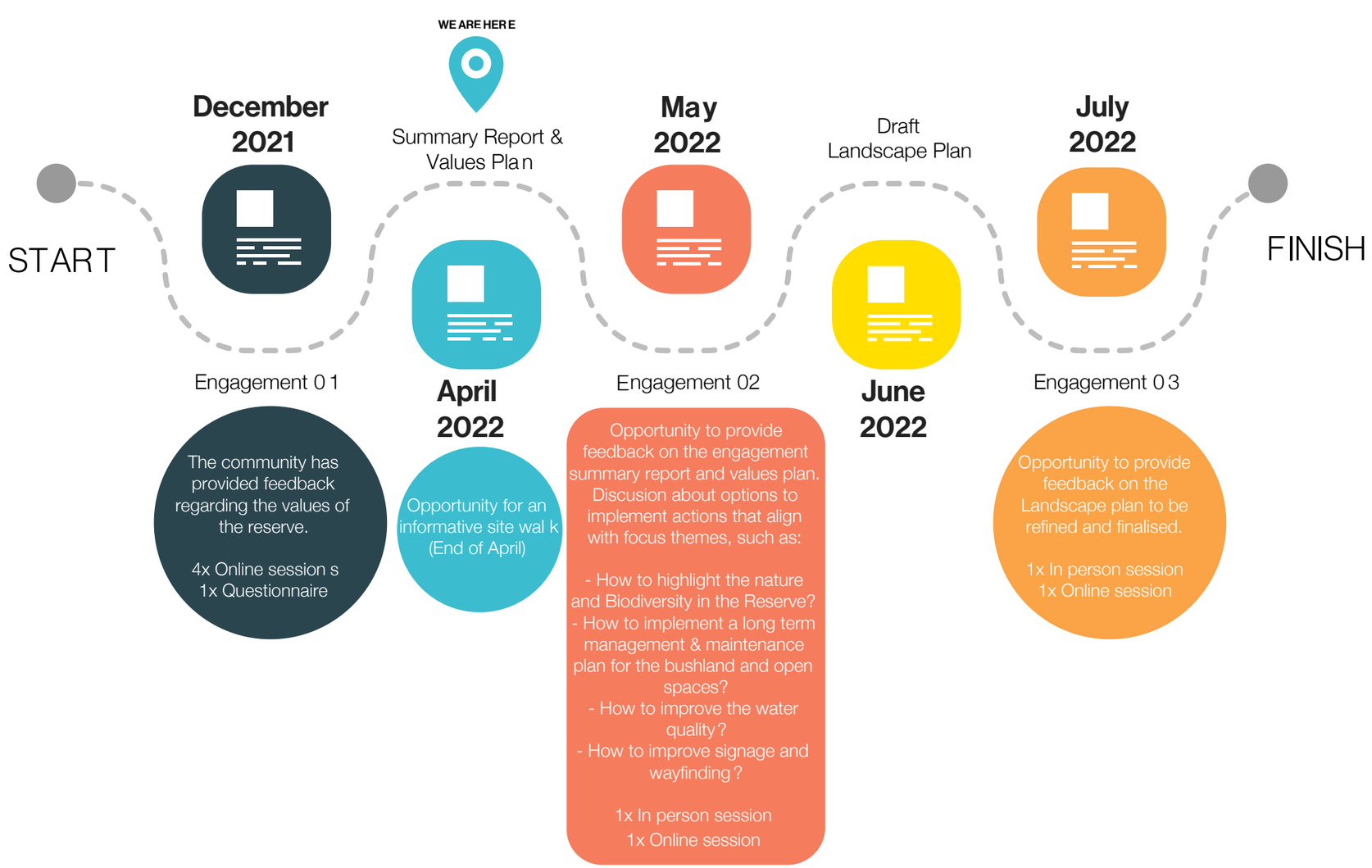
SUMMARY

In order to successfully achieve the desired outcomes for this project, all the information collected and recorded during the community engagement process will be crucial.

Once the preliminary strategy is approved, a draft plan will be developed for public exhibition and community feedback. Once this is endorsed by the community and council, a final direction plan will be concluded.

For a better understanding of the process, please refer to the diagram on the side with a road map of the steps to follow the first engagement round.

For the next engagement sessions and informative sitewalk, keep an eye out for dates and times to be announced by council via e-mail / post.





APPENDIX 01

08

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK TABLE







KEY DISCUSSION POINTS	COMMENTS
CURRENT VALUES AND USES OF THE RESERVE	• Great balance between bushland / wilderness and open space; • Mixture of uses such as walking / dog walking / gathering opportunities as well as bushland walk; • Passive and active recreation value; • Safe space for families and children; • Bike riding, running, exercising, football; • Exploration and hobby opportunities such as photography & film; • Historical and educational values for its former uses and biodiversity; • Observation of wild life including birds, flowers, fungi, frogs, etc; • Formal and informal values in it's character; • Significant Native species within the fauna and flora; • High biological significance • Open flexible spaces are quite valuable and offer a variety of opportunities to the community;
FUTURE FOCUS USES AND VISION	• Interpretative signage including historical and fauna & flora information; • Arts and sculpture could be incorporated; • Cleaning / bin collection / maintenance to be done more often; • Rehabilitation of the creek; • Acknowledgement of the traditional owners. • Plan for improving the water quality is a major need. • Potential community gardens; • More open spaces if possible;
IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED	**Maintenance:** • Improve maintenance by developing a management plan; • Improve the open grass spaces by mowing more often; • Fire management plan replacement of some vegetation; **Accessibility:** • Accessible paths for wheelchairs where possible; • Potential ramps on approach to bridges; • Adequate seating close to the nursing home should be provided; • Revisit the existing steps to make sure they are to standard; **Water Quality:** • Existing creek needs attention and maintenance; • Reinforce creek banks and improve water quality; • Wetland could help improve water quality; • Improve drainage on site; **Other:** • Perhaps inclusion of shade structures; • Perhaps more parking opportunities / parallel parking along Daffodil Rd if possible;; • Drinking fountains with dog bowls; • Signage to existing carparks; • Perhaps exercising circuit could be offered within the reserve; • Picnic settings / tables could be added in specific areas.
MEASURES FOR HABITAT PROTECTION	• Inclusion of vegetation mixes that can improve changes caused by climate change; • Consider wildlife corridors and how to connect this reserve to other reserves; • Support birds life and breed;

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK TABLE





KEY DISCUSSION POINTS	COMMENTS
MEASURES FOR HABITAT PROTECTION	• Provide supplements to different species such as possum or cockatoo boxes; • Pest control ie. foxes and weeds; • Integrate new animal and plant species if possible (ideally native); • Create a plan to replacement of vegetation; • Fences in certain areas can help with habitat protection; • Initiatives to ensure dog poop is picked up; • Tree canopy needs to be enhanced and protected; • Endangered species to be retained and protected; • Initiative for local residents to participate in protecting the habitat i.e. birds / possum boxes to put up or trees planting; • A permanent water element would help native species to sustain in the reserve and attract new species, as the existing creek dries in summer.
CONNECTION TO NATURE	• Keeping the reserve as natural as possible provides a better connection; • The seasons provide different ways of connecting; • A walk under the shade of pine trees; • The balance between the different natural elements is crucial; • Pine's bark is beautiful; • Using the reserve everyday makes one feel connected to the nature within it; • The variety of species within the reserve; • Accessibility to and within the reserve is key for this connection to happen; • Existing fauna and flora offer peace and solice; • Signage that highlights existing biodiversity; • Minimal man made elements; • Respecting and preserving the bushland; • Being able to lay down on the grass; • Quiet areas with seats and views are great for connecting to nature; • Ability to bring the pets to the reserve; • Water presence is important, i.e a lake. • Informative panels about the benefits of nature.
LEGIBILITY AND WAY-FINDING	• Current conditions are fine and provide a sense of direction without a large amount of signs, but these could be upgraded and improved for better navigation; • More educational/ information panels for users awareness of existing biodiversity and environmental aspects, i.e. vegetation species, orchids flowering time, allergies, etc; • Creating a clear loop trail would be good (1Km loop); • QR codes with information could be good; • Line marking and signage on carparks needs improvement; • History and interpretative signage / Acknowledgement of traditional owners;; • A map for first time visitors could be good; • Signage regarding dogs off leash and dog poop bags/picking. • Night sky constellations signs could be nice to have.
OTHER / GENERAL COMMENTS	• Existing creek's name 'Forest Rd Drain' should be renamed to 'Koolunga Creek'; • Promotion of citizen science monitoring via apps • Formally include Vaughan Reserve as part of Koolunga reserve


THANK YOU!

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