ST KILDA BOTANICAL GARDENS PLAY SPACE

Engagement Report

February 2026



Acknowledgement of Country

Wominjeka. Council respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge their legacy and spiritual connection to the land and waterways across the City of Port Phillip and pay our heartfelt respect to their Elders, past, present, and emerging.

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Introduction

Project background

City of Port Phillip is planning a major upgrade of the playspace at the St Kilda Botanical Gardens. The planned upgrade will seek to make the playspace more adventurous, more inclusive and more enjoyable for the diverse community of Port Phillip, including different age groups and abilities.

What we set out to achieve

Council undertook a community engagement program from 17 November to 21 December 2025 to inform a concept design of the botanical gardens play space. The purpose of the engagement was to understand community preferences and ideas for what the play space could look and feel like. Community members were invited to provide feedback on:

- New equipment for the play space
- Current features of the play space to keep, upgrade or remove
- Suggestions or feedback on the overall design of the play space.

About this report

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the St Kilda Botanical Gardens play space engagement. The findings of this report will be used by Council to support the development of concept designs for the upgrade in 2026.

Before reading this report

The following should be considered in reading this report:

- The findings are based on qualitative feedback from people who chose to take part. This means the views shared are not statistically representative of the whole community and may only reflect a portion of local voices.
- While we aim to include diverse perspectives, some community members may have faced barriers to participation, including people with disability, multicultural communities, older people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Participants refers to everyone involved in the engagement; respondents refers to those who answered a specific question or activity.
- The report covers Council-led engagement activities only and does not include community-run or third-party events, surveys or petitions.
- This report was developed through a combination of human analysis and artificial intelligence (AI). Human analysts conducted the primary data analysis. AI tools were used to process and analyse large datasets, identify trends, and generate some preliminary findings. Any AI-generated findings were subsequently reviewed, validated, and interpreted by human analysts with expertise in the subject matter. The final conclusions and interpretations presented in this report represent the considered judgment of these human analysts, even where AI contributed to the data processing.

What we did

Between 17 November and 21 December, 2025 we delivered a range of communications activities to let the community know about the St Kilda Botanical Gardens play space engagement, and collected feedback through a mix of engagement activities.

Communications activities

We used the following methods to increase awareness of the engagement process. Our communications covered both the St Kilda Botanical Gardens play space upgrade and a similar project at the nearby Clarke Reserve.

Table 1. Communications activities

On-site signage x 8	Signs were placed at entrances to the St Kilda Botanical Gardens and at the play space and at the St Kilda Botanical Gardens. The signs announced the engagement process and the opportunity to provide feedback.
Postcards x 4,950	Postcards were distributed to local residences, explaining the engagement process and inviting people to provide feedback.
Emails	Emails were sent to nearby schools, kindergartens and playgroups, inviting them to notify their communities of the opportunity to give feedback.
Newsletter	Project information and an invitation to engage was included in two editions of Council's community engagement newsletter *Help Shape Our City*. An invitation to provide feedback was also included in Council's main newsletter *Divercity* in November 2025.
Social media posts x 6	Social media posts on both Facebook and Instagram promoted the engagement and opportunities to give feedback.

'Have your say' website	Council's dedicated engagement website, 'Have your say', included a page for this project with information on the process, a timeline, contact details, and opportunities to engage.

Engagement activities

To collect feedback from the community we did the following activities:

Table 2. Engagement activities

Survey	This survey collected demographic details about participants, and asked for community feedback on: • What do you love about the play space, and why? • What existing play equipment do you (or your child) most enjoy? • What new play equipment or features would you love to see added? The survey was available online (hardcopy on request). The online survey was available in other languages via machine translation software.
Submission upload via the Council website project page.	The Council website provided a submission portal for community members to upload feedback in the form of word documents, drawings, video or audio.
Neighbourhood Pop-ups x 3	This project delivered a series of pop-ups in neighbourhoods around Port Phillip. These are designed to engage community members who may not otherwise participate. The pop-ups were delivered in the following locations: • Clarke Reserve, Thursday 27 November 2025, 3 pm to 5 pm • St Kilda Botanical Gardens, Saturday 29 November 2025, 9 am to 11 am • Elwood Community Market, Saturday 6 December 2025, 10 am to 1 pm.

Participants were invited to hear about the project, discuss with a staff member, and answer the same questions as the survey.

Reach and participation

The communications program provided a number of different platforms to engage with the community.

Reach through communications activities

Table 3. Communications reach

Activity	Reach	Insights
Social media posts	**Over 8,000**	Across six posts on Facebook and Instagram there were: • 78 likes or reactions • 9 comments • 7 shares • 52 clicks through to 'Have Your Say'.
Newsletters	**Over 14,000**	Across two editions of *Help Shape Our City*, the newsletter was opened 5,656 times and received 63 clicks through to 'Have Your Say' for the play space projects. The November edition of *Divercity* was sent to over 14,000 recipients and received 46 unique clicks through to the 'Have Your Say' page.
'Have your say' website	**261**	Our communications referred interested community members to a landing page shared with the Clarke Reserve project. This page received 488 visits. The subpage focussing on the St Kilda Botanical Gardens project received 357 visits from 261 unique visitors. Most visitors came to the landing page via a direct link (68%). Other visitors were

	referred from social media (18%), search engines (10%) or other websites (4%).

Participation by engagement activity

Approximately 69 community members participated in this engagement process. This was spread across the engagement activities below:

Table 4. Participation by engagement activity

Activity	Number of participants	Insights
Survey	**44**	• The project landing page and online survey provided an accessible way for participants to provide feedback in their own time. Hardcopy and translated surveys were also available. • Women aged 35-49, with children aged 0-5 were the most common survey participants. • Participants in the survey were largely from St Kilda.
Document upload	**6**	• Provided a way for participants to give their feedback in formats suitable to them; feedback was received in the form of documents, audio files and images. • Participants were largely women aged 35-49 with children aged 0-12.
Pop-ups	**19**	• Pop-ups were more successful at engaging local community members and park users. No demographic information was collected at the pop ups

Who we heard from

The following presents information about participation in this engagement.

Demographics

Through our surveys, and document uploads, we asked questions about participants' demographic details. Of the total 69 participants, 49 shared their demographic information with us. The following explores those demographics collected via the survey and document upload.

Age

The most common age group engaged in this program was those aged 35-49 (69%), largely the parents and carers of children who use the play space. This engagement had representation of older age groups 50-84 (18%), many of which were grandparents and carers of children who use the play space. Children and young people are underrepresented in this engagement program. Pop up activities did engage with children and young people through a drawing activity (n=5), however age demographics were not collected. Table 5. below, presents the age breakdown of participants.

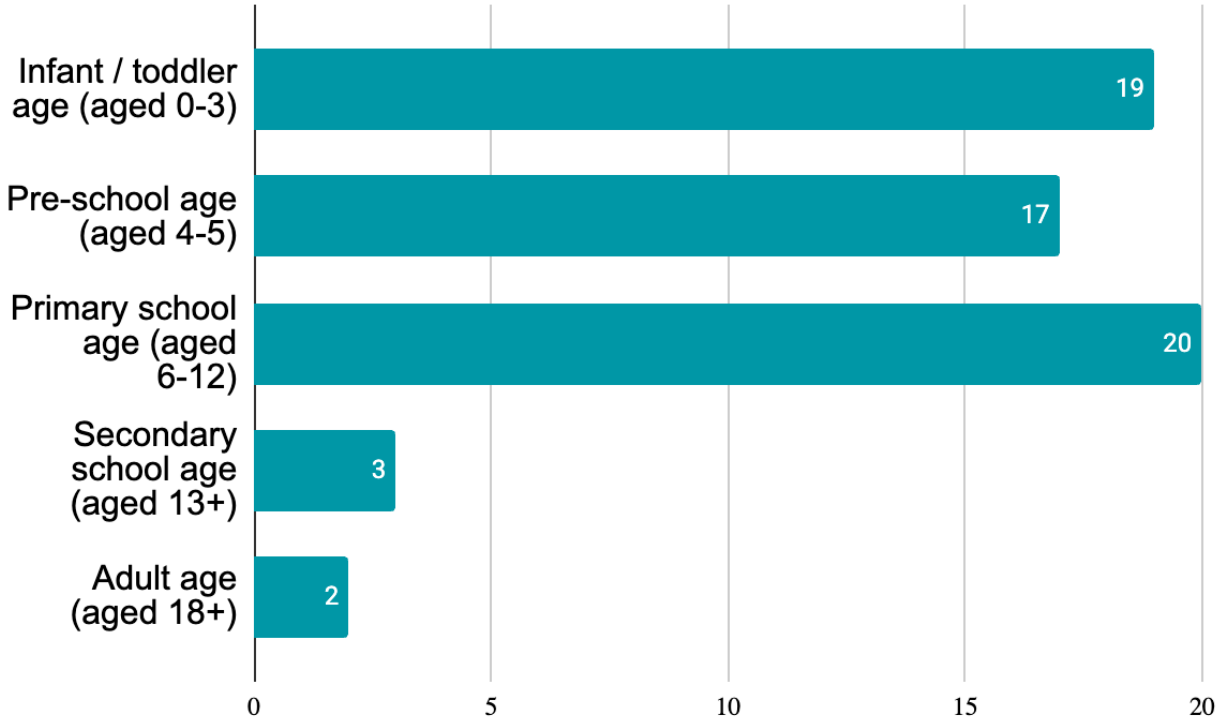
Table 5. Age representation

Age group	Number of participants	%
5 - 11	2	4%
12 - 14	0	0%
15 - 17	0	0%
18 - 24	0	0%
25 - 34	2	4%
35 - 49	34	69%
50 - 59	4	8%
60 - 69	4	8%
70 - 84	1	2%
85 and over	0	0%
I'd prefer not to say	2	4%
Total	**49**	**100%**

Source: survey, document upload

Participants who cared for children were also asked to provide the age groups of the children they represented. Overall, the most common age groups represented were primary school aged children (0-3, 33%), infant and toddlers (4-5, 31%) and Pre-school aged children (4-5, 28%). This engagement had less representation from older children and young people (13+, 8%). Figure 1. presents the age groups represented by parents/carers in this engagement.

Figure 1. Ages of the children represented by participants in this engagement

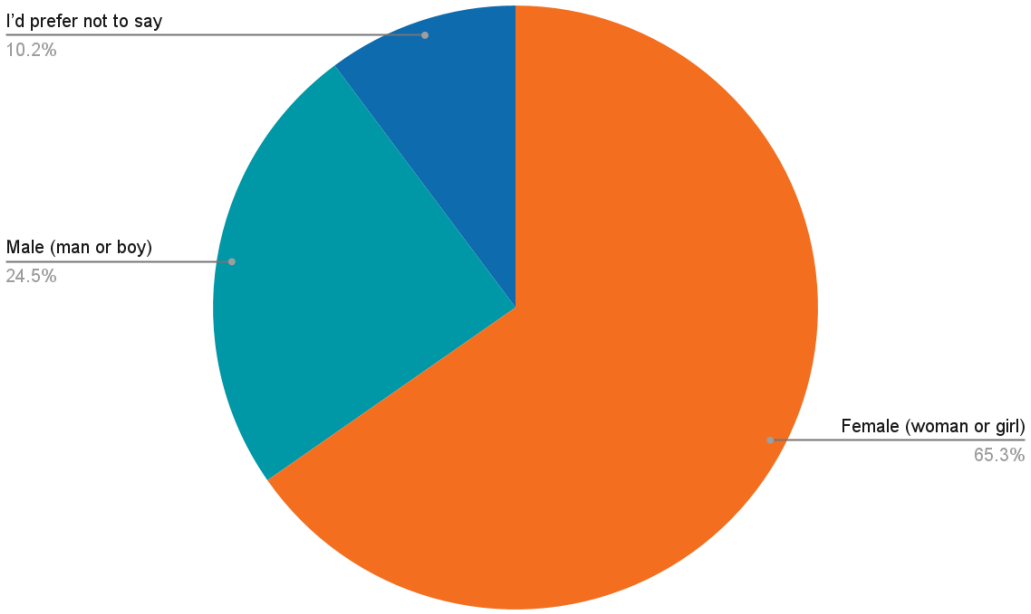


Source: Survey, document upload

Gender

Participants were asked to indicate which gender they identify with. There were a total of 49 participants who provided a response. Women (n=32, 65.3%) were overrepresented in this engagement in comparison to men (n=12, 24.5%) and other genders (0%). Figure 2. below, presents this breakdown.

Figure 2. Participation by gender.



Source: survey, document upload

Residential Location.

Participants were asked to provide their suburb of residence. Engagement participants were largely from neighbouring locations with the highest participation from St Kilda (n=23, 47%) followed by Elwood (n=19, 39%), Balaclava and St Kilda East with n=3 (6%) participants respectively and one participant (2%) from Middle Park.

Diversity and inclusion

To ensure we hear from a diversity of voices in our community, we asked people if they identified with any of the following statements. The statements included:

- 'I speak a language other than English at home' (n=4 responses).
- 'I am a person with a disability' (n=3 responses).
- 'I identify as LGBTIQA+' (n=2 responses).

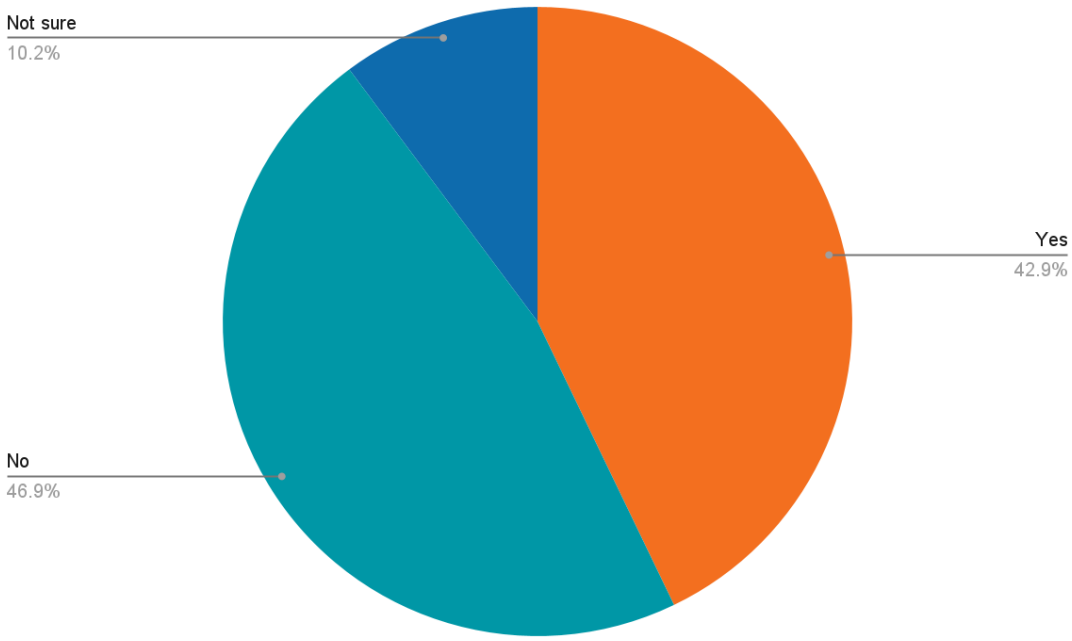
- 'I am from an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background' (n=0 responses).

A total of 34 participants identified as none of the above and a total of 6 participants preferred not to say.

To help us understand if we were engaging with new community members, we asked participants had provided feedback on any other Council projects in the past 12 months.

In total, 43% of participants (n= 21) said they had provided feedback to Council in the past 12 months; 47% of participants (n=23) said they had not, and 10% were unsure (n=5). Figure 3. displays this breakdown.

Figure 3. Participants who provided feedback on any other City of Port Phillip projects in the past 12 months.



Source: survey, document upload

What we heard

Key findings

The following sections present the key findings across all engagement activities.

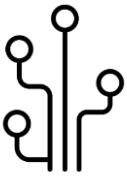
What participants love about the current play space

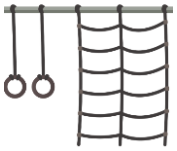
Participants in the survey and pop ups were asked the question; 'What do you love about the play space, and why?'. There were a total of 52 open-ended responses to this question. This feedback has been analysed using a coding framework to capture common themes. Some participants mentioned more than one theme in their comments and these mentions have been counted accordingly.

Overall, the positive things participants mentioned the most about the Botanical Gardens play space were: Connection to nature and the botanical gardens setting; including planting, natural elements and materials used (n=18), the heritage features of the playspace; including the rotunda, play equipment and artworks (n=16) and the layout of the space being easy to get to, move around in and able to accommodate many visitors in ample space (n=10). Table 6. below presents a breakdown of the themes mentioned by participants with a description and verbatim quotes.

Table 6. Features of the play space participants love most

	**Connection to nature and the Botanical Gardens setting**	The Botanical Gardens setting, mature trees, plantings and large green spaces to use. The natural materials	*"It blends harmoniously with its environment. The neutral tones, natural materials, and thoughtful scale of the equipment*

	(n=18)	used, lack of plastic and connection to local wildlife.	*allow the botanical garden to remain the star. Children play among the trees, not despite them…connects children with nature while they play".*
	**Heritage features (n=16)**	Unique heritage features and 'vintage feel' of the play space and botanical gardens including artworks, play equipment, towers, rocket ship and metal structures.	*"The vintage feel to some of the sculpted and metal elements: that an actual artist was involved, not just a plastic factory".*
	**Layout (n=10)**	Participants enjoyed the variety of spaces and equipment, spread out to accommodate lots of people. Participants also mentioned the space being enclosed and safe and well integrated with the natural places in the gardens.	*"There is plenty of green space to run around and have a picnic even if there are other parties around. It prevents overcrowding and naturally helps to space out kids playing in a small area".*
	**Play experience (n=9)**	Participants enjoyed the kinds of play this place evoked through its design and elements: nature play, equipment for different ages, imaginative play, quiet and reflective play, sensory and creative play.	*"These wonderfully eccentric St Kilda items need to be there for future generations of Gardens visitors to fly around the Solar System, ponder the meaning of the motor-bike-riding rabbits, and slide down via the ceramic fish and flowers!".*
	**Accessibility (n=8)**	The play space location in the Botanical Gardens is easy to get to and well integrated with good disability access.	*"Love the position of the park, easily accessible and there are lots of grassed spaces and trees for different uses of space in that corner of the botanical gardens".*

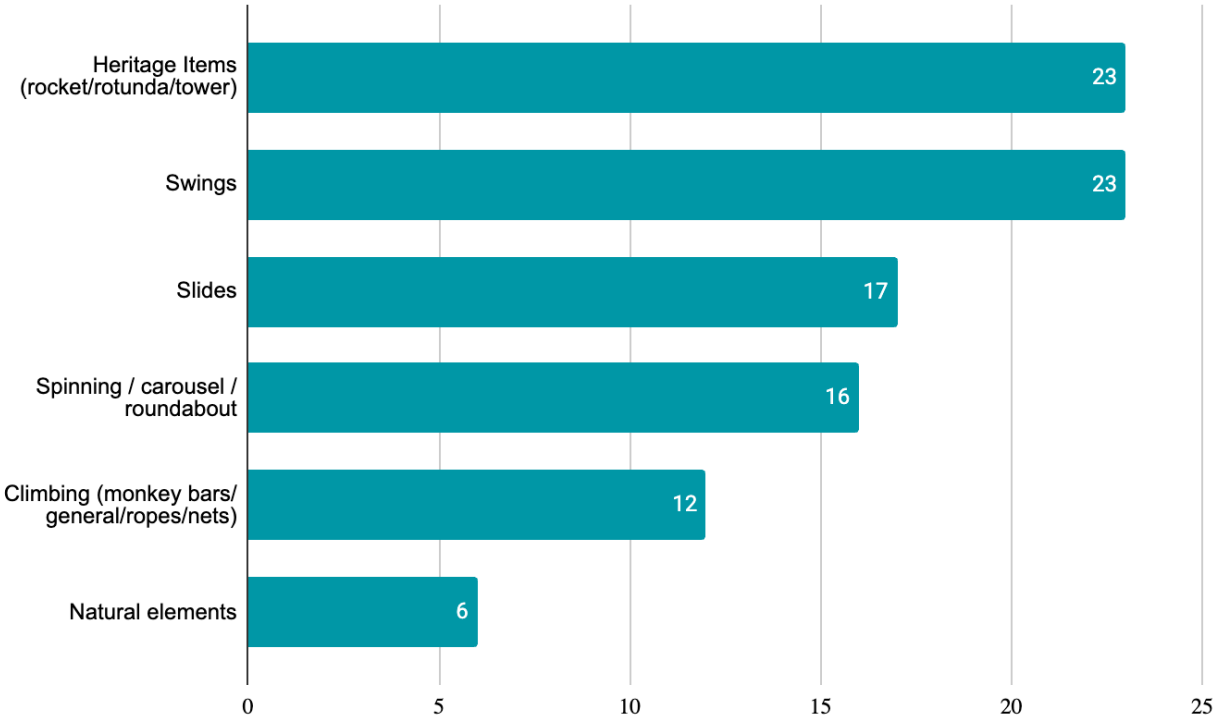
	**Suggested maintenance or upgrade (n=7)**	Participants suggested upgrades to the space; safer play equipment, more diverse play equipment, refresh of the equipment, more seating, enhancing/ refreshing existing features.	*"Nothing for a child under 18 to play on".*
	**Slides (n=7)**	Participants enjoyed the slides at the play space.	*"The slides are great—very long and safer than others as they go along the hill. The slide for little ones is also great".*
	**Climbing (n=6)**	Participants who enjoyed the climbing equipment such as tower, monkey bars, metal climbing frame. Participants described these as safe and accessible.	*"The metal climbing frames - they seem safer".*
	**Seating, picnics and BBQ (n=5)**	Participants who enjoyed the amenity, playspaces integrated with seating areas and spots for picnicking	*"There is plenty of green space to run around and have a picnic even if there are other parties around".*
	**Swings (n=4)**	Participants who loved the swings and spinning frame at the play space.	*"We like the new swings".*

Source: pop ups, survey, document upload

Play equipment participants enjoy

Participants in the survey and at pop ups were asked the question; 'What existing play equipment do you (or your child) most enjoy?'. There were a total of 47 responses to this question. Figure 4. below shows the top play equipment mentioned.

Figure 4. Play equipment participants most enjoy.



Source: pop ups, survey, document upload

Participants also made comments about maintenance and upgrades of play equipment as well as the design of the play space. The top themes that participants mentioned are displayed in Table 7. below.

Table 7. Suggested improvements to existing play equipment

	**Suggested maintenance or upgrade to play equipment (n=7)**	Upgrading the play equipment to ensure safety and accessibility, while maintaining the look and feel of the space. Replacing play equipment that is unsafe.	*"Best to leave everything as it is…just make it safe. Please don't turn the beautiful spot into a sterile 'run of the mill'playground".* *"Mostly the rocket but it's old and rusty. All equipment should go".*

	**Maintaining the look and feel (n=9)**	Replacing or expanding the equipment but maintaining the sense of heritage and imaginative play opportunities. Participants wanted to preserve the artistic and creative unique features, use of steel and other non-plastic materials.	*"I really like how the slides with the bridge and tower structure used local artist artwork, this definitely needs to be incorporated".*
	**Improving accessibility and safety (n=4)**	Providing a diversity of equipment for all age groups. Ensuring safe use for toddlers. Including use of mulch bark, less steep slides or steps.	*"A lot of the stuff isn't very safe for our 2 year old".*
	**Layout and visibility (n=2)**	Maintaining the spacious layout and ample space between play equipment. Improving visibility across the play areas.	*"It has low visibility for watching children and doesn't have a lot of visual community in it"*

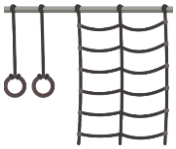
Source: pop ups, survey, document upload

Suggested improvements to the play space

Participants were asked the question; 'What new play equipment or features would you love to see added?'. There were a total of 64 responses to this question and these comments were analysed for common themes. Overall, the most common suggestions were to improve or expand climbing equipment (n=20), followed by incorporating more natural elements and nature play (n=20) and introducing water play or other imaginative or sensory elements

(n=15). Table 8. below presents a breakdown of participant preferences for improvements.

Table 8. Suggested improvements to the play space.

	**Improve/ expand climbing equipment (n=20)**	Updating climbing equipment and providing more variety for different age ranges and levels of confidence. Include: ropes courses, ladders, bouldering walls, natural climbing structures and softfall for safety.	*"Climbing equipment like at Booran reserve is great for slightly older kids".*
	**Incorporate more natural elements (n=20)**	Nature play, use of natural materials; mulch, bark, creeks, garden beds and sandpits for children to play in. Increase planting and do not remove existing trees.	*"Garden beds that kids can play in and dig around in. Large rocks that hold pools of water to encourage imaginative play".*
	**Water play (n=15)**	Introducing water play elements; splash pad, stream or creek, water pumps, fountains for play and cooling off on hot days.	*"A splash pad would provide cooling relief during Melbourne's hot summers, create opportunities for different types of sensory and imaginative play, use water sustainably (with recycling systems), could be designed to fit naturally into the space".*
	**Imaginative, educational and sensory play (n=15)**	Preserve the open-ended play that the play space encourages. Include; educational elements about First Nations history, engagement with	*"More interactive pieces for children to explore which incorporate elements of the surrounding nature/environment. Educational element would be good".*

		plants and animals of the botanical garden, musical elements, houses or structures for imagination games.	
	**Maintaining the look and feel (n=14)**	Replacing or expanding the equipment but maintaining the sense of heritage, imaginative play in the look and feel of the play space. Participants wanted to preserve the artistic, creative and unique features, use of steel and other non-plastic materials.	*"...any added/replaced equipment should be sympathetic to the surrounds and not too tacky/cheesy/colourful".*
	**Seating, picnicking and BBQs (n=12)**	Expand seating areas to accommodate parties and picnics, shaded seating areas, seating for parents/grandparents to supervise children.	*"I visit every day with my granddaughter. It would be great to have more comfortable benches around the play equipment".*
	**Swings (n=12)**	Upgrade and expand swings. Safe swings for young children. Shared swings/baskets.	*"A giant bird's nest swing, a 5-way swing".*
	**General maintenance and upgrade (n=12)**	Upgrades to existing features to ensure safety/refresh; rotunda, rocketship. General maintenance of play equipment and grounds. Cleaning and hygiene of play areas; dog poo, lawns, soft fall, mulch.	*"better slides, the submarine/rocket talking thing is very cool but doesn't work".* *"there is always dog poo in the vicinity left by dog walkers who do not pick up. (Probably the minority but still a negative impact on*

			other park users with little kids)".
	**Provide diversity for different age groups (n=11)**	Update, expand equipment to cater for young children safely (1-4 yr olds). Provide more equipment for older children to play on (7-12 yr olds).	*"To cater for a range of age groups and safer more modern play equipment (including our 5 & 7 year olds)".*
	**Zipline/flying fox (n=11)**	Provide a flying fox for all ages.	*"Something like a Flying Fox would be a good feature. Maybe two to cater for different sizes, age or ability".*
	**Shade/ shelter (n=11)**	Create more shade and shelter; natural tree canopy, shade sails for hot days, some indoor/undercover equipment for rainy day play.	*"Shade and seating are increasingly important due to changing climate — nature-based shading preferred".*
	**Improve/ expand slides (n=10)**	Refurbish existing slides, provide new, larger, safer or enclosed slides. Slides accessible on hot days.	*"a modern plastic slide with side walls incorporated into a larger piece of play equipment with some climbing modules".*
	**Risky play/ challenge (n=10)**	Opportunities for risky play and developing skills: adventure playgrounds, boulders/rocks, balancing beams. Natural materials preferred.	*"More balancing structures and risky play opportunities".*

	**Trampolines (n=9)**	Include inground trampoline(s). Trampolines as part of the landscape. Separate trampolines for younger/older children.	*"In-built trampoline".*
	**Art, colour, sculptures (n=8)**	Incorporate more unique elements like cubby houses, sculptures, artworks, bright colours to encourage imagination play.	*"Sculptural elements about local flora and fauna, Indigenous stories".* *"Cubbies!".*
	**Improved layout and visibility (n=5)**	Maintaining different zones for play, while clustering areas of equipment together so that children can be supervised easily.	*"The biggest issue with the playground is that it's impossible for a parent to find a place to sit where you can supervise children going to all different areas of the playground. Shaded benches/grass areas for picnics which have a view of all play spaces so children are free to run around to all play areas without parents having to follow them".*
● ● ●	**Other (n=10)**	Participants suggested: - improving accessibility: pedestrian safety to access park, pedestrian safety within the park (lips, garden beds, mulch) (n=3) - Incorporating sports features: bike facilities,	*"...smoothing the tam bark circles concrete in a way that blends the soft bark into the grass without stepping up and over a small concrete barrier".*

		basketball, pump track (n=3) . - improved dog management, changing dog times (n=2) - public toilets close by (n=2)	
	**No change (n=5)**	Participants who wanted to preserve the play space as is.	*"None added! Keep to the same footprint!".*

Source: pop ups, survey, document upload

A number of participants also mentioned good precedents or other examples of play spaces they liked that could be used as inspiration for the upgrade (n=14). The top places mentioned were; Thomas St Reserve, Melbourne Botanic Gardens play space, Elwood beach playground, JJ Holland Park Flemington, Ormond Point, Albert Park, Booran Reserve and Hillview Reserve.

Next steps

Next steps

The results of this engagement will inform the development of concept designs for the playspace.