



Back to Nature

The Sunshine Coast
Ecological Park
Master Plan - DRAFT

A refuge for people and wildlife, creating ecological habitat, encouraging nature-based recreation, interaction and learning.





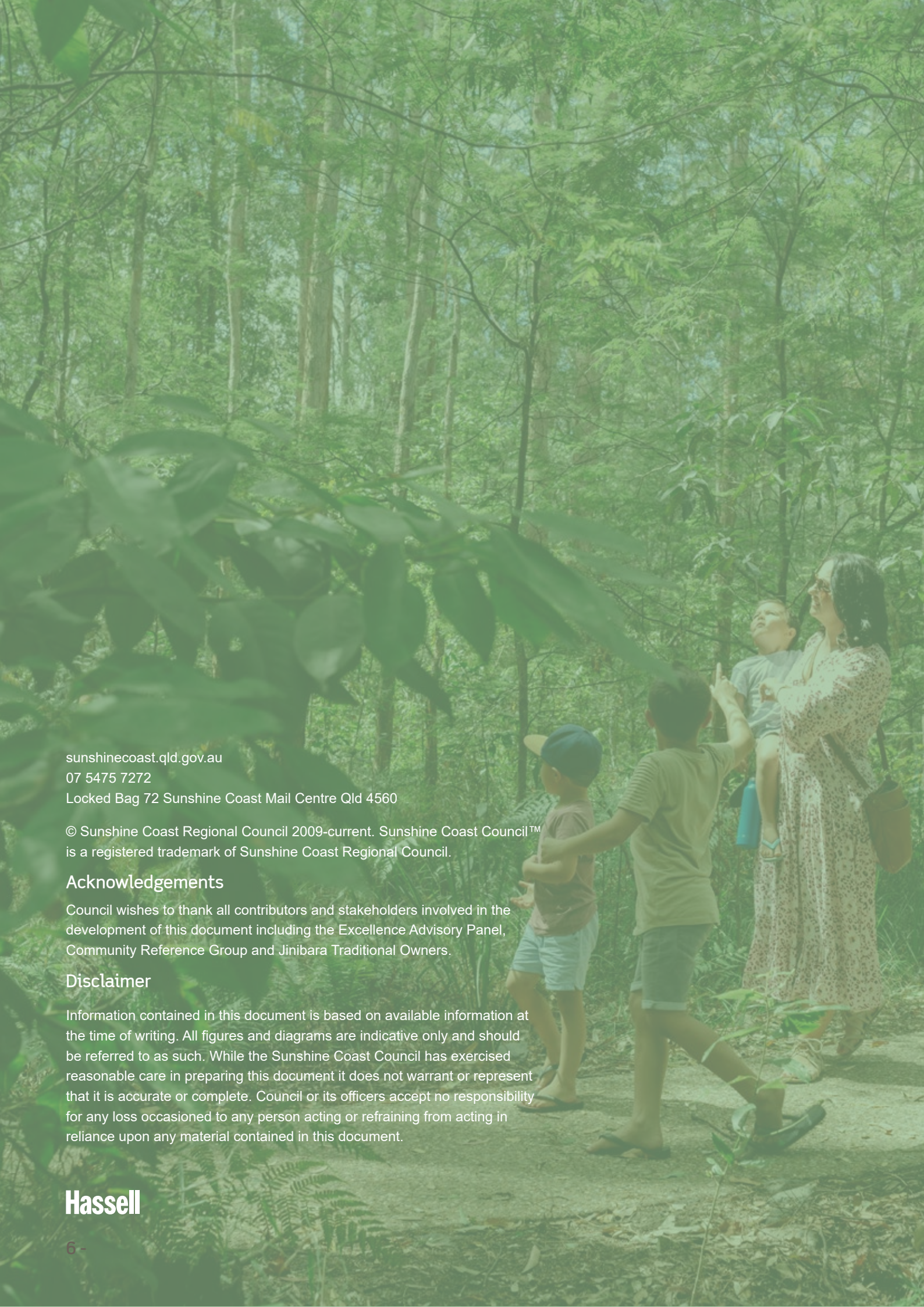
Acknowledgement of Country

Sunshine Coast Council acknowledge the Jinibara and Kabi Kabi peoples and the peoples whose lands and waters we all now share. The Traditional Owners' unique values and ancient and enduring cultures deepen and enrich the life of our communities.

Through important cultural events such as the Bunya Festival, this region has been a place of celebration, abundance, connection and kinship for thousands of years.

Every three years from December to February, thousands of First Nations people from across Queensland descended on the Sunshine Coast to feast on the bunya nut, meet friends and relatives, and engage in trade, governance meetings, cultural activities, marriages and dispute settlement. Many people walked hundreds of kilometres for this important festival.

Truth telling is a significant part of our journey. We are committed to better understanding the collective history of the Sunshine Coast and the experiences of First Nations people. Legacy issues resulting from colonisation are still experienced by Traditional Owners and First Nations people. We recognise our shared history and will continue to work in partnership to provide a foundation for building a shared future with the Jinibara people and the Kabi Kabi people. Sunshine Coast Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Sunshine Coast, and pays respects to their elders past, present and emerging.



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Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer

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01 Introduction

‘Back to Nature’ the Sunshine Coast Ecological Park Master Plan, establishes a framework for a new destinational park which expands the green space of the region.

The project provides an opportunity to create a unique park in-tune with the natural environment. The new Ecological Park will service the entire Sunshine Coast, providing a significant green space for people to enjoy, while celebrating the amazing biodiversity of the region's natural environment.

Purpose of this Master Plan

This Master Plan provides a road map to guide the park's establishment and evolution for coming generations. The plan reflects a range of ideas and strategies that have been informed by stakeholder engagement, community feedback and technical investigations.

Policy context

Sunshine Coast Council has a strong established policy framework to support facilitating the vision of the Sunshine Coast as 'Australia's most sustainable region - healthy, smart, creative'. Two key policies provide the strategic framework for the Ecological Park:

1. The Environment and Liveability Strategy 2017 provides detailed strategic directions for the natural and the built environment, with a strong focus on integration. It contains policy positions relating to themes of landscape character, social infrastructure, biodiversity, open space and sustainable design, which are all overarching drivers for the Ecological Park. To activate and implement these policy positions, the following transformational actions contribute to these themes:

- Transformational Action 14
- 'Expanding the green space
- Securing and activating space for future generations through an accelerated strategic land program to improve conservation, flood mitigation and sport and recreation opportunities'.
- Transformational Action 14.4
- 'Establish the ... Ecological Park Land as a major conservation and recreation destination for the region'.

2. Council's Corporate Plan 2021-2025 includes a Strategic Priority to 'expand the green space by establishing five major green spaces, two major sport and recreation precincts, creating a major Ecological Park and continuing to work with major developers to secure public land'. The five major green spaces are identified in both the Environment and Liveability Strategy 2017 and Council's Corporate Plan:

- 1 Regional Inter-urban Break
- 2 The Coast
- 3 The Blue Heart
- 4 Lower Mooloolah River
- 5 Mountain View

The Ecological Park is located within the 'Mountain View' green space and provides an opportunity to strengthen and expand the existing Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve (MCSR) in the Sunshine Coast hinterland.

+ The Ecological Park is a project of regional significance providing opportunities for nature-based tourism and investment in the region



Part of the Sunshine Coast's continued green future

Responding to growth

The Sunshine Coast is well known for its natural beauty and green spaces. These green spaces surround our neighbourhoods and towns contributing to both the liveability and identity of the region. The region's national parks, environmental reserves and recreation parks provide space for conservation, visual relief, as well as sport and recreation.

As the Sunshine Coast continues to grow and emerge as a city-region, it is well positioned to respond to the opportunities and challenges that rapid population growth will bring over the coming decades. The region's current population of nearly 350,000 people is projected to continually grow in the next 20 years, to over 500,000 residents by 2041. This growth has the potential to place increased pressure on existing coastal parks and green spaces.

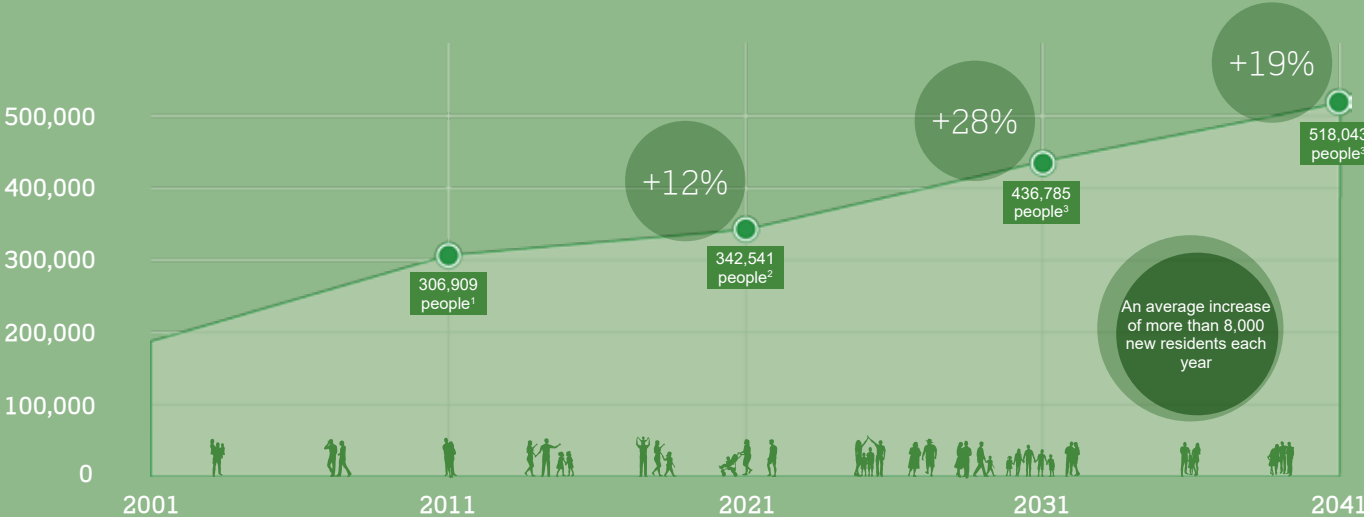
The Ecological Park is a significant opportunity to assist in alleviating the shortfall of Council-wide recreation parks and take pressure off coastal parks - which already well already well utilised.

Continued green future

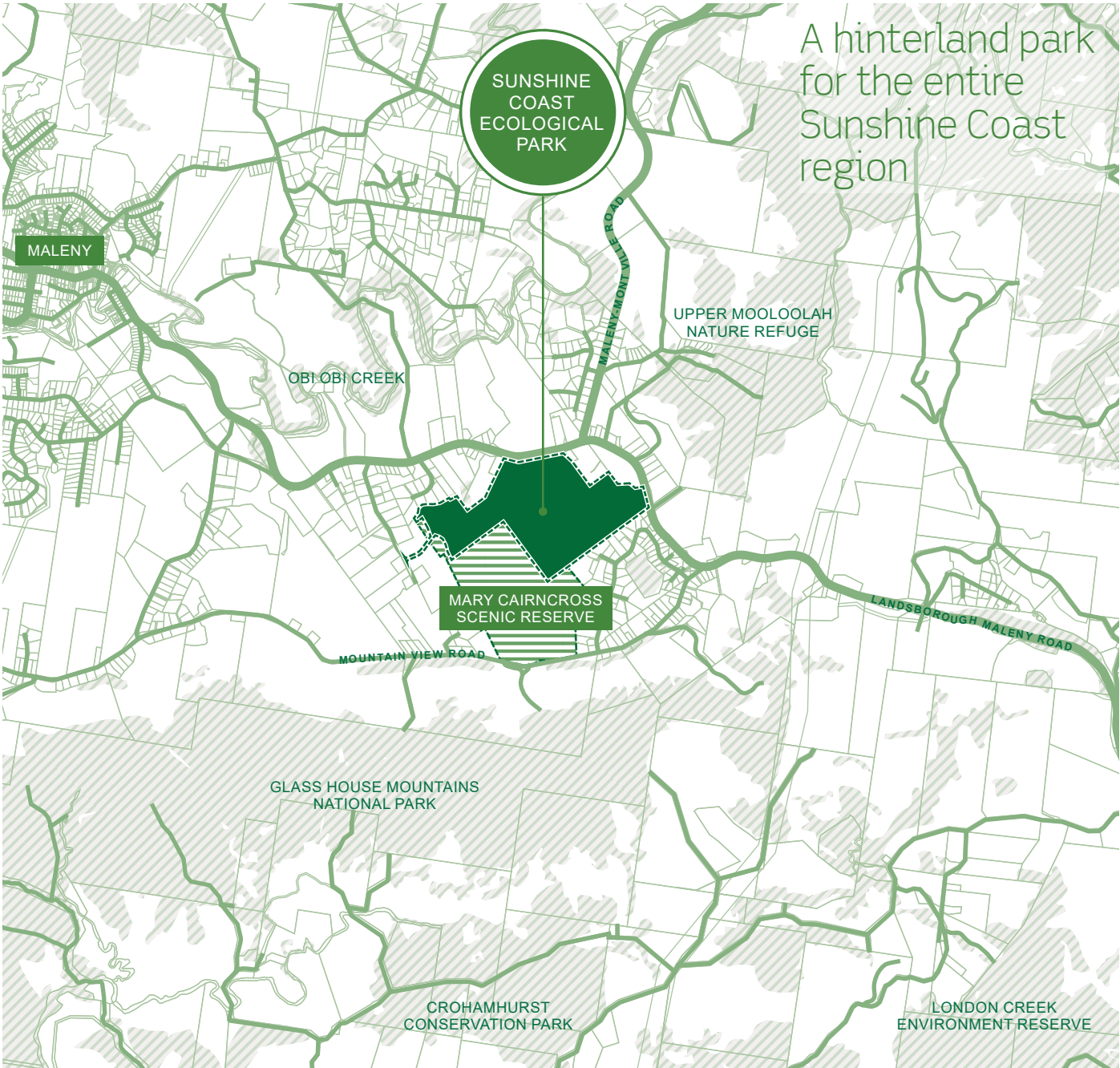
A key priority of Council's Environment and Liveability Strategy is to maintain the rate of open space to 5ha per 1,000 residents and ensure an equitable distribution of publicly accessible open space . The Strategy also targets a no net loss of biodiversity by 2041, and recognising the need to guard against loss of native vegetation.

The Sunshine Coast Ecological Park (SCEP) will expand and enhance the Sunshine Coast's open space network in the hinterland area of Mountain View. It will establish a major green space to bolster the Sunshine Coast's liveability for all residents and visitors for years to come. The Ecological Park will celebrate the landscape, create connections and support nature-based recreation, as well as compliment the existing adjacent Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve.

The park will continue the Sunshine Coast's legacy as a green and sustainable city - boosting the attractiveness of the region.



Source:
 1 2011 population figure sourced from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Census of Population and Housing 2011
 2 2021 population figure sourced from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Census of Population and Housing 2021
 3 2021-2041 population figures sourced from Queensland Treasury, Queensland Government population projections, 2018 edition, medium series



Strong ties to Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve

The Sunshine Coast Ecological Park is a major new open space with the potential to become a regionally significant destination. Strategically located adjacent the natural jewel of Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve (MCSR), the park presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to strengthen and expand this ecological asset.

Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve comprises 55 hectares of subtropical rainforest overlooking the Glass House Mountains. The Reserve is a living museum of diverse plant and animal life that once covered the Blackall Range and an amazing ecological asset for the community to enjoy. The Sunshine Coast Ecological Park will deliver a 'release-valve' from the current visitor pressures on MCSR and protect the diverse ecological value of the old growth forest.

The Ecological Park will heal Country - embracing First Nation's cultural knowledge and continue the work of caring for and protecting the Country that sustains us

Background

Council acquired 65 hectares of land between 2016 and 2018 for the creation of the Ecological Park. Four rural lots were purchased using funds from the Sunshine Coast Council Environment Levy and the Local Government Infrastructure Program – Parks and Land for Community Facilities.

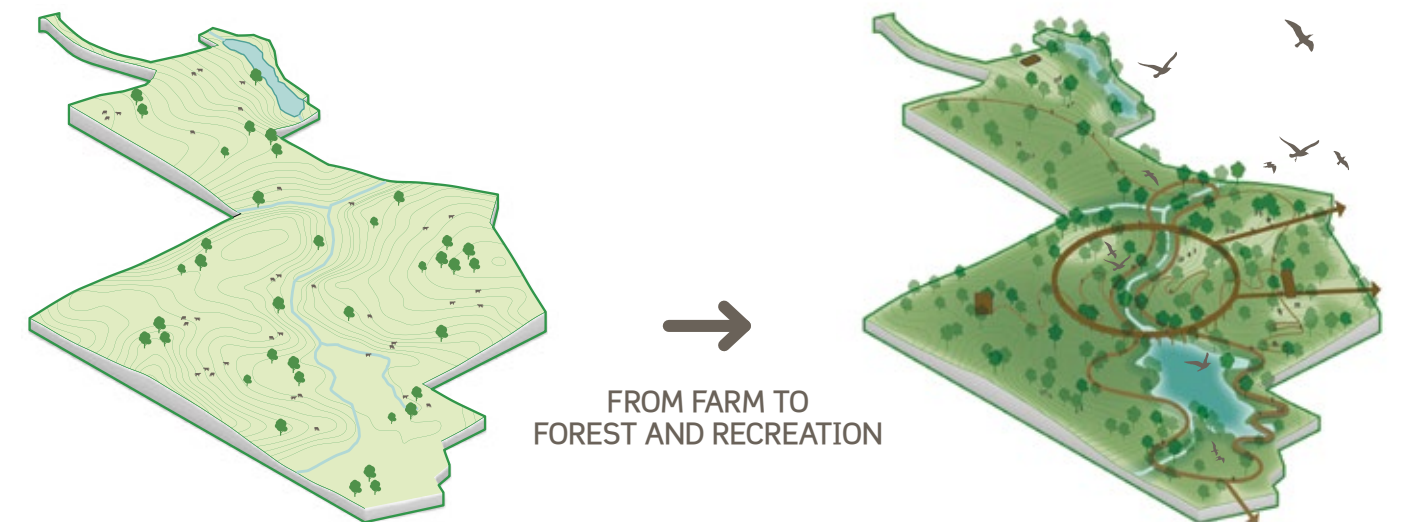
Prior to colonisation the site was part of a lush subtropical rainforest ecosystem, featuring waterways and undulating topography. It was, and still is, the land of the Jinibara People. In recent history the site has been modified for farming practices through clearing of remnant vegetation and alterations to the waterways and wetlands.

The Ecological Park will be a story of repair, recreation and education, that delivers significant environmental and social benefits. The project will transform existing pastoral land into a cherished park space, that will grow and develop with the Sunshine Coast community. The existing farmland provides an unfettered canvas to realise unique nature-based spaces, amenity and elements. Affording opportunity for curated community and cultural programming within a restored forest setting.

The park will provide a green asset that allows people to have a deep engagement with nature and be inspired by a Traditional Owner philosophy of 'Healing of Country'.

BACK TO NATURE

Healing of Country



Returning endemic rainforest to create a legacy for future generations



A new kind of park

The Ecological Park presents a significant opportunity to create a new style of park that considers people, wildlife, resources and vegetation equally - a genuine balance of recreation and ecological restoration.

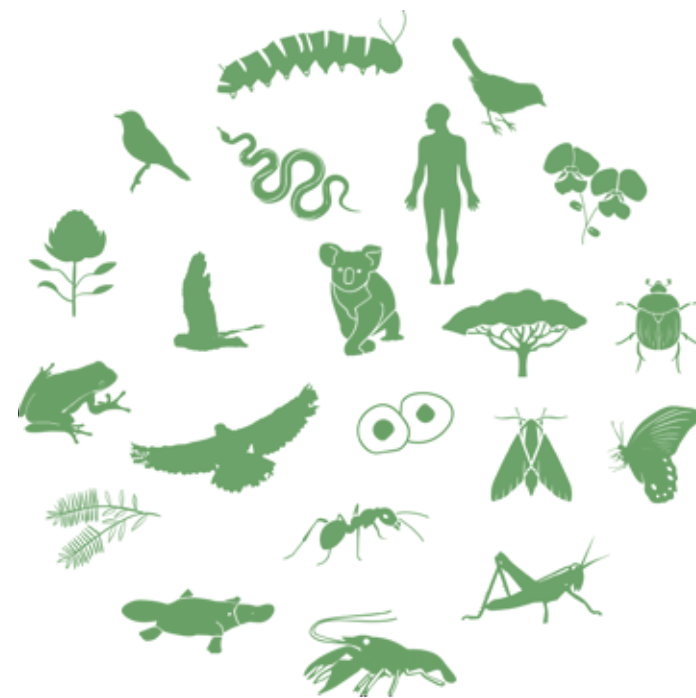
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HUMAN-CENTRIC TRADITIONAL PARK

Source:

1 Diagram adapted from German architect Steffen Lehmann, Eco v Ego diagram 2010

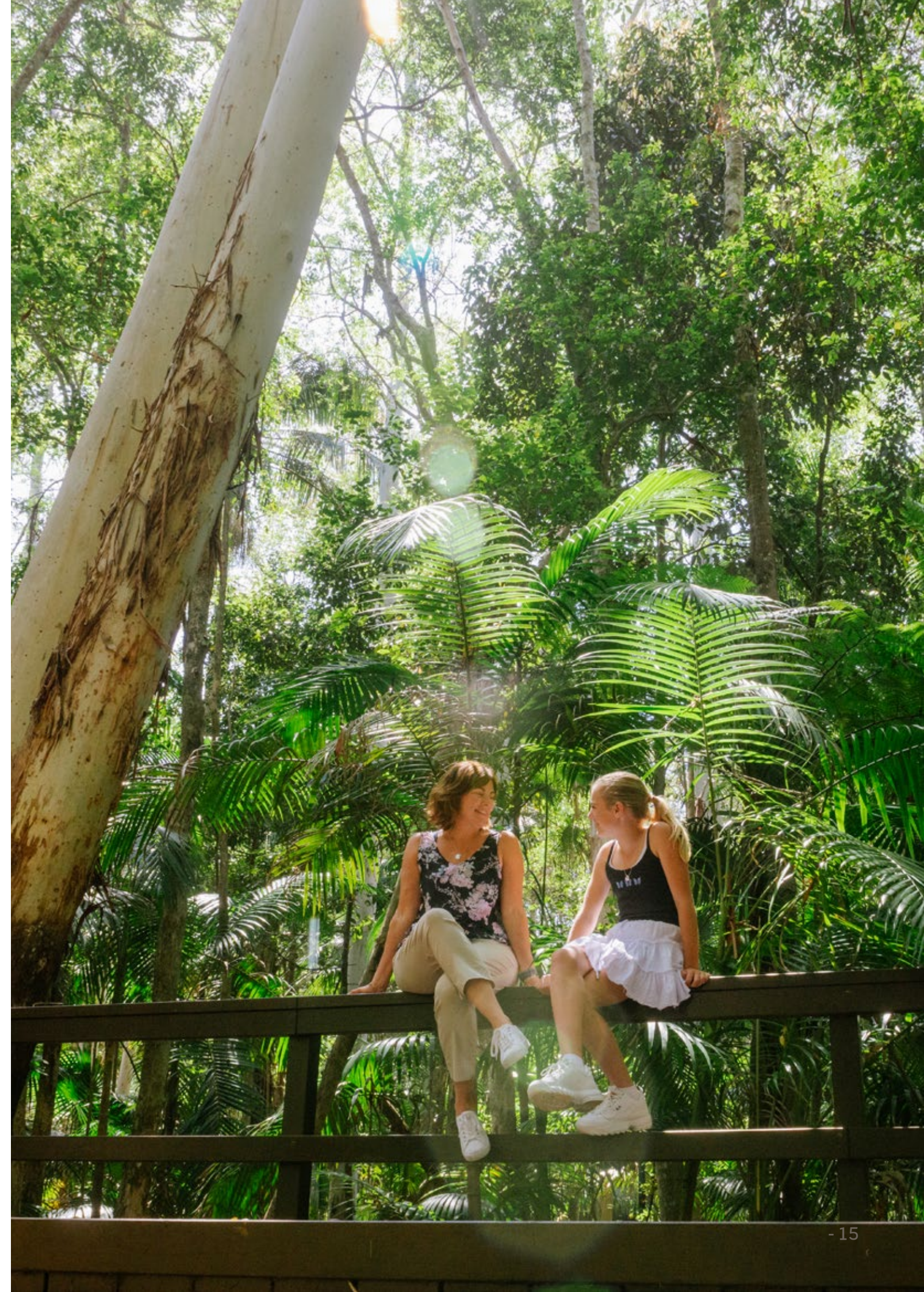


NEW CO-HABITATION ECOLOGICAL PARK

Cohabitation

The Ecological Park will create a distinct open space that balances the needs of people, wildlife, resources and vegetation equally; a place that establishes a genuine balance of recreation and ecological restoration.

The concept for the park explores the idea of co-habitation, which fosters a relationship within living systems and a sharing of the same place. It is critical that we expand open spaces design beyond a 'human-centric' approach, conceived for our 'own' personal comfort and create a shared space for all species. A place which aligns with First Nation ideas of 'Caring for Country' and creates habitat and space for all.



02 Our Vision

A place of cherished nature and ecological wonder for generations to discover and enjoy

Strategic process

To ensure that the Ecological Park delivers on Council's vision, environment and liveability aspirations, as well as community feedback, a strategic process has been developed to guide all phases of the project.



The 'Vision' provides an aspirational narrative of the place outcome and guides the evolution of the project. It acts as sounding board to test future planning and decisions.

The 'Values' establish a framework to guide decision making, aligning ideas and investment to deliver the vision.

The 'Functions' articulate the vision and values into core themes and the primary roles of the project. They provide direction to the strategies of delivery and the key physical elements.

The 'Strategies' provide specific moves to realise the vision, values and functions.

A spatial reflection of the vision, values, functions and strategies that responds to the site's physical attributes, opportunities and constraints.

Our Values

- 1

AN ECOLOGICALLY VALUABLE, RESILIENT AND CONNECTED LANDSCAPE.
- 2

A PLACE THAT WELCOMES PEOPLE TO LEARN, PLAY AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE FUTURE.
- 3

A PLACE TO BE INSPIRED BY NATURE.
- 4

AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE THAT PROMOTES BALANCE, RESPITE AND REVIVAL.
- 5

A PLACE OF UNEXPECTED AND SPONTANEOUS DISCOVERY.
- 6

A PLACE THAT SHARES THE STORIES OF LOCAL PEOPLE AND THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE REGION.

A park that will grow and develop with the Sunshine Coast community



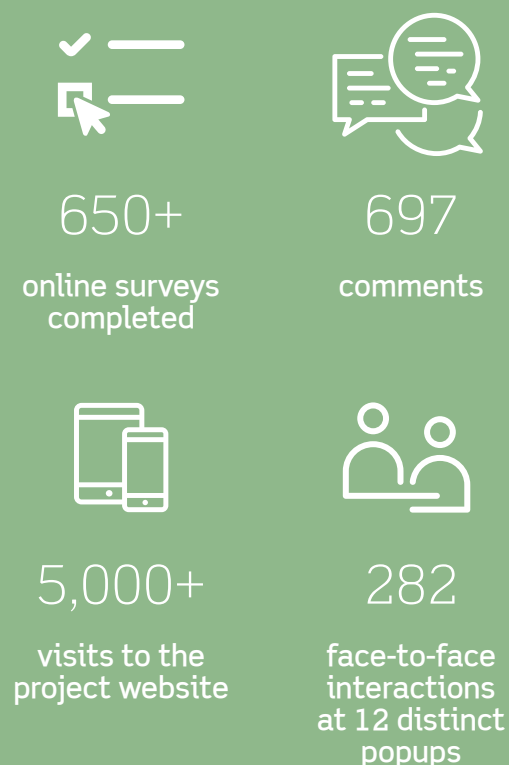
03 Community Consultation

This Master Plan has been prepared with the input from the community to ensure that the project delivers a balanced mix of park activities, education and ecological restoration.

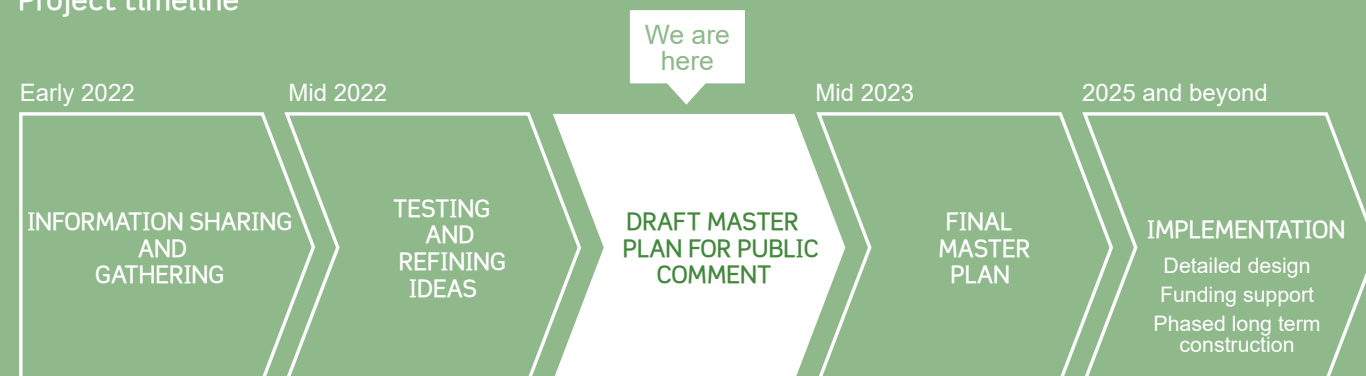
Engagement process

To guide this Master Plan, the community was asked to contribute their ideas and input for the Ecological Park. The park's vision, values, strategies and a draft concept were shared to help shape the direction of this Master Plan. Engagement activities included pop-ups, online questionnaires, advisory groups, information sessions and meetings with Jinibara Traditional Owners were conducted.

The engagement activities highlighted three core themes that were important to the community. These themes have formed the basis of this Master Plan strategies, and have defined the three overarching functions of the park.



Project timeline



Three key themes emerged from community engagement:

Recreation and Wellness

Nature based recreation was supported, with a preference for creating places of calm respite and passive activities in nature. There was a desire to avoid highly active elements such as zip-lines and sports fields. The creation of a variety of safe and comfortable outdoor rooms that provide a range of experiences and natural adventures, including nature-play was supported.

Respondents identified the creation of a network of connected paths and trails, both within and linking outside the park as important. Walking trails were well supported and identified as the highest priority for survey participants.

Community feedback was strongly in favour of accessibility for people with mobility issues and activities for all ages and abilities was a priority.

Ecology and Restoration

Respondents supported ecological strategies, including corridors for wildlife movement and vegetation buffers to protect Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve. Restoration and regeneration of the park received overwhelming support. Creating habitat for wildlife and the planting of indigenous plants is considered a priority for the community.

Regeneration of wetlands to re-establish the natural waterways, so they once again become a place of importance to native animals such as fish, macro-invertebrates, frogs and birds was also strongly supported.

People recognised that the adjacent Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve as 'over-loved' and that there was opportunity to expand and enhance offering through the creation of the new park.

Research, Education and Culture

Spaces to experience the stories, history and values of Jinibara People, the traditional custodians of the area, was overwhelmingly supported by the community.

Respondents highlighted support for exhibitions, interactive installations and artworks that interpret and reveal stories of the people and natural history of the region.

Strong support was recorded for stewardship opportunities, restoration and legacy planting with volunteers keen to help and lend their expertise, skills and time to support the restoration works of the Ecological Park.

Other suggestions included the facilitation for research and education to learn about local ecology and history.

Interface with Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve

The relationship of the new Ecological Park to Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve (MCSR) is mutually beneficial, and Council are acutely aware of the responsibility that comes with working adjacent to this significant natural asset.

Community support for connections to Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve varies between enthusiastic endorsement to connect the two spaces and 'share the load', while others feel that connecting the two spaces may potentially impact on the Reserve.

All interfaces and connections proposed within this Master Plan have been strategically located to minimise potential impacts on MCSR. Proposed connections will be subject to further detailed studies, review and expert advice during future detailed design stages to ensure final solutions are sensitively integrated in an ecologically responsible manner.

'The interaction between people and nature seems balanced...'

 Community feedback from May 2022 Information Sharing and Gathering Phase

04 Functions and Strategies

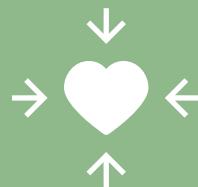
Twelve strategies to guide the future of the Ecological Park

Three overarching functions and twelve strategies reflect the aspirations and themes the community shared during the engagement process - providing clear roles and objectives to realise the vision and values.

Functions:

Strategies:

Recreation and Wellness



A focused community heart

Cluster core community infrastructure to create vibrancy and activity – nurturing recreation and conservation throughout the park.



A series of Forest Rooms

Establish a diverse collection of spaces defined by vegetation, offering adventure, play, discovery, reflection and gatherings.



A sustained connection to nature

Create a green refuge for the community, promoting health and wellbeing through immersive experiences within nature.



A connected and accessible park

Provide a safe and accessible park for everyone, sensitively connected within and to the surrounding landscape.

Functions:

Strategies:

Ecology and Restoration



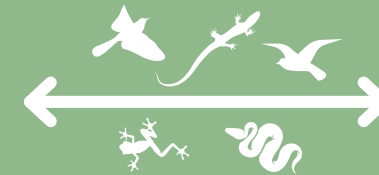
Expand and buffer Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve

Complement the mosaic of ecosystems within Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve and safeguard the existing old growth forest.



Protect, enhance and celebrate water

Rebuild the ecological function and resilience of the wetlands and creek system and allow water to be a valuable part of the park experience.



Improve fauna connections and biodiversity

Boost ecological diversity and resilience through establishing habitat and connections to improve fauna movement into the wider landscape.



A beacon of environmental sustainability

Apply environmental excellence in all aspects of planning, construction and operation - supported by community involvement and stewardship.

Functions:

Strategies:

Research, Education and Culture



Experience the evolution

Engage all generations throughout the restoration journey to strengthen knowledge and understanding of ecological values and respectful interaction.



Celebrate local history and ecology

Inspire intergenerational learning by sharing stories of the land and people through art, interaction and interpretive elements.



Connecting to Country

Provide a cultural conduit that promotes caring for Country and respects Aboriginal knowledge in partnership with Jinibara Traditional Owners.



A place to nurture community involvement

Facilitate activities which engage the Sunshine Coast community, fostering a sense of generational connection, ownership and pride.

Note: Refer Section 8 for further detail on Strategies

05 Spatial Layout

An understanding of the sites natural and technical attributes has informed a series of spatial moves which define how the site can be transformed into the future park.

01 Consolidate activity north of the creek

Focus core community activities on the northern side of the creek, leveraging proximity to the site's main road frontage, as well as the existing flatter terrain. This consolidation of activity allows a stronger ecological role on the south adjacent Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve.

02 Connect into surrounding natural corridors

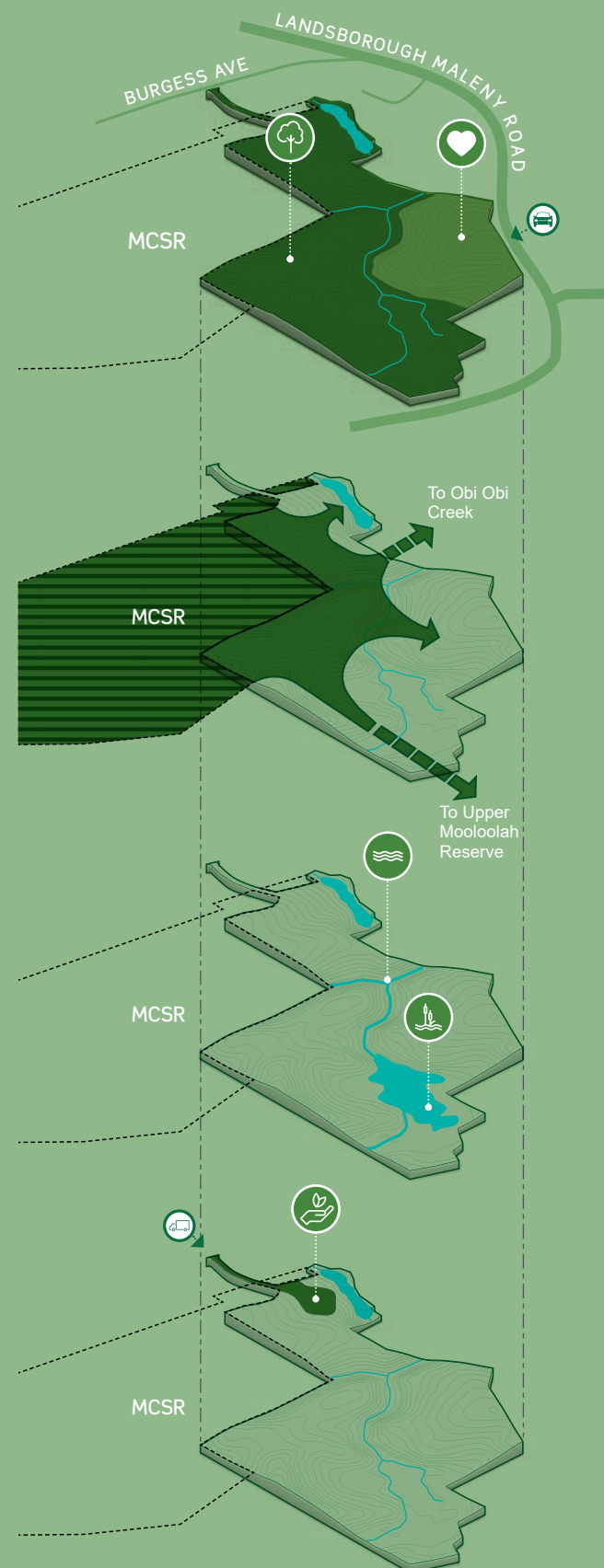
Protect, expand and enhance the ecological integrity of the adjacent Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve with significant restoration which will connect to a broader network of surrounding natural corridors.

03 Restore waterways

Restore the existing degraded wetland and creek located on the lowlands of the site - repairing aquatic habitat and boosting water quality.

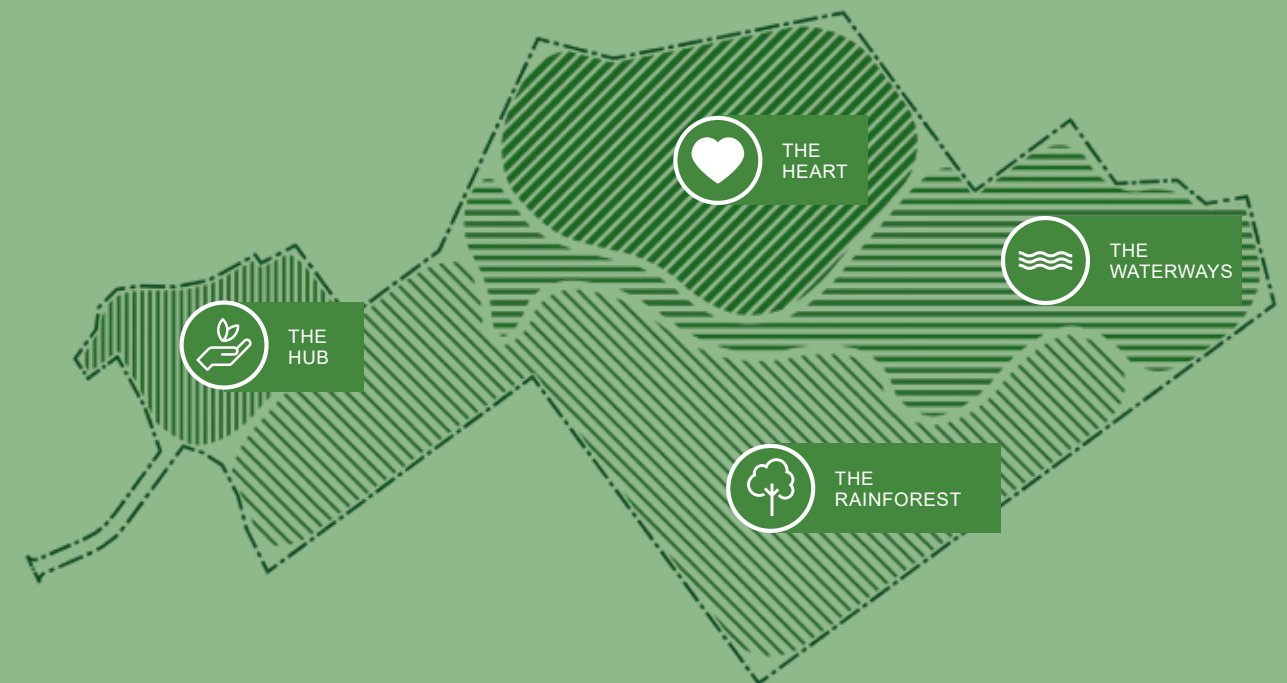
04 Focus research, stewardship and operations

Research, stewardship and operation activities will be focused off Burgess Avenue to control vehicular movement through adjacent residential areas. Located at the junction of MCSR and the Ecological Park the space provides a convenient and central location to manage and learn from both sites.



06 Defining the Precincts

The spatial moves clearly define four distinct but interconnected landscape precincts: The Heart, the Rainforest, the Waterways and the Hub. This Master Plan proposes these precincts to define, and cultivate essential characteristics and experiences that leverage the sites natural features and context. Altogether the four landscape precincts combine to create a unified park offering something for everyone.



The Heart

A lush people-oriented community destination for park visitors, the Heart will accommodate the more active uses and programs of the park. The precinct will function as a diverse collection of community focused spaces nestled in a reconstructed forest - providing a unique civic heart embedded in nature. As the entry point for many of the park's visitors, the precinct will provide a welcoming green arrival which connects visitors to core amenity and broader parkland experiences.

The Rainforest

The Rainforest focuses on the restoration journey of the park - complementing the adjacent MCSR. The precinct will focus on the establishment of robust and thriving habitat that celebrates the amazing biodiversity of the local environment. The Rainforest will prioritise nature with controlled immersive insertions for community interaction, education and enjoyment.

The Waterways

After years of use as pastoral land, the site's natural creek and wetland will be restored to improve ecological function. The waterways will showcase the ecological diversity of the ephemeral wetlands, improve water quality and boost aquatic habitat. With a variety of immersive features, this precinct will be an area that invites interaction with water and celebrates its natural systems.

The Hub

Located on the western end of the park, The Hub will be the home of operations, research, and community stewardship. It is the 'engine-room' of the park, where Council and community come together, learn and are inspired to get hands-on with nature. A place where opportunities for participation and knowledge sharing will be initiated and then spread across the park.

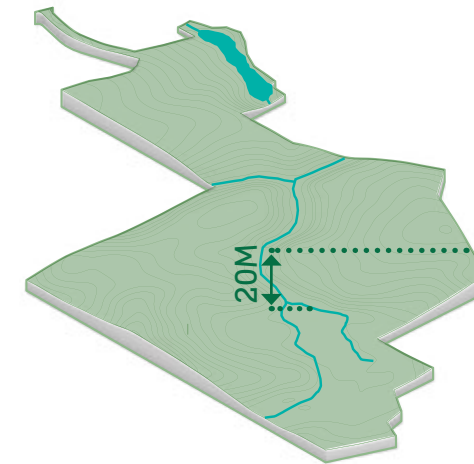
Note: Refer Section 9 for further detail on Precincts

Treetop Bridges will unify the two sides of the park and deliver a highly accessible pathway that leverages the site's natural terrain to create a unique nature-based attraction

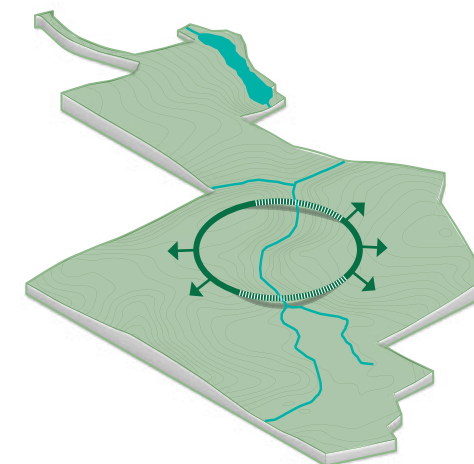
Organising the precincts and taming the terrain

While the precincts respond to the site's natural features, the park's steep terrain represents a key challenge. With a significant level change of 20m from the main entry to the creek, the site's existing topography creates a natural barrier.

This Master Plan flips this challenge into a major opportunity through the proposed Loop Path and Treetop Bridge. The Treetop Bridge unites the two sides of the park and delivers a highly accessible pathway for all. The Treetop Bridge leverages the site's natural terrain to create a unique nature-based attraction set within the lush canopy. The Loop Path and Treetop Bridge creates a legible, central organising element to connect the park's various precincts and spaces.



The site is divided by steep terrain, with a 20m level change from street to creek



The Loop Path and Treetop Bridges will link the two sides of the creek and provide access for all



Diagrammatic Section of Treetop Bridge

'Accessibility for different abilities is especially important in the Hinterland. There needs to be more access for people in wheelchairs in parks and recreation areas'.



Community feedback from May 2022
Information Sharing and Gathering Phase

07 Illustrative Master Plan



LEGEND

- | | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Community Pavilion | 6 BBQ Lawn | 11 Amphitheatre | 16 Forest Lookout |
| 2 Car park | 7 Play Forest | 12 Creek | 17 Dam / constructed wetland |
| 3 Event Lawn | 8 Loop Path | 13 Ephemeral wetland | 18 Operations and research facility |
| 4 The Grove | 9 Treetop Bridge (Loop Path) | 14 Rainforest Green | 19 Bush food community garden |
| 5 Forest Plaza | 10 Tree-houses | 15 Boardwalk | 20 Fauna crossing |

