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It's the
people that
make it.

DRAFT

WESTERN DOWNS PARKS STRATEGY

2026-2031



Mayor's Welcome

Our parks and open recreational spaces are at the heart of our communities. They are places where memories are made, where children play, families gather, teams compete, and individuals find peace and connection in the outdoors. These spaces are deeply valued by our residents and visitors alike, and they play a vital role in supporting our wellbeing, lifestyle, and sense of belonging.

As our region continues to grow and evolve, it's important that we plan for the future of these much-loved places. The Western Downs Regional Council Parks Strategy sets out a clear vision to ensure our parks and open spaces remain vibrant, accessible, and fit for purpose, now and for generations to come.

Whether it's a weekend game at the local oval, a quiet walk through a leafy reserve, or a community event in one of our town parks, these spaces bring us together and enrich our lives. This strategy will guide how we manage and invest in our parks, ensuring they continue to meet the needs of our diverse communities while also upholding responsible financial stewardship.

Council is committed to fostering active, healthy, and connected communities. Through this strategy, we reaffirm our dedication to delivering safe, attractive, and inclusive spaces that enhance the quality of life across the Western Downs.

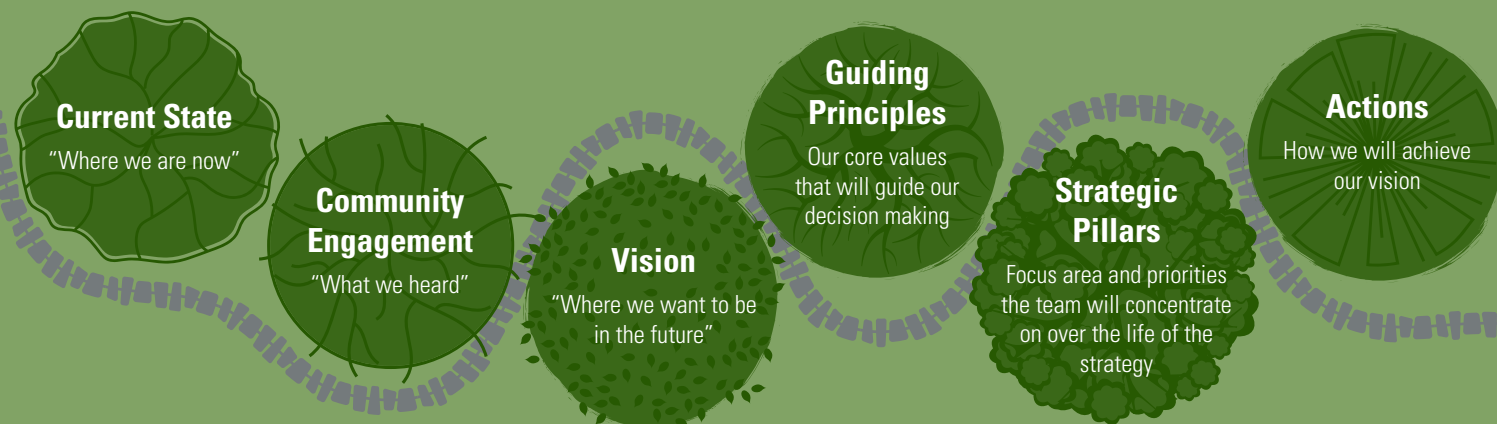
Cr Andrew Smith

Mayor, Western Downs Regional Council



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Why is this Strategy important?

This strategy provides a clear and actionable pathway to transition from our current state to the desired future state of parks. While we are already on the right track in managing parks and open spaces, this approach builds on that progress by reinforcing our direction and setting out a framework for continuous improvement. By prioritising renewals and upgrades based on defined service levels, the strategy ensures consistent, high-quality open spaces across the region while celebrating local identity and supporting community events. It builds on our current efforts and sets a framework for decision-making that supports sustainable, vibrant, and resilient community assets.

This strategy focuses on parks and general open space assets (grounds maintenance) and excludes the following:

- Cemeteries and camping reserves (these may be addressed in the future under individual strategies)
- Showgrounds (Western Downs Showgrounds Strategy 2023-2038)
- Sports fields and ovals, most of which are leased and managed by community groups and organisations.



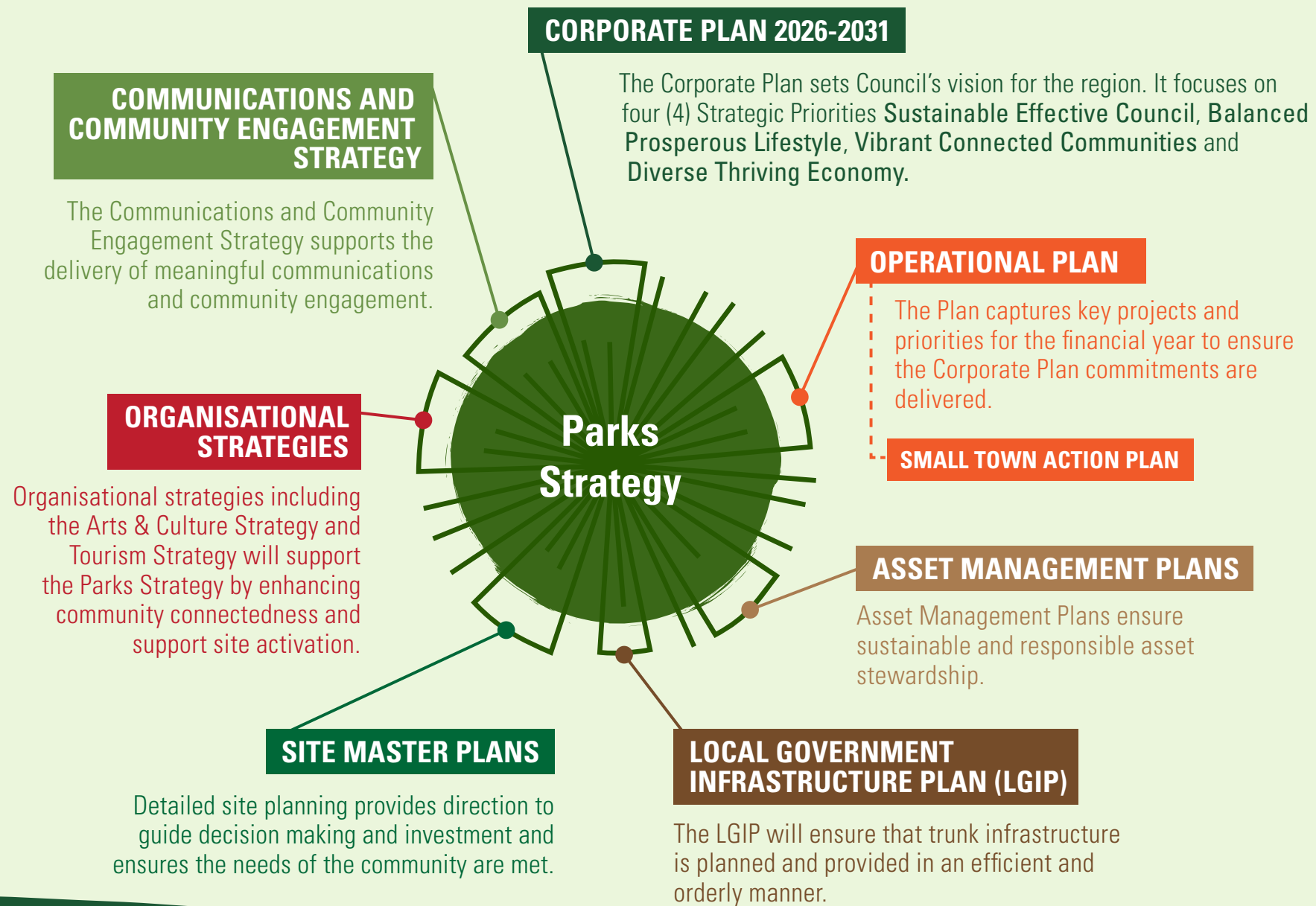
Alignment with the Corporate Plan

The Parks Strategy directly supports the Western Downs Regional Council's Corporate Plan by fostering vibrant, inclusive, and well-connected communities. It does this through the activation of parks, open spaces, and community facilities that are safe, attractive, and accessible. By encouraging participation and pride in our natural assets, the strategy contributes to a stronger sense of place and community wellbeing. Guided by principles of sustainable planning, the strategy ensures our parks and open spaces are resilient, adaptable and future ready. Through effective asset management and proactive investment, we are committed to maintaining high-quality community infrastructure that reflects our shared values and aspirations.

How this Strategy connects

The Parks Strategy is part of a bigger picture. It works alongside other Council plans and strategies to help shape vibrant, inclusive, and well-connected communities. By reviewing key planning documents, we've made sure this strategy fits within Council's broader goals and priorities.

It supports community-focused planning, aligns with infrastructure needs, and helps create great places for people to enjoy. It also contributes to arts, culture, and tourism by making our parks and open spaces more inviting and enriching. Most importantly, it ensures our community assets are well cared for and ready for the future.



Park Trends

Parks and open spaces are essential community infrastructure. Research and community feedback consistently show that well maintained parks deliver the greatest benefits for health, wellbeing, social connection, and climate resilience. Understanding broader park planning trends ensures the Parks Strategy is evidence based, realistic, and aligned to the needs of the Western Downs community.

INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

Key Trends

- Parks promote physical health and mental wellbeing
- Parks support biodiversity and climate resilience
- New Park planning incorporates technology into design (digital tools, sensors, smart systems)

Strategic response

Evidence shows the greatest benefits come from accessible, well maintained spaces, not from large scale technology rollouts.

NATIONAL TRENDS (AUSTRALIA)

Key Trends

- Park planning focuses on improving the existing park not expanding it - quality over quantity
- Inclusive, accessible and culturally responsive designs are prioritised
- Increasing acknowledgement of Traditional Owner values and cultural landscapes delivered in ways that match organisational capacity
- Growing focus on consistent service levels across the park network

Strategic response

Evidence shows that national trends prioritise improving the existing park network, inclusive design, and consistent service levels. For this reason, the strategy does not focus on network expansion or detailed cultural landscape planning other than what is already approved in the budget, as these elements require separate, deeper work beyond the current scope.

REGIONAL & RURAL OLD TRENDS

Key trends:

- Parks serve as everyday community spaces, not major destination parks
- Communities prioritise clean, shaded and safe parks
- Park users prefer passive and tranquil areas for relaxation
- Councils focus on maintaining and renewing existing assets due to financial and workforce capacity
- Practical, low maintenance improvements are prioritised over high-energy or highly specialised upgrades

Strategic response

Evidence shows that regional communities prioritise clean, shaded, everyday-use parks and practical renewal. For this reason, the strategy does not focus on destination scale developments (other than what is already planned and approved within the budget) or high intensity upgrades, as these fall outside current community needs and Council capacity.

Reference: *Parks Strategy Research Paper – Parks & Open Space Trends, Evidence and Strategic Implications*

What will this Strategy achieve?

MAINTAINING EXISTING NETWORK

RATIONALISE

OPTIMISE

EXPAND

Positive outcomes this Strategy will achieve

FOR INDIVIDUALS

- ✓ Support inclusive design and accessibility
- ✓ Respond effectively to customer requests and changing community needs
- ✓ Improve the overall quality and usability of open spaces for all ages and abilities



FOR COMMUNITY

- ✓ Encourage greater use of parks through events, programs, and social opportunities
- ✓ Strengthen community pride and ownership of open spaces
- ✓ Foster partnerships and volunteer involvement opportunities



FOR COUNCIL AND THE REGION

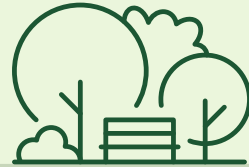
- ✓ Enhance safety, cleanliness, and visual appeal across the region
- ✓ Align service levels with available budgets and resources
- ✓ Improve efficiency through planned maintenance and data-informed decision-making
- ✓ Reduce long-term costs through preventative strategies and smart asset management
- ✓ Support a consistent and equitable asset renewal program
- ✓ Ensure resources are directed to high-value, high-use spaces





Regional Snapshot

The current state of our parks and recreational spaces in the Western Downs was reviewed and assessed in the development of this Strategy.



PUBLIC PARKS & RECREATIONAL AREAS

8 x Regional (37.78 Ha)
33 x District (42.86 ha)
36 x Local (162.80 ha)
42 x Natural Areas (96.74 ha)
TOTAL
119 x Parks (340 ha)
Other (125.4 ha)



CBD

4 x Large streetscape
14 x Small streetscape



ROAD RESERVES

50 kms - Highway entries
310 kms - Urban Sealed Roads
135 ha - Drainage Open Space



PLAYGROUNDS

56 x Playgrounds ranging from being equipped with swings, rockers, exercise equipment and multi-activity centres. Minimal spent in current operation spend on playground Maintenance. less than 2% of operational spend across the region.

Our Purpose

"To provide clean, safe & attractive open spaces for both our residents & visitors."



Spotlight on Our Region

CHINCHILLA BOTANIC PARKLANDS

The Chinchilla Botanic Parklands is a four-hectare destination that combines natural beauty, cultural heritage, and community spirit. It is internationally recognised with the Green Flag Award for excellence in management, sustainability, and public value, making it the first regional park in Queensland to achieve this status.

The park offers unique features including a megafauna discovery zone, a cultural area showcasing Aboriginal heritage,

and a water play zone inspired by the biennial Melon Festival, native plant gardens, and an outdoor amphitheatre for events. These spaces create opportunities for recreation, learning, and celebration.

The success of Chinchilla Botanic Parklands reflects the commitment of Western Downs Regional Council and inspires us to dream boldly, plan sustainably, and celebrate the unique character of our communities.

PARKS & RECREATION SERVICES

- Mowing, whipper snipping, spraying, garden and tree maintenance
- Nature strip care
- Asset inspections, repairs, and renewals
- Banner installations
- Event support (internal & in-kind)
- Christmas decorations
- Cemetery support including: funeral preparation, plaques, ashes interments, palbearer
- Utilities support (as required)



Community Voices Shaping our Parks

This Strategy reflects the voices of our community. Through extensive engagement across the region, residents shared a deep appreciation for parks and open spaces and their vital role in supporting wellbeing, lifestyle, and connection.

Three key themes emerged:

1. Clean and Welcoming Spaces

While many parks are well maintained, the community called for more consistent upkeep to ensure all open spaces remain clean, safe, and inviting.

2. Celebrating Local Identity

People want parks that reflect the unique character of their town. There's strong support for more events and activities that bring people together and activate these spaces.

3. Thoughtful Upgrades

Residents highlighted the need for improvements like better shade, clearer signage, and more native planting to honour the region's natural heritage.

Turning Feedback into Action

Since hearing from the community, the Parks team has begun implementing meaningful changes. New signage has been installed across the region to clearly display park names, helping locals and visitors better navigate and connect with these spaces. Behind the scenes, the team have also undertaken a detailed operational review establishing clearer service levels to ensure maintenance is more consistent, transparent, and aligned with community expectations.

57
'HAVE YOUR SAY' SURVEY
ONLINE RESPONSES

7
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOPS

8
SCHOOL WORKSHOPS

3
WORKSHOPS WITH WDRC STAFF

475
LIVEABILITY CENSUS RESPONSES

1
WORKSHOP WITH COUNCILLORS





Our Parks Story

Where We Are Now

Parks and open spaces are an important part of community life. They support recreation, wellbeing, and social connection. We manage a wide range of spaces including local parks, reserves, playgrounds, sports fields, nature strips, and natural areas. These areas support everything from casual visits to organised sport and community events.

We are committed to keeping parks clean, safe, and welcoming. Maintenance is delivered to a consistent regional standard, with regular inspections and proactive care to ensure spaces remain accessible and enjoyable throughout the year.

What We Do Well

What we already do well aligns closely with the priorities expressed by our community, reinforcing our approach to safe, welcoming, and locally relevant spaces.

Clean and Welcoming Spaces

- We deliver consistent service across the region, ensuring parks and open spaces are clean, safe, and well-maintained.
- We respond promptly to customer requests, with teams focused on maintaining spaces that reflect local values.

Celebrating Local Identity

- We incorporate community feedback into planning and design, ensuring upgrades like shade, signage, and native planting are considered as part of our long-term approach.

Thoughtful Upgrades

- Our asset renewal program helps us proactively replace ageing infrastructure so that facilities remain functional and aligned with community needs.

Where We Want to Be

Over the next five years, we aim to build a region-wide network of parks that are safe, attractive, and well-managed, while celebrating the unique identity of each town.

Our goal is to deliver consistent service excellence, promote community wellbeing, and activate open spaces through inclusive design and thoughtful investment.

This vision is supported by values that will guide our decision making:

1. Excellence Through Continuous Improvement
2. Collaborative and Community-Focused
3. Sustainable and Strategic.

Striving for Continuous Improvement

Our team regularly reviews operations to improve how services are delivered. This work is guided by service standards, asset data, and community priorities. By aligning service levels with available resources, we ensure our parks are well maintained in a way that is sustainable, transparent, and responsive to local needs.



Conversations with
our community have
shaped our strategy

Welcoming Spaces

While many parks are well maintained, the community called for more consistent upkeep to ensure all open spaces remain clean, safe, and inviting.

Celebrating Local Identity

People want parks that reflect the unique character of their town. There's strong support for more events and activities that bring people together and activate these spaces.

Thoughtful Upgrades

Residents highlighted the need for improvements like better shade, clearer signage, and more native planting to honour the region's natural heritage.

Vision

To create and maintain a region-wide network of clean, safe, and well-managed parks that celebrate local identity, promote activation, and deliver consistent service excellence across the Western Downs.

Guiding Principles

Excellence Through Continuous Improvement

We strive for operational excellence by maintaining clean, safe, and welcoming spaces, improving service delivery, and managing assets with foresight and care to meet evolving community needs.

Collaborative and Community-Focused

We work together across teams and with communities to design and activate spaces that reflect local identity, foster connection, and respond to community priorities.

Sustainable and Strategic

We commit to proactive planning and smart investment to deliver upgrades and services that are environmentally responsible, cost-effective, and future-focused, ensuring long-term value for our parks and open spaces.

Strategic Pillars

Safe, Attractive, and Well-Maintained Spaces

We create and maintain parks and open spaces that are clean, safe, and inviting for people of all ages and abilities. Our focus is on consistent upkeep and proactive maintenance to ensure every space feels welcoming and cared for.

Community, Connection, and Local Identity

We design and activate parks that celebrate the unique character of each town, foster cultural expression, and encourage social interaction through events and activities that bring people together.

Smart Investment and Continuous Improvement

We plan and deliver services and upgrades in line with Council's resources and budget, ensuring long-term sustainability that reduces long-term costs and maximises community benefit.



All actions outlined in this Strategy are intended to be delivered within existing operational resources and current budget allocations. Any new initiatives, or actions that may require additional funding beyond these resources, will be considered through Council's standard budget planning and approval processes.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREA 1: Safe, Attractive and Well-Maintained Spaces

We create and maintain parks and open spaces that are clean, safe, and inviting for people of all ages and abilities. Our focus is on consistent upkeep and proactive maintenance to ensure every space feels welcoming and cared for.

Objective	Key Actions	Success Indicator(s)	Timeframe
Maintain high standards of safety and visual appeal	Conduct and record regular inspections for hazards as per the Levels of Service (e.g. damaged equipment, trip risks, overgrown vegetation).	90% completion of inspections as per Levels of Service.	Annually
		All new Supervisors or Acting Supervisors trained in defect identification.	Ongoing
	Conduct annual compliance inspections of all playgrounds and skateparks to ensure safety, functionality, and adherence to relevant Australian Standards and legislative requirements. This proactive approach supports risk management, asset longevity, and community confidence in the safety of public recreation infrastructure.	All playgrounds and skateparks have documented annual compliance audits aligned with Australian Standards.	Annually
		Undertake an internal condition assessment rating on all assets.	Annually
		Comprehensive audit of all other assets every 3 years.	Every 3 years (audit all other assets) - 2027 & 2030
Enhance inclusivity and usability for all ages and abilities	Maintain Green Flag status for Chinchilla Botanic Parkland through ongoing implementation of the site-specific operational plan, continuous improvement practices, and annual assessment readiness.	Achieve annual Green Flag Award reaccreditation for Chinchilla Botanic Parkland by demonstrating compliance with all criteria and maintaining high standards of presentation, safety and sustainability.	Annually
	Engage with diverse community groups to inform new park planning and design.	All new major park planning projects to include documented engagement with ≥ 3 diverse groups.	As required
	Apply universal design principles in new park developments and upgrades where budget permits and alignment with the Levels of Service.	Apply universal design principles for identified Premium and High Park upgrades and renewals as identified in the Levels of Service.	As required

All actions outlined in this Strategy are intended to be delivered within existing operational resources and current budget allocations. Any new initiatives, or actions that may require additional funding beyond these resources, will be considered through Council's standard budget planning and approval processes.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREA 2: Community, Connection and Local Identity

We design and activate parks that celebrate the unique character of each town, foster cultural expression, and encourage social interaction through events and activities that bring people together.

Objective	Key Actions	Success Indicator(s)	Timeframe
Engage communities in park planning	Use newsletters, Council's websites, Have Your Say (HYS) and in-person community engagement sessions to invite community input or provide updates for key park projects.	Ensure community feedback is considered and documented in all relevant projects.	Ongoing
Integrate cultural stories, heritage elements, and community art into park elements.	Align new design initiatives with the Arts & Culture; Public Art; and Placemaking strategies.	Consultation with Arts & Culture, Public Art, and Placemaking Strategies owners to review and align proposed capital and operational park projects.	Ongoing
Enhance community connection and local identity by creating accessible plant identification resources that celebrate the unique botanical character of Chinchilla Botanic Parkland.	Develop and implement a plant identification process for Chinchilla Botanic Parkland to support education and interpretation.	Establish a comprehensive plant identification system for all key species within Chinchilla Botanic Parkland.	2026
Identify infrastructure and service gaps to support events and activations	Audit existing park infrastructure and services to identify gaps that limit event delivery and activation, using insights from the Placemaking Strategy and community feedback.	Undertake an audit and identify parks that are regularly utilised or have potential to host events and then complete an infrastructure audit report for each priority park.	2026/2027
		Develop a prioritised list of projects identified in the audit to address the infrastructure and services gap for Council's 20 Year Capital Works budget for consideration.	2027/2028



Objective	Key Actions	Success Indicator(s)	Timeframe
Support the community and Council to deliver seasonal and community-led events	Facilitate and promote seasonal and community-led events in parks by providing access to spaces, resources, and streamlined approval processes.	All eligible community-led in-kind requests are supported in line with Council policy.	Ongoing
		Parks & Recreation support for Council and community-led events reported in the Quarterly Report.	Quarterly
Promote priority sites for regular programming based on accessibility, visibility, and community interest.	Develop and deliver a targeted communications plan to promote identified priority park sites for regular programming, highlighting their accessibility, visibility, and community appeal.	Develop a formal communications plan in conjunction with Communications and Marketing.	2026/2027
		Review the communications plan.	Annually
Encourage volunteer planting and clean-up days	Support and promote volunteer-led planting and clean-up days through partnerships, local networks, and Council communication channels.	100% of eligible volunteer requests are supported (if they align with Council's Corporate Plan, safety and operational requirements).	Ongoing
		Identify, promote and deliver >1 volunteer opportunity regionally.	Annually

STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREA 3:

Smart Investment and Continuous Improvement

All actions outlined in this Strategy are intended to be delivered within existing operational resources and current budget allocations. Any new initiatives, or actions that may require additional funding beyond these resources, will be considered through Council's standard budget planning and approval processes.

We plan and deliver services and upgrades in line with Council's resources and budget, ensuring long-term sustainability that reduces long-term costs and maximises community benefit.

Objective	Key Actions	Success Indicator(s)	Timeframe
Optimise service delivery through planning and technology	Use the field app for inspections, defect reporting, and service tracking.	All identified high severity (priority 3) safety defects responded to.	Within 24 hours
		Undertake and review the Defect Summary Report to monitor and manage park asset issues, including completed defects, outstanding defects, and frequently defected assets flagged for condition review.	Fortnightly
	Review levels of service annually to ensure alignment with community expectations, operational capacity, and available budget. This process will support continuous improvement, inform future planning and investment decisions, and maintain consistency across the region.	Complete service level reviews to inform operational planning and decision making.	Annually
Build resilience into park operations and design	Incorporate drought-tolerant and native plant species into landscaping to reduce water demand and improve climate resilience.	≥ 80% of new plantings in parks are native or drought-tolerant species.	Ongoing
		Develop a plant specification guide for each town to identify appropriate planting species to ensure sustainability and improve consistency.	2027/2028
	Use durable, low-maintenance materials in park infrastructure to reduce lifecycle costs and improve long-term sustainability.	All new park infrastructure projects to specify durable, low-maintenance materials in design and procurement.	Ongoing
	Develop a Water Conservation Management Plan, aligned to Council's Water Strategy, regional water restrictions and climate conditions to guide irrigation practices to reduce water usage across parks and recreation spaces whilst maintaining amenity and service levels.	Irrigation guidelines reflect current water restrictions and climate resilience principles.	2026/2027
	Utilise mulch generated from Council's green waste processing or partner with contractors to repurpose locally sourced organic material, reducing waste and supporting circular economy principles.	100% of mulch used in parks is sourced from Council green waste or local suppliers.	Ongoing



Objective	Key Actions	Success Indicator(s)	Timeframe
<i>Cont'd</i> Build resilience into park operations and design	Garden beds and landscaped areas are mulched to improve soil moisture retention, suppress weeds, reduce water usage and improve visual amenity.	Ensure mulch levels in all parks are maintained in accordance with approved Levels of Service, with top-ups scheduled as part of routine asset maintenance.	Premium Level Parks - Annually High Level Parks - every 2 years Low Level Parks - every 3 years
Maximise asset value through strategic investment	Seek external funding opportunities (e.g., grants, partnerships) to support strategic asset improvements and reduce reliance on internal budgets.	All eligible projects are assessed for external funding potential and tracked accordingly.	Ongoing
Align asset management with financial and infrastructure planning	Integrate planning and upgrades to align with growth areas, population projection and development priorities supported by the LGIP.	Deliver the Chinaman's Lagoon capital project as per Council's forecasted 10-year capital plan in order to supply Miles with a district level park.	Annually review the capital budget for commencement of this project.
	Review long-term renewal and maintenance forecasts for park infrastructure to inform capital works planning and funding allocations.	Forecasts are reviewed and updated to inform capital works planning.	Annually
	Collect and analyse utilisation data across the parks network and report findings to Council to inform evidence-based decision making, including consideration of network rationalisation.	Annual utilisation report is provided to Council.	Ongoing

Monitoring, Reviewing, and Reporting

This Strategy is accompanied by supporting documents outlining levels of service, procedures, and operational manuals. These will assist in consistently achieving the outcomes sought by the Parks Strategy through strategic planning, improvements to operational efficiency and asset management.

Progress against the Strategy will be regularly monitored, reviewed and where possible, quantitative data will be used to assess the performance. To ensure the Strategy responds to future changes that may arise due to legislative obligations or community attitudes, a major review of the Strategy will occur in 2028.





Next Steps and how to stay involved

The development of our Communications and Community Engagement Strategy marked a turning point in Council's approach to engaging with the community.

This Parks Strategy integrates the key objectives of community consultation, including our commitment to:

1. Increase awareness and understanding in the community of Council's programs, services and decision-making processes
2. Develop and maintain opportunities for local people and groups to inform policy, service delivery and what happens in their communities
3. Improve responsiveness to existing queries and feedback channels
4. Build the capacity, confidence, and competence within Council to communicate, engage and deliver this Strategy.

For more information head to [Parks & Outdoors Western Downs Regional Council](#) or visit our [Have Your Say survey](#).



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2026-2031

