

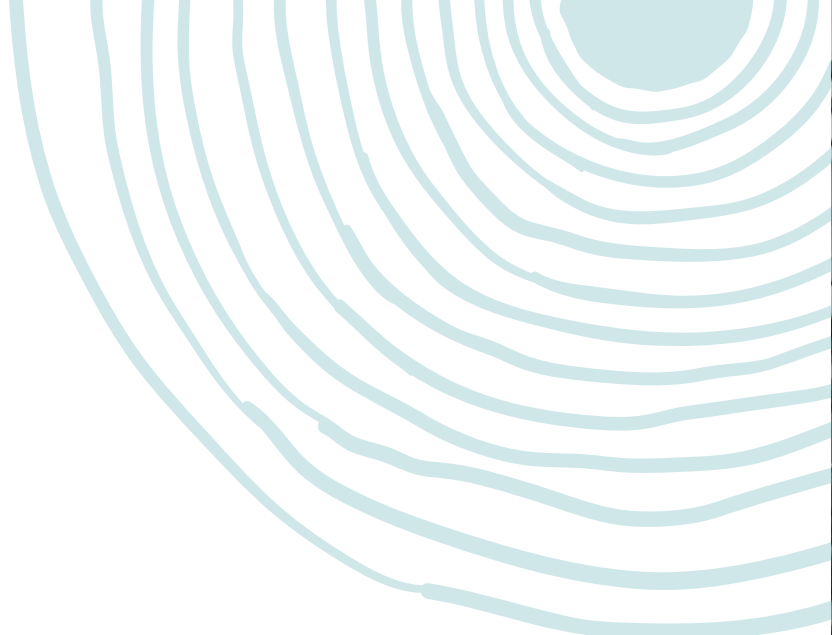
Russell Square Revitalisation

URBAN DESIGN STUDY 2024



**CITY OF
PERTH**
City of Light





Acknowledgment of Country

The City of Perth acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land that we are situated on, the Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation and Aboriginal people from other lands. We celebrate the continuing traditions, living culture, and the spiritual connection to Boorloo and the Derbarl Yerrigan. We offer our respects to Elders past and present.

Nyoongar Translation

The City of Perth kadij kalyakool moondang-ak kaaradj midi boodjar-ak ngala nyinny, Whadjuk Noongar yoongar wer bandany Aboriginal yoongar yooarme boodjar-ool. Ngalangwoola Boorloo wer Derbal Yerrigan kalyakoorl, wongin kadadjiny wer, wirn-yoodan. Ngalang kadij Birdiya koora wer yeyi moondang-ak kaaradjiny.

Disclaimer

The information provided within this study does not claim to be comprehensive. The study is a snapshot in time. The City of Perth does not accept any responsibility or liability for any loss or other consequence which may result from any reliance on the information contained in this study.



Russell Square aerial view, Nearmaps 2023

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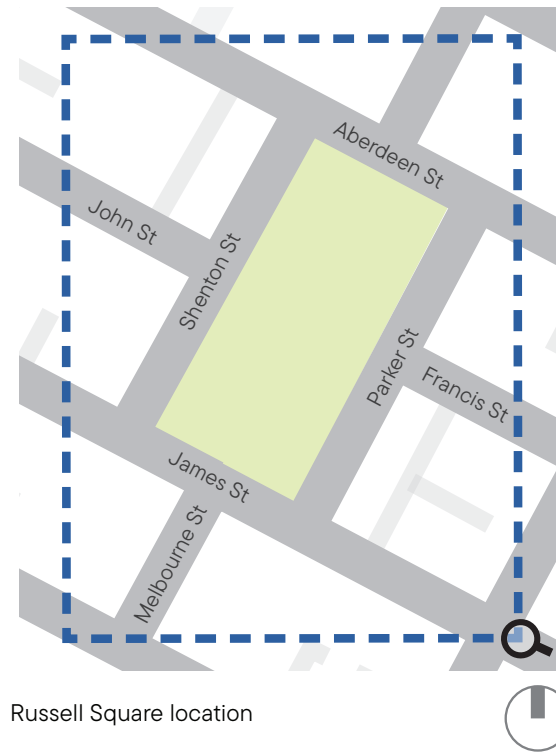
Introduction

Purpose of this document

The city's green open spaces are highly valued for their aesthetic quality, recreational benefits, and have the potential to help improve biodiversity and climate resilience.

Russell Square, as the only significant green open space in Northbridge, offers areas of green respite for city dwellers while also serving as an important community and event space that draws numerous visitors to our city. Enhancing the quality and usability of Russell Square can enable it to function more effectively, supporting increased activation and diversification of use.

This document outlines the current conditions, key issues, and opportunities that will inform the development of a concept plan to revitalise Russell Square into a contemporary city park to meet the current and future needs of our growing community.



Russell Square location

Strategic Context

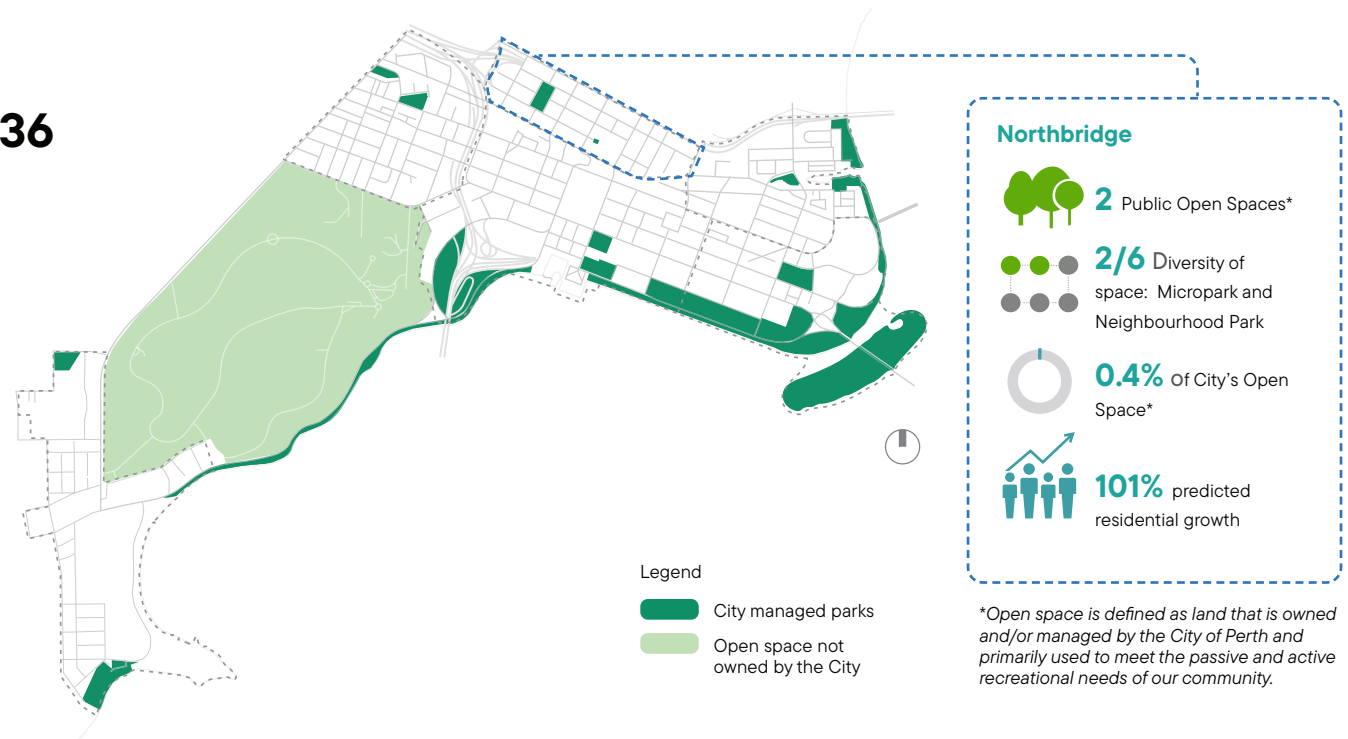
The following high level diagram outlines the relationship between various endorsed strategies which will underpin the Russell Square Revitalisation:



Urban Greening Strategy 2023-36

The Urban Greening Strategy sets out a range of initiatives aimed at integrating the City's approach to land use planning and the design of our existing streets, open spaces and other city infrastructure to maximise greening outcomes as well as environmental and social benefits.

At over 500 hectares or 41% of the city's total land area (including Kings Park), our city green open spaces have significant potential. One of the key moves in the Urban Greening Strategy is to enhance these open spaces. Russell Square is recognised as a high priority for enhancement due to inadequate open space provision in Northbridge, a lack of diversity in existing open space, and anticipated high levels of population growth in the area.



City of Perth's Open Space Network

Key priorities of open space enhancement:



Publication: Urban Greening Strategy 2023-2036

Context and History

The land in and around Central Perth holds immense cultural significance for the traditional owners, the Whadjuk Nyoongar people. The elevated sand dune between two freshwater lakes, traditionally known as Boojoormelup (Lake Henderson) and Goologoolup (part of Lake Sutherland and Lake Kingsford), corresponds to the approximate location of present-day Russell Square. The significance of this area to the Whadjuk Nyoongar directly relates to the surrounding water sources in the landscape, both perennial and non-perennial, which hold spiritual significance and connection to the Dreamtime. The area likely played a vital role as a camping, ceremonial and hunting ground.

In the early days of Perth's colonial settlement, Russell Square was reserved as parkland. Named Russell Square to honor Lord John Russell, the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1839 and UK Prime Minister from 1846 to 1852, it became a popular recreational area for settlers.

Despite the land reservation, the space was not developed into a park until the late 19th century when it came under the management of Perth City Council. Under John Braithewaite, the City's head gardener from 1896 to 1925, the park was transformed into a Victorian-style space resembling London's formal fenced squares.

The square holds historical significance for various cultural and ethnic communities who migrated and settled in Northbridge area during the late 19th and early 20th century. These include the Greek, Chinese, and Italian - each contributing to its rich tapestry of

heritage and traditions. Russell Square served the communities primarily for social purposes and religious activities, reflected in adjacent landmarks like the Hellenic Community Centre and the Moon Chow and Chung Wah Promenades.



An early map from 1838 shows the network of wetlands within the Perth landscape. Most of the study area was situated on an elevated sand dune.



Pre-European Settlement

Likely an important camping, ceremonial and hunting ground for the Whadjuk Nyoongar people.



1896-1925

The park was transformed into a Victorian-style space resembling London's formal fenced squares.



1989-94

Continuous upgrades include a gazebo, gates at entrances, additional water features and lighting.

1845

In the early history of Perth's development, Russell Square was reserved as a parkland. It was named after Lord John Russell.

1885

The land ownership was transferred to the Perth City Council.

1940s

Meeting place for immigrant communities. It was known by the Italian community as 'Parco dei sospiri' ('Park of Sighs') after the sounds of young Italian and Greek couples heading home from the dance halls.

Since 2014

Russell Square is home to the 'Pleasure Garden', one of Perth Fringe Festival's main festival hubs.



Russell Square timeline

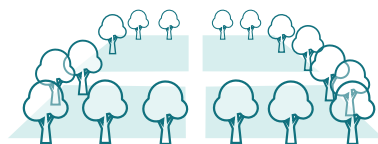
Russell Square Today

Current Snapshot

Russell Square is a traditional Victorian style park with a quadrant layout and open lawn bordered by mature trees. The original fencing has been removed, and gates were installed at the four entrances as a landscape feature. It serves primarily as a passive recreational park while providing strong pedestrian connections through the square.



Formal quadrant layout with central footpaths



Large perimeter trees



Open lawn



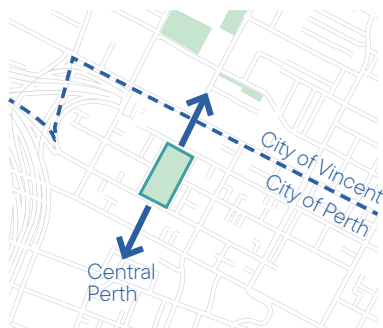
Event space



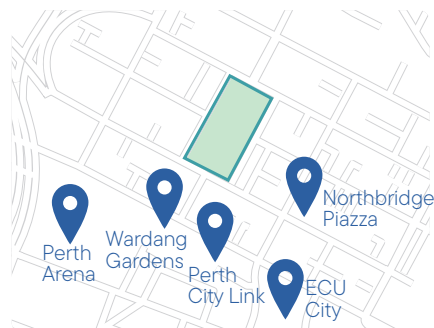
Limited and deteriorating infrastructure



Poor perception of safety



Good neighbourhood connection



Surrounding key destinations



Residential and short term accommodation

Neighbourhood Profile



230,000 +
Daily visitors into the City

7725
2016

16500
2036

Northbridge and Central Perth

Projected residential population increase

811
2021

1776
2041



Number of children age 0-9

Northbridge, Central Perth, and City of Vincent

88.4%
1 and 2 bedroom townhouse/apartment



Common dwelling type

Northbridge

Data extracted from Local Planning Strategy 2023 and 2021 Census

Current Uses

Russell Square is typically underutilised on regular days. However, it is popular for wedding photography due to its proximity to the adjacent marriage office and church. During the summer months, the square is transformed into 'Pleasure Garden', a hub for Perth's Fringe Festival.

Due to its size, Russell Square would benefit from additional attractions to increase visitor engagement and overall activity in the park.



Passive recreation



Walking



Wedding photography



Demonstrations



Dog walking



Event space

Scale



Florence Hummerston

0.2ha | Micro Park

Green pocket for relief and respite



Russell Square

2.0ha | Neighbourhood Park

Recreation and social opportunities for community enjoyment



Moort-ak Waadiny/ Wellington Square

7.7ha | District Park

Formal sports and large scale city events utilised by residents and visitors

Small

Large

Small scaled spaces are easy to program and feel busy.

Large spaces need high density immediately nearby to keep them constantly filled. Large spaces need a high level of management and ongoing programming.

Public Life Study

Public life studies were conducted on a Wednesday and Saturday in September and December 2023 between the hours of 8am to 6pm to understand who uses the space, how and when.

The following key findings have been identified:

Demographics

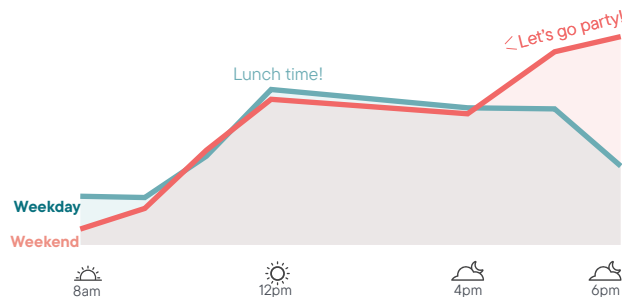
The greatest number of park users are adults. During the observations, there were few children, teenagers or elderly people recorded visiting the park. This suggests that there is a lack of diversity in activities on offer to attract a broad section of the community.

Peak User Times

During weekdays, people are walking through the square in the morning and late afternoon to commute to and from work; and having lunch in the square. People passing through outnumber those who stay.

Weekend afternoons and evenings are typically busier. This is largely due to the scheduling of events or weddings. People are also actively participating in recreational activities on weekends such as jogging and dog walking.

The playground was only moderately utilised on weekdays and weekends.



Peak times on a weekday and weekend



of visitors to the park are adults. 60% of them are male*.

**Nearby building construction may have impacted these figures, as workers were seen regularly using the square during the day.*

Visitors demographics



Activity hot spots on a weekday

Walking through

Weekday 64%

Weekend 42%

Dwelling

Weekday 36%

Weekend 58%

Usage of park

On a weekday visitors walking through the square outnumber those who dwell



Weekday:



Sitting

Weekend:



Wedding photography

Most popular activities

Average 22% increase in activities on weekends



Activity hot spots on a weekend

Surrounding Landuse

It is predominately residential to the north and west of the site with commercial to the east. Given its location the park attracts a variety of users – from visitors, workers and residents.

Internal and External Paths

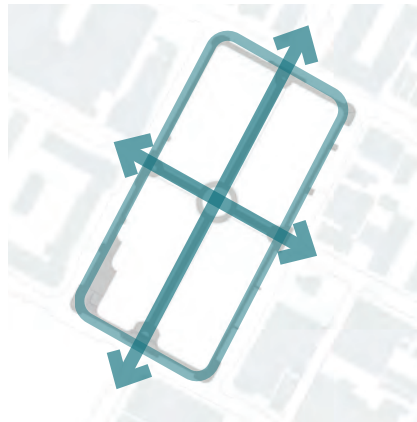
The existing paths are well utilised, with most pedestrian movement concentrated on the central north-south footpaths. People tend to use the perimeter paths in late evening in preference to the park due to the poor perception of safety.

Desire Lines

A few desire lines were observed diagonally across the park connecting surrounding streets and central footpaths. There is increased movement in the southeast quadrant on both weekdays and weekends due to high pedestrian activity on Parker Street South, which links to the James Street entertainment area.

Summary

Russell Square lacks the amenities and infrastructure needed to support diverse uses and activities. This is evident from the data, which shows the park is significantly underutilised in terms of visitor numbers and their length of stay.



Internal and external paths



Desire lines



Surrounding streets



Surrounding landuse

Legend

- Residential
- Food and drinks
- Night club
- Community services
- Church and religious hall
- Office and studio
- Carpark
- Commercial and service provider
- Plaza
- Childcare centre
- Clinic
- Under construction
- Vacant

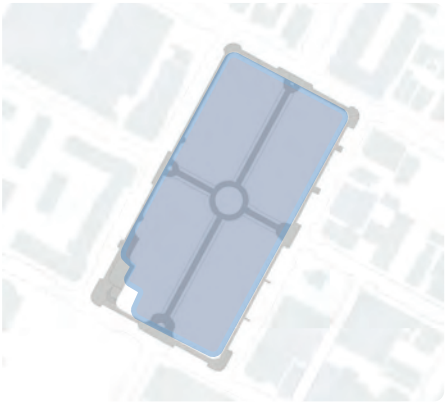
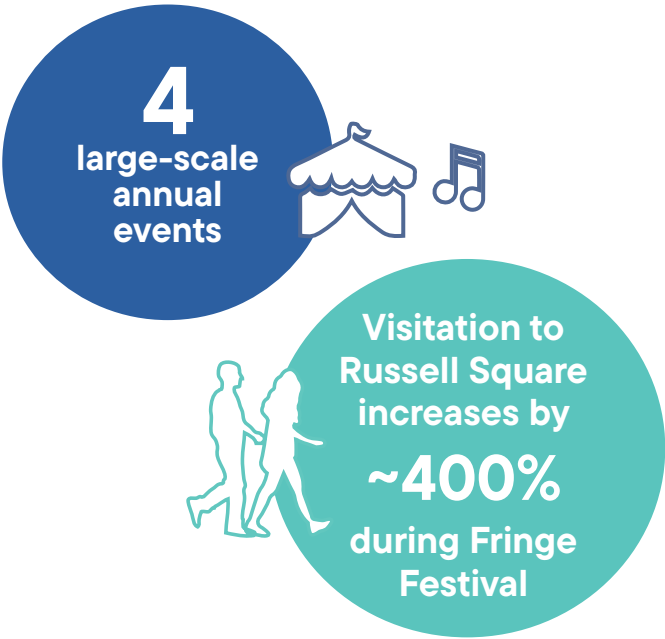
Events

Russell Square hosts a variety of events throughout the year. Its central location make it an ideal setting for large-scale events such as Fringe Festival's 'Pleasure Garden' and other cultural gatherings like the Hellenic Church Festival, St. Patrick's Day, and Pride. Russell Square attracts over 5,000 people daily during Fringe Festival.

In 2024, Parker and Francis Streets (from Parker to Mountain Terrace) were closed to traffic as part of the Fringe program. This transformed them into vibrant spaces with temporary stages and food and beverage offerings.

However, several challenges currently affect Russell Square's effectiveness as an events venue such as inadequate event infrastructure including power, water and sewer connections. Limited hardstand areas for staging and storage cause turf damage requiring substantial recovery periods. Low tree canopies and underground services restrict access and egress for large vehicles and hinder event bump in and bump out. Currently, there is only one access point via the Parker Street entrance.

Balancing the needs of events with everyday community use is essential to ensure the park is available for everyone to enjoy.



A large-scale event such as Fringe utilises the entire square, closing off public access except for the small playspace.



The Pleasure Garden is the largest event held at Russell Square

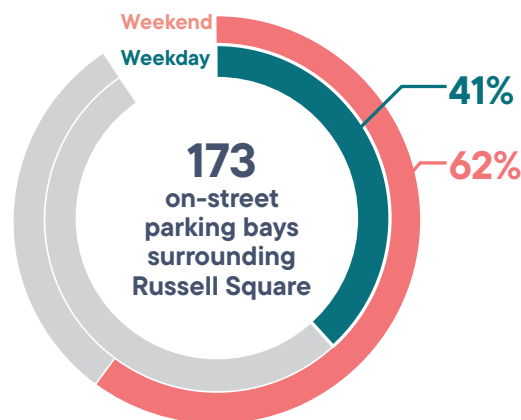
Parking and Vehicles

Good practice parking strategies suggest that the maximum parking occupancy should be 85%. This results in an environment where on-street parking bays are well used but people can still find a space without circling unnecessarily.

A survey conducted in December 2023 revealed that street parking around Russell Square is utilised more on weekends than weekdays.

Weekends see a few peaks, between 12-2pm, and in the evening from 5-10pm. Peaks could be due to church attendance and people heading into Northbridge in the evening. The weekday peak is at night between 8-10pm. The City's 'Free parking after 6pm' initiative may be contributing to on-street parking bays being well used.

On-street parking on Melbourne Street is well occupied in the evenings on both weekdays and weekends. The western side of the street is frequently used by party buses for pick-up and drop-off. Since the introduction of ridesharing in Perth, the demand for the purpose-built taxi rank on Melbourne Street has dropped dramatically.



**Average parking occupancy*
-weekday and weekend**

** Includes Aberdeen, Shenton, Parker, James and Melbourne Streets*



Surveyed time: 7-10am, 12-2pm, 4-6pm, 8-10pm and 12-2am on a Tuesday and Saturday

On-street parking - average stay



Nearby off-street carpark

Melbourne Street

Western side is well utilised for party bus pick up and drop off on weekend nights

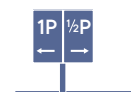


Taxi ranks are consistently underutilised



Off-street

611



On-street

173

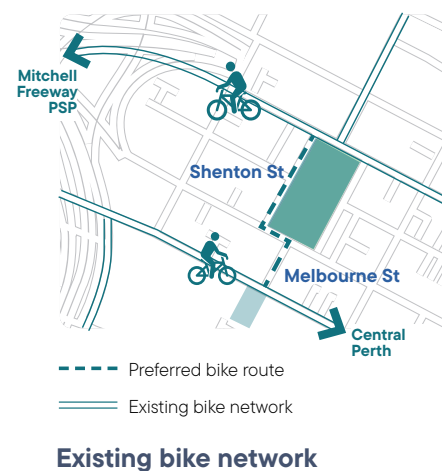
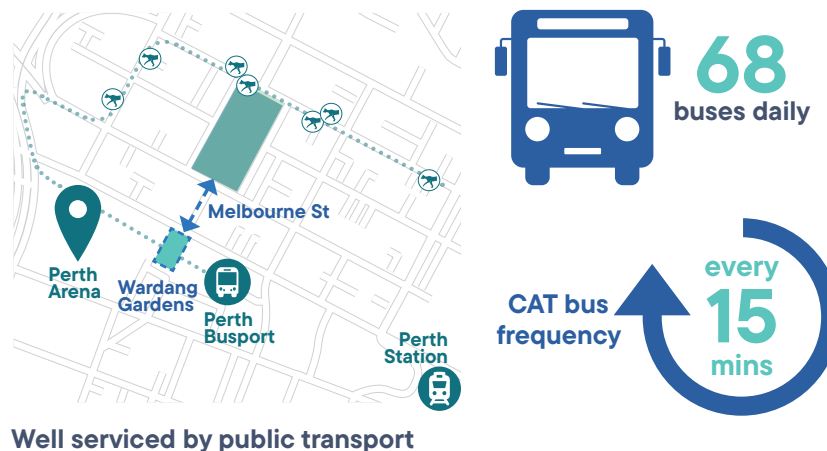
Numbers of surrounding parking bays

Sustainable Transport

Russell Square is well serviced by free Central Area Transit (CAT) buses and within walking distance to Perth Busport and Perth Station. The proposed Wardang Gardens in Perth City Link will provide a new pedestrian route connecting Perth Arena via Melbourne Street. To support this, there is a need to repurpose Melbourne Street to improve the walking environment.

On average, Shenton Street sees more cyclists than Parker Street, with cyclists frequently using Melbourne Street to connect to Roe Street. This route is popular among cyclists transitioning to and from the Principal Shared Path (PSP) from Leederville.

E-scooters have become a popular mode of transport, and the City has designated two parking stations around Russell Square to the E-scooter Share Scheme: one in front of James Street Car Park and another at the west entrance of Russell Square on Shenton Street.



CAT bus stop outside Russell Square

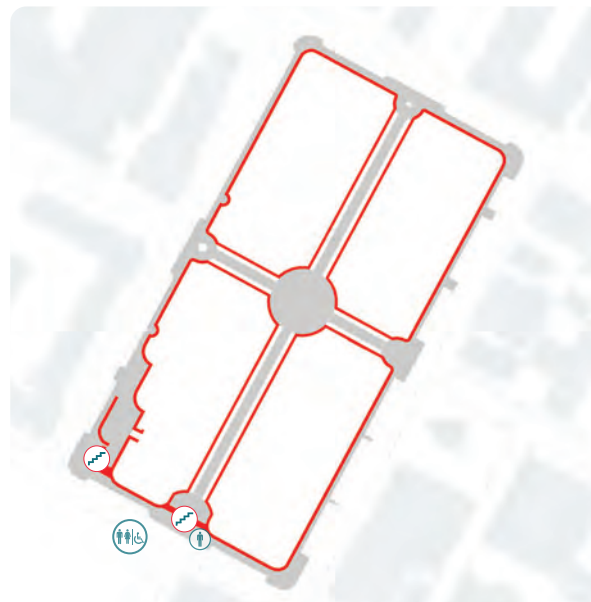
Park Amenities

Russell Square faces several challenges that limit its accessibility and usability. Uneven levels on the southern side create barriers, making it difficult for people with prams, the elderly, and those with visual impairment or limited mobility to navigate. The central gazebo shows signs of deterioration and all public artworks were removed following the decommissioning of the fountains.

The playground is limited and lacks facilities for diverse age groups and varied abilities. Inadequate lighting at night creates dark areas and impacts the perception of safety. Bin collection occurs off Parker Street, with a significant number of bins permanently cluttering the entrance. Existing irrigation systems, using unfiltered bore water, has significantly stained surfaces such as paving and signs which negatively affects their appearance.

Although the original fencing is long gone, gates with a non functional purpose were installed at the four entrances (around 1994) as a landscape feature. Removing the gates would create a more open and inviting space.

A public toilet is situated at the corner of James and Melbourne Streets. Enhancing its connectivity is necessary for park users to access. A retractable urinal located near the James Street entrance operates exclusively on Friday and Saturday nights. This facility was installed to manage high activity periods.



Stairs and kerbs limit accessibility



Most incidents occur between 9pm and 3am

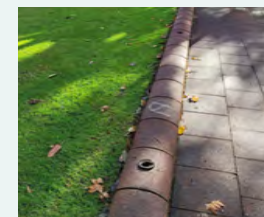
27%
of reported incidents are disorders e.g. street drinking and loitering

Reported incidents at Russell Square

Existing park amenities



Stairs impacting access



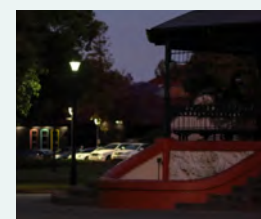
Kerbs impacting access



Limited play opportunity



Deteriorating gazebo



Inadequate lighting



Clutter



Public toilet -James Street



Bore water staining

Trees

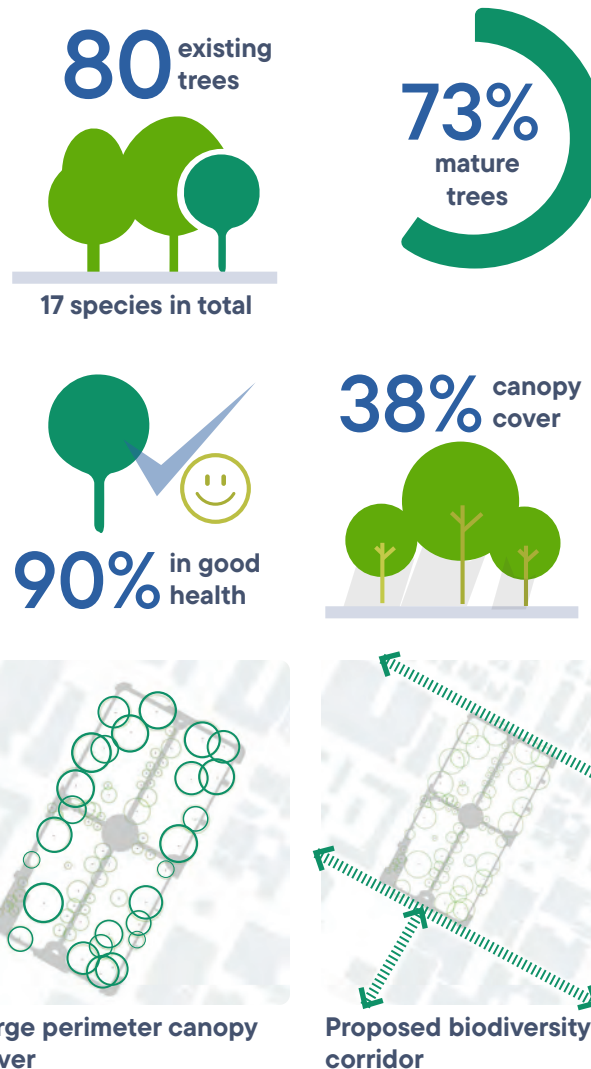
The landscape elements of open grass and large perimeter trees are quintessential to the City's historical parks. Today, they contribute significantly to Russell Square's character and appeal. They provide ample shade and cooling, enhancing the space for events and everyday use alike. These trees also serve as focal points and landmarks, and provide local habitat to various species.

However, their dense canopy and extensive root systems pose challenges such as limiting access for large vehicles and requiring careful planning to protect their health during events. Extensive groundcovers reduce access to the tree understorey, limiting the usability of the space. Balancing the preservation of these trees with the need for open lawns and functional event spaces, as well as areas for everyday recreation, is a crucial consideration in the development of Russell Square.

The City's Urban Greening Strategy has identified Melbourne Street as a biodiversity corridor, presenting an opportunity to enhance the pedestrian environment by creating a green link.



There are a number of confirmed detections of Polyphagous shot-hole borer (PSHB) throughout the City of Perth and greater metropolitan area. Whilst not currently detected in Russell Square, it poses a significant threat to the trees in the park which will continue to be monitored.



Common existing tree species



Ficus macrophylla
Moreton Bay Fig



Olea europaea
Olive



Brachychiton populneus
Kurrajong



Jacaranda mimosifolia
Jacaranda

Community Consultation Summary

A survey was posted on Engage Perth from 26 September to 16 October 2023 to capture community feedback about how people currently use the park and their aspirations to help shape the future of the space. A total number of 322 survey responses were received.

Key issues and feedback

1. Safety when using the park

Safety is often an issue and a deterrent for me to visit

Poor lighting in the evening

The park has a lot dark areas and the rotunda attracts intimidating gatherings. As a female I would never cross the park during the night.

62 comments received mentioned safety.

56% of the unsafe comments were from **female**.

40% of the unsafe comments were about congregation of anti-social behavior in the **rotunda**.

2. Poor quality and lack of amenity

The rotunda is poorly maintained. Fountains haven't flowed for years. Play equipment is limited and looking very sad...

It lacks decent facilities for children and zero exercise place for adults.

No tables for picnics

Underutilised space... sad and unkempt

Facilities to encourage food truck/ coffee vans, etc with a variety of shaded seating

...should include public art and cultural heritage interpretations

41 comments received mentioned limited amenities to suit diverse users.

3. Monofunctional space and lack of activation

Only go for Fringe - nothing else to attract us there

... would like regular Farmers Market

A youth precinct or skatable area with basketball courts would be a great attraction

21 comments received mentioned lack of appeal and activation outside of events (Fringe).

Top priorities for future planning



1 Open lawn areas and seating for passive recreation relaxation



2 Enhancing perceptions of safety



3 Enhancing the streets surrounding and improving connections to the surrounding neighborhood



4 Continue events, festivals and markets



5 Social meeting place, bbq and picnic facilities

What Could It Be?



A contemporary city park

- Welcoming to people of all ages, genders, and abilities
- Accessible and enjoyable movement network
- Safe and inclusive environment
- Strong identity expressed through cultural heritage interpretation and public art
- A destination that stimulates local business and development on surrounding streets



An activated and connected park

- A variety of features and facilities for different community groups
- Overlapping activities and events
- Supports rich and inclusive social interaction
- Accessible and enjoyable movement network



A green oasis

- Green linkage to support biodiversity and connectivity
- Water-sensitive design for urban cooling and stormwater management
- Resilient to climate change with adaptive infrastructure and sustainable materials and practices

What makes a great park



Safety and security

- Allow for passive surveillance
- Overlapping functions day and night
- Well lit/lighting to human scale
- Well maintained
- CCTV



Opportunities to walk and ride

- Room for walking
- Dog walking
- Good surfaces
- Accessibility for everyone



Opportunities to sit, stand and stay

- Attractive and functional edges
- Pleasant views, people watching
- Good mix of seating
- Resting opportunities



Dimensioned at human scale

- Dimensions of structures and spaces at human scale (in relation to senses, movement, size and behaviour)



Landscape biodiversity

- Water sensitive urban design
- Tree canopy
- Beauty and activation every season
- Hydrozoning to promote efficient use of water



Positive sensory experience

- Good design and detailing
- Quality materials
- Fine views/vistas
- Rich sensory experiences: trees, plants, water



Protection against unpleasant sensory experiences

- Dust, noise, glare
- Climate
- Traffic



Opportunities to see

- Reasonable viewing distances
- Unhindered views
- Interesting views
- Lighting at night



Opportunities to talk and listen

- Low noise levels
- Public seating arrangements conducive to communicating



Opportunities for play and exercise

- Allow for physical activity
- Temporary activities (markets, festivals, exhibitions etc)
- By day and night
- In summer and winter



Opportunities to enjoy the positive aspects of climate

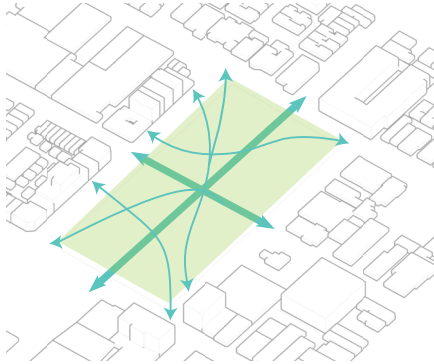
- Sun/shade
- Heat/coolness
- Shelter from wind/breeze



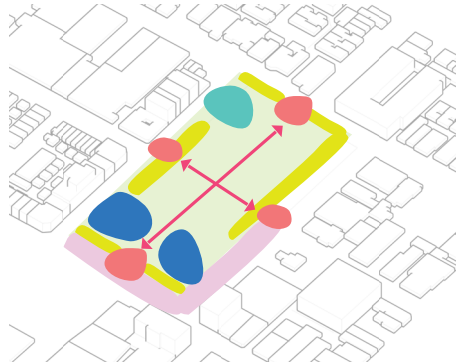
Identity and sense of place

- Acknowledge history of the place
- Embrace and integrate key characteristics of the landscape

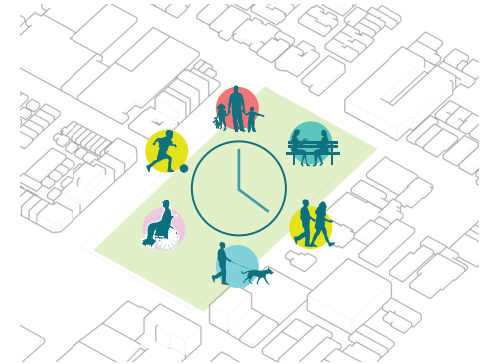
Design Principles



**Accessible and
connected pathways**



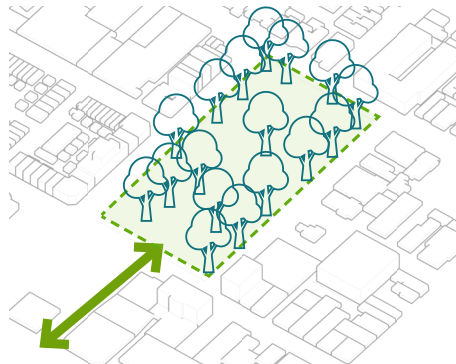
Vibrant and diverse



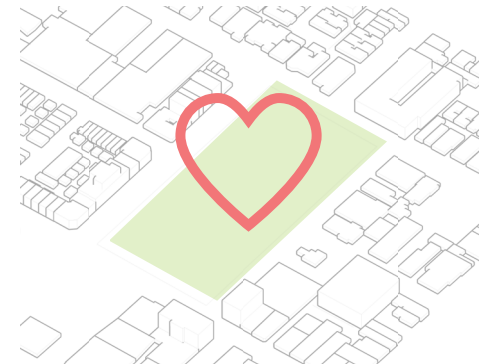
Safe and inclusive



Integrated uses

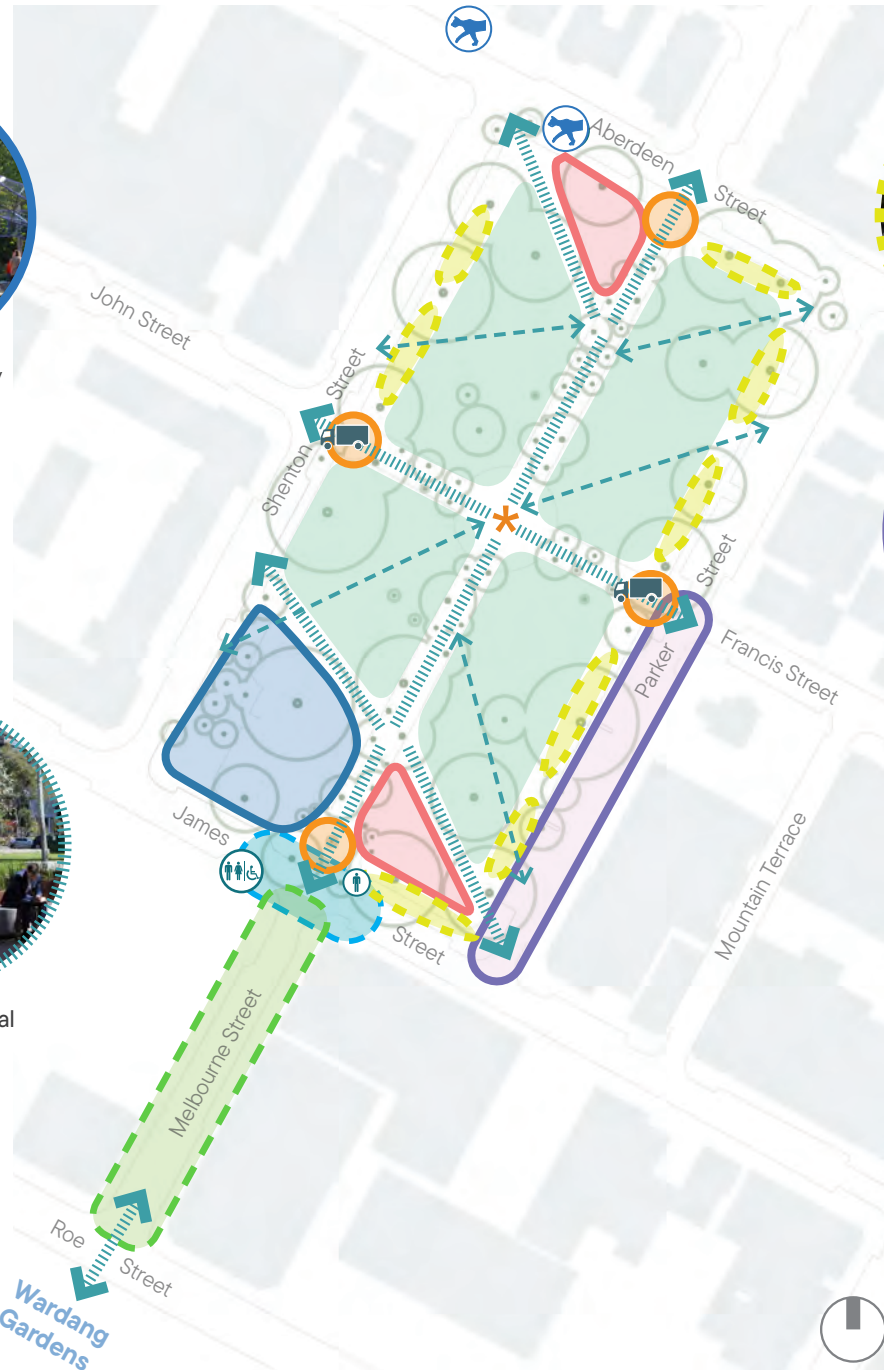


Green and sustainable



**Unique identity and
sense of place**

Potential Key Moves



Legend

- Primary pedestrian movement
- Secondary pedestrian movement
- Primary entry point
- Events access and egress point
- Open lawn and event space
- New central feature
- Strengthen pedestrian link
- New green biodiversity link
- Play opportunity
- Infrastructure to support social interaction
- Inviting park edges
- Potential seasonal event space
- Existing trees
- Existing CAT bus stop
- Existing toilet
- Existing pop-up urinal



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CITY OF  **PERTH**
City of Light