

Case Study 1: Reimagining Moonee Ponds Creek to create a green future for Melbourne's north-west



The Reimagining Moonee Ponds Creek Project (the project) aims to create a more appealing creek-side environment, restore waterway health and activate open space and recreational opportunities along a section of Moonee Ponds Creek in Melbourne's northwest. The project involves re-naturalising a 550 metre section of the existing concrete channel through the suburbs of Strathmore and Oak Park.

The project is being driven by many organisations and stakeholders which shows their immense commitment to success. Melbourne Water is leading the project, on behalf of the Chain of Ponds Collaboration Group (CPCG) and in partnership with Moreland City Council, Moonee Valley City Council, Greater Western Water and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

Every year, Melbourne Water develops large strategies that guide our objectives, actions, and targets over the mid to long term. We deliver more than 100 capital projects and more than 300 local community projects to improve our communities and protect the environment. This project was not only a project to transform and uplift a community space; it had immense community interest, support and investment driven by individuals, and community groups. Melbourne Water was fortunate to be able to work with the community so intimately to design a project and space that engaged with and touched people in so many ways – and was aligned to what the local community envisaged and wanted. We feel privileged to have worked on a project that the community connected with and were given the ultimate decision on, in their local area.

Community engagement has been at the heart of this project from the outset. Melbourne Water put the community at the centre of decision-making to shape the future of this valued waterway. We have inspired and engaged the community to own the project outcomes in a sensitive and genuine manner, while overcoming the incredible constraints of commencing engagement in the middle of a global pandemic.

We knew we needed a co-design engagement approach and worked closely with our project partners to design two phases of engagement. Our approach placed stakeholders and the community at the heart of the decision; their feedback ultimately selecting the preferred concept design that would improve the future of the Moonee Ponds Creek. Our approach operated at the **involve** and **collaborate** levels of the IAP2 spectrum.



Figure 1: Project map

Our stakeholders challenged us to innovate and look for new ways to connect with our communities and demonstrate how their feedback influenced the design. We used augmented reality photographs to show how community feedback had shaped this by giving a realistic image of the different ways the waterway could be transformed.

To engage with young audiences and local schools, we created a fictional character in the form of a Genie whose lamp had been found in the creek. With this tool educating school students about the waterway and providing them with a safe space to provide informed feedback about the future of the creek. It was important that our engagement approach involved working closely with Traditional Owner groups early to understand how they would like to be engaged so this could be incorporated in the approach.

Throughout our work, we continued to demonstrate that Melbourne Water is a leader in engagement and is committed to placing the community at the heart of our decisions.

The key outcomes of our engagement on the Reimagining Moonee Ponds Creek project are:

- Our engagement with Traditional Owner groups is now seen as the benchmark within Melbourne Water.
- There was high engagement with young people, who tend to be underrepresented in engagement on infrastructure projects. This was achieved through designing a fun and appealing education campaign which used a 'story telling' approach through a fictional Genie character.
- This project is Melbourne Water's most commented on/engaged project on our YourSay digital engagement platform.

The three key engagement takeaways we would guarantee implementation of on future projects include:

- Building strong relationships with community-based groups at the project commencement to ensure the engagement approach meets expectations, and to enable connection with community networks.
- Being clear about what the community can influence and demonstrating how this feedback has shaped project outcomes. This helps build trust in the engagement process and a social licence to operate.
- Developing tailored engagement approaches for Traditional Owners groups and hard-to-reach groups, such as young people, to ensure diverse voices are considered and represented.

1.0 Objectives

The project area is situated in Melbourne’s Northern suburbs and is split across the municipalities of Moreland and Moonee Valley. There are several community facilities along the project site, such as sporting clubs and schools. Strathmore North Primary School has a close relationship with the creek and backs directly onto the Moonee Ponds Creek trail. The trail offers an important connection to the city and provides the community with recreational based cycling use.

Project snapshot

Name: Reimaging Moonee Ponds Creek

Organisation: Melbourne Water

Location: Oak Park and Strathmore, Melbourne

Status: Design complete

Start: 2020

End: ongoing with construction to start in 2022

IAP2 level: Involve and collaborate

The following represents a snapshot of the key demographics in Oak Park:

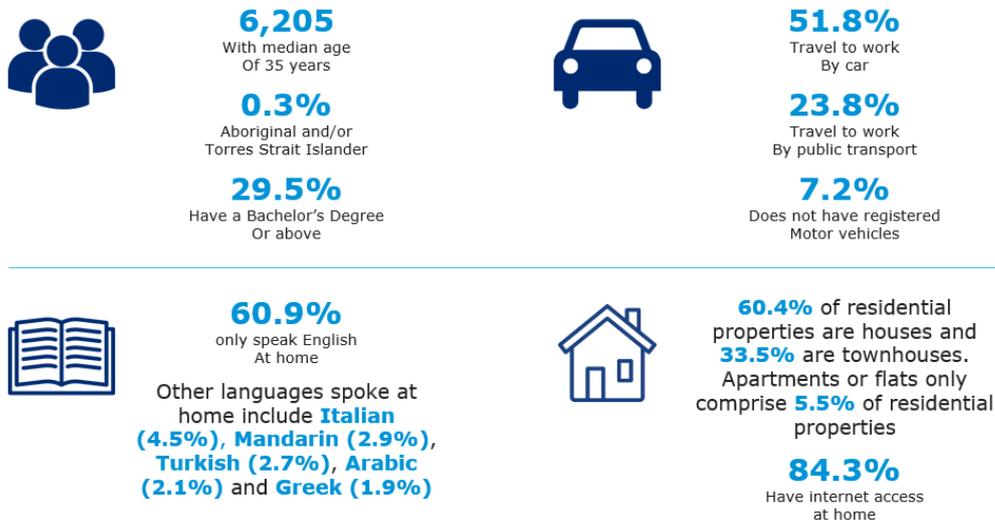


Figure 2: Oak Park demographics

A snapshot of the key demographics in Strathmore include:

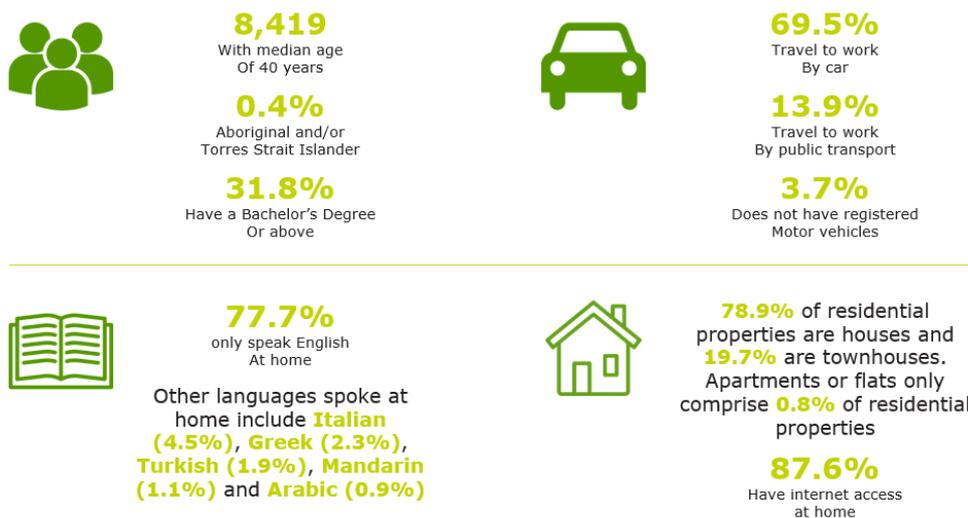


Figure 3: Strathmore demographics

The project was unique in that the Chain of Ponds Collaboration Group (CPCG) – made up of 15 community and government organisations – was dedicated to transforming Moonee Ponds Creek into an iconic Melbourne waterway, in turn providing social and environmental benefits to the community. Melbourne Water was committed to delivering a project which allowed for members of the community and CPCG to collaborate on the engagement design and be part of the project outcome.

Community engagement was at the heart of this project from the outset and commitment to collaborate with community and stakeholders was at its core. During the initial stages of the project, we worked closely with all project partners to co-design a two-phase engagement approach that allowed for the community and stakeholders to have numerous opportunities to participate across multiple platforms. The team inspired and engaged the community to own the project outcomes in a sensitive and genuine manner, while overcoming the incredible constraints of commencing engagement in the middle of a global pandemic.

The project objectives were broken into two areas – urban design and waterway design. The community engagement aim, strategy, tools and process were developed with those focus areas in mind to meet each objective. The aim of phase one was to be upfront with the community about project constraints and the areas they could influence, and to gain local intelligence. This included the length of creek that could be naturalised and the opportunity for the area to be increased from 500 metres to 700 metres, depending on the concept the community chose.

Phase one engagement aimed to understand the community's use of space and what improvements they believed would enhance this. Feedback on five important themes was sought – sustainability, safety, recreation, accessibility, and community connection. The project team would use the feedback to inform and guide the Moonee Ponds Creek project concept designs, before presenting these back to the community in phase two.

We used live and digital engagement tools to:

1. Implement a communications channel allowing open and honest responses, using Melbourne Water's YourSay page.
2. Gather meaningful data that enabled evidence-based decisions, rather than relying on 'gut feelings'.
3. Understand the community's attitudes and key drivers in relation to the five themes. Feedback helped shape the concept designs and identify what the community was most passionate about in relation to the creek's naturalisation. This assisted us in developing the phase two methodology.

It was important to communicate and inform the community of the non-negotiables and constraints of the project site to support an informed decision. This highlighted physical constraints, pedestrian and cyclist safety, budget constraints, PFAS removal and flood management.

Phase two engagement built on the knowledge we acquired during phase one as we asked the community to consider three concept design options. We showcased how the community's feedback was incorporated into the concept designs and provided key explanations of the barriers to feedback which couldn't be incorporated. Phase two included extensive consultation, including a last-minute change from face-to-face to online engagement due to Victorian State Government COVID-19 restrictions.

The community were provided with information about the project via key stakeholder websites; creatively designed and helpful videos; videos hosted by the project team; multiple letterbox drops covering a large residential and business area (6,000+); fact sheets; creative graphics; direct email; phone calls; and social media channels. We regularly spoke with community members and key stakeholders throughout the project to consider other activities and ensure our message achieved cut-through.

2.0 Methodology

Our co-design approach and two-phase engagement created real investment and ownership over the redevelopment of the local area. Our approach operated at the **involve** and **collaborate** levels of the IAP2 spectrum and form the project timeline below.



Figure 4: Current project timeline and engagement milestones

Our engagement approach aligns with the IAP2 Core Values as outlined in the table below.

IAP2 Core Values	Example of how this was considered in the design of your project methodology
1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process	We co-designed a two-phase engagement approach with project partners using a combination of engagement methods to engage broadly and deeply with community members interested in Moonee Ponds Creek. Extensive stakeholder mapping was undertaken at the start of the project and connected with local champions, community and sporting groups to access a broader audience. We ensured those who use this space were engaged and provided with an opportunity to feed back.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision	We made a clear promise to the community that their feedback would be used to develop a concept design and then a detailed design for the re-naturalisation of Moonee Ponds Creek. We used videos to inform the project and educate the community about the waterway and the constraints to be considered when providing feedback. We used reports and videos to report back to the community after each phase of engagement, sharing this information and how it had shaped the design.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers	We used a range of face-to-face and online consultation technologies to communicate the needs and interests of community participants and decision makers. The opportunity to share submissions, factsheets, maps, videos, and augmented photographs produced a richer learning experience for all participants from the local football club through to students at Strathmore North Primary School.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision	We used face-to-face and online consultation as well as our local champions network to communicate to hard-to-reach groups, (eg school children). We knew we had to use a range of communication tools to make the consultation process as accessible as possible for the diverse community. We saw a diverse range of demographics who engaged with the project and provided feedback, especially the younger generation.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate	We worked closely with the CPCG and the two Councils to co-design an engagement approach to meet the needs of the diverse community. We consulted with key community champions to understand how the community wanted to be engaged and communicated with. We analysed the demographics and actively tailored our approach to suit. Engagement with Traditional Owner groups was key and we sought their feedback early to understand how they wanted to be involved.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way	Melbourne Water's YourSay platform became a hub for the project, employing a range of mediums including videos, maps, photos and surveys to communicate complex information to our diverse audiences.

	We engaged early with key community members to generate interest, and further spread project information across local networks.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision	After both engagement phases, the community were informed of how their input from phase one was incorporated into the concept designs presented in phase two. Where community feedback couldn't be included, we developed clear key messages explaining those reasons. Communication was put up on the website and factsheets were created to visually convey what we had learnt and the next steps.

“Reimagining Moonee Ponds Creeks continues to demonstrate that Melbourne Water is a leader in engagement and is committed to placing the community at the centre of our decisions.”

Andrew Mellor, Melbourne Water



Figure 5: A frame from the video used to communicate the project, constraints, and opportunities for community to participate. The video was shared widely across Melbourne Water platforms.

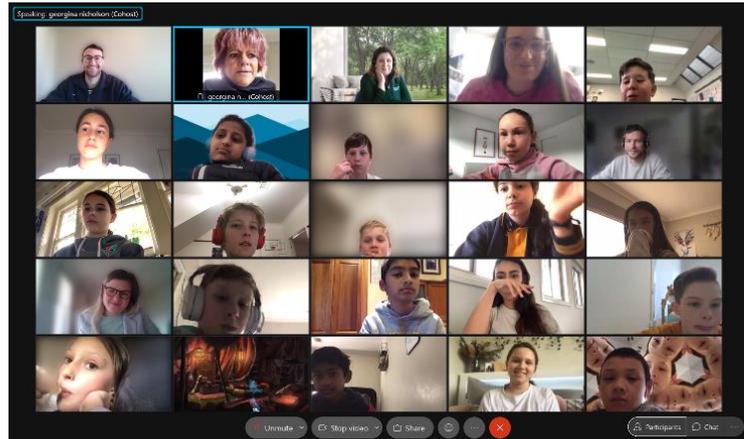


Figure 6: The school engagement session with Strathmore North Primary School where they were asked which concept designs, they preferred (Online due to Covid restrictions)

Phase one of our engagement approach was focussed on understanding how the community used the surrounding environment and what future enhancements could improve the space. From this information, we developed three key questions:

- What do you like about this section of Moonee Ponds Creek and surrounds?
- How do you currently use this section of the creek and surrounds?
- Reimagine this section of the creek. What would make you use the creek and surrounds more?

Five themes were developed to guide the community in giving their feedback. Accompanying images and context in the communication support materials helped guide and theme the community’s ideas.

During this phase, we worked closely with representatives of the Moonee Valley Bicycle Users group to improve cyclist and pedestrian safety by changing the new shared path alignment to a co-designed path alignment. We met the group on site and walked the track to understand their requirements and how they would like to see the Shared Use Path along the creek improved.



We deliberately sought and facilitated community members potentially affected by, or interested in our project decisions through strong relationships with local stakeholders. Working closely with Councils and other members of CPCG provided local champions on the ground to effectively engage, enabling us to tap into more diverse voices.

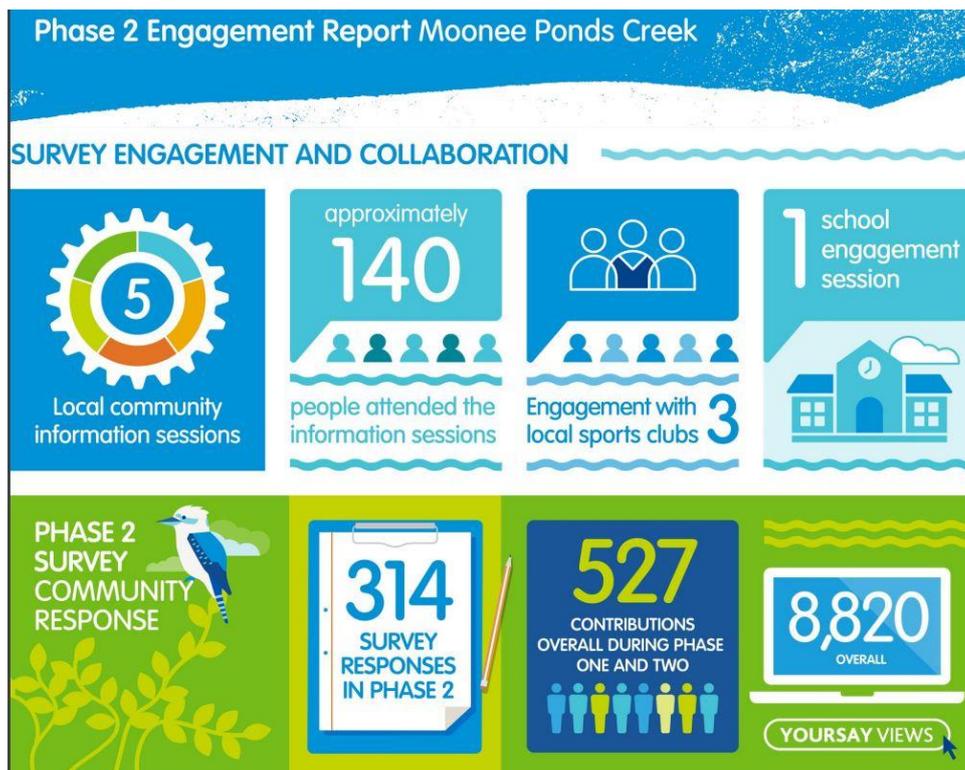
Figure 7: A snapshot of Phase One engagement results

Phase two engagement was designed to collect more refined information about the evolved concept design. Our YourSay page showcased the three design concepts in detail via artists impressions and an information video; then participants were asked:

- to provide their feedback on what aspects of each concept were most important to them.
- what their favourite design concept was and why.
- their three preferred treatments for the open space adjacent to the creek and whether they had any other ideas for these spaces.

The YourSay page was supplemented with five online information sessions allowing the community to ask questions directly to the project team. From the survey results, Design Concept C was the most popular. This

process created ownership for the community and showed the differing of opinions and needs for the community.



The conversation has not stopped since the engagement has concluded. Due to the community being continuously involved in the project, it is still generating conversations and excitement.

Figure 8: A snapshot of Phase Two engagement results

3.0 Manage Engagement

The project has faced a number of challenges over the past 18 months, encouraging the team to work closer with project partners to adapt our engagement approach. Key challenges included:

- **COVID-19 lockdowns:** Our engagement program was impacted 3 days prior to commencing engagement phase one and two weeks prior to engagement phase two. We quickly pivoted to online from a hybrid engagement model requiring us to develop and distribute communications to support the new approach. We used innovative online tools like Mentimeter, which included a virtual tour of the designs, and interactive online survey to collect feedback.
- **Legacy issues and lack of trust in Melbourne Water:** Between 1940 and the 1970s, the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works straightened and concreted the creek from Strathmore to Flemington Road in an attempt to stop periodic flooding. This decision did not have community support, resulting in a lack of trust in Melbourne Water. A key component of our approach was to reset expectations with the community and rebuild trust by delivering on our promise to involve community in key decisions about this project. Melbourne Water offered to collaborate with the community providing themes and designs to choose from.
- **How cherished the project area is:** The project area was chosen due to its high value by the community and the symbolism of removing the last installed piece of the concrete channel. Our challenge was to ensure a broad and diverse audience was consulted to represent community values. We did this by building a network of local champions who promoted the project and encouraged the community to participate and actively seeking out hard-to-reach voices through an engaging, fun education campaign.
- **Political overlay and scrutiny:** The funding for this project was provided by Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP) after campaigning by the CPCG and the local Member for Essendon. Local Councillors were also interested. To overcome this challenge, government stakeholders were regularly updated on the project progress via formal and informal briefings utilising Melbourne Water's government relations manager as a key liaison. Working closely with relevant government stakeholders, local Councils and CPCG to coordinate messaging, we provided communications and media opportunities for ministers, local MPs, Councillors, and volunteers from the Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek.
- **Lack of understanding of project limitations:** We made sure we were very clear on who we are, the project scope, the negotiables, and the non-negotiables of the project, and how the collaboration process with the project partners would work. This project was heavily campaigned for by the community and we were aware of an expectation that the full 700-meter length of the creek could be naturalised. We wanted to put faces to the project and show the community that Melbourne Water have a team of people who care just as much about the space as they do. To overcome this challenge, we constantly fed back to the community, shared all data we collected in an easy-to-understand way, and demonstrated that data-driven and evidence-based practices can generate meaningful findings for the community.

4.0 Outcomes, impact and insights

The project had high engagement and was valued by the community from the beginning. We gathered immense insight into how the community wanted to see their creek reimaged and reached thousands of community members and stakeholders across the two phases including:

- 5 public information sessions
- 1 school engagement session complete with magic carpet and genie
- Engagement with 3 sporting clubs (2 football and 1 cricket)
- 526 YourSay online survey responses across both phases
- 6 posts across social media channels
- 5 Facebook event pages
- 7 Facebook ads
- 5 Event ads which generated 609 event responses and reached 30,975 people
- YourSay traffic ad generated 577 landing page views and reached 19,979 people
- YourSay traffic reminder ad generated 411 landing page views and reached 14,250 people
- The social media campaign resulted in 609 event responses and 988 click throughs to the YourSay page, reaching over an estimated 65k people.



In phase one, we received 194 responses and once categorised, the feedback indicated community desire to see the longest possible stretch of creek naturalised, as well as an improvement in pedestrian and cyclist safety and more recreational features along the creek.

Figure 9: Phase One engagement summary results

In phase two, we found Design Concept C to be the most popular, contradicting the phase one responses to remove the longest length of concrete possible. The option received 135 community votes despite removing 150 meters less concrete than Design Concept A. This showcased the need to communicate the whole picture and to strongly highlight the constraints to support the community making an informed decision.

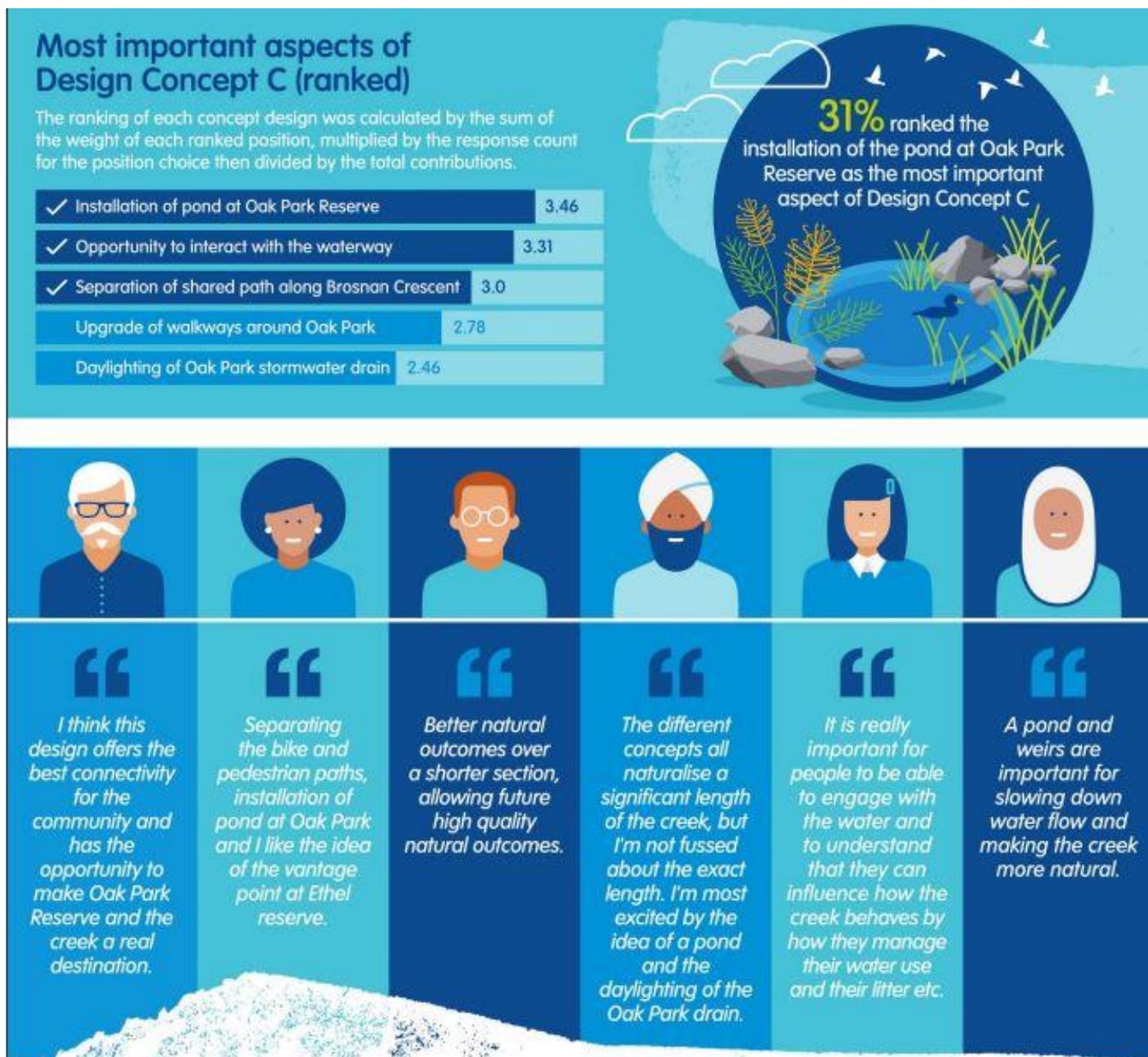


Figure 10: Outcomes from Phase Two

This project is Melbourne Water’s **most commented on / engaged project on the YourSay platform**. We received glowing feedback regarding our communication and engagement, as The Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation’s (WWCHAC) said:

‘The Reimagining your Moonee Ponds Creek project has sent the benchmark for how all projects should seek to engage with WWCHAC and for this reason we are pleased to offer our unconditional praise and support on the engagement process.’

Innovation and Uniqueness

The project team pivoted to online and video to ascertain the best way of communicating feedback to the community. We focused on engaging hard to reach audiences, particularly local indigenous groups, and the community’s youth through a specific genie activity with local school children, to see gather their insights and feedback and to ensure their traditionally underrepresented voices.

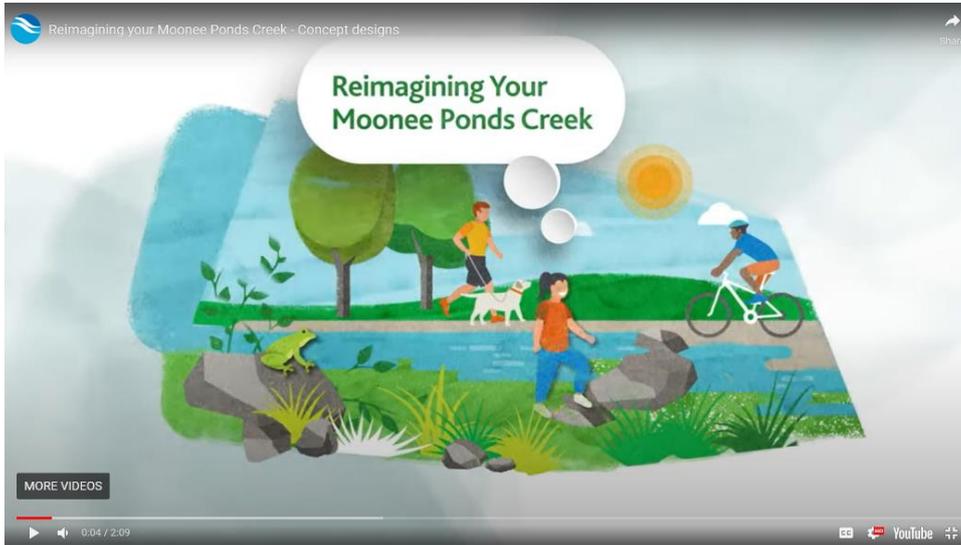


Figure 11: Video of *concept designs for the Moonee Ponds Creek*

Working with Strathmore North Primary School, we created a genie character, Sim Sala Bim. Sim Sala Bim is an actor and artist and is experienced in engaging with children and schools, getting them to share their opinions and have a voice. Using this character, we were able to make our information interesting and accessible to younger audiences, as the infrastructure being built today will benefit them for the longest. We knew it was important to incorporate youth wants and needs to ensure long term project success.



Figure 12: Image of *Sim Sala Bim, as part of the online genie activity with Strathmore North Primary School*

Traditional Owner groups have a strong connection to land and waterways and engaging them early and genuinely is important to ensure their voices are heard, and cultural values are considered and incorporated into the project. We engaged Wurundjeri to prepare a list of actions to partner on for the project and that built on an earlier Cultural Values Study undertaken by Council. We conducted site walks and tours, targeted feedback, indigenous focused workshops and are currently exploring an option to develop an indigenous sensory garden as part of the project.

The WWCHAC said:

‘Although outside the scope of the project, Melbourne Water identified and led the process of seeking grant funding for an additional project to deliver on the recommendations - The Wurundjeri Immersive Trail project. This project will collaborate, design and install interactive signs along the trail, showcasing the rich Aboriginal culture of the area through interpretive media such as sounds, video, sculpture and signage’.

The key lessons we learnt and would continue to build on and implement on future projects include:

- During phase one engagement, less than 1% of participants were aged under 18. A key focus of phase two engagement was to increase participation from younger age groups. Targeted engagement was undertaken with Strathmore North Primary School and contents was provided to four surrounding schools, to encourage students and younger people to participate in the survey.
- During phase two community engagement, a small number out of 314 survey responses identified as local traders/business owners. It was acknowledged that given the project site did not abut or impact any businesses, the challenge of getting trader and business involvement was more difficult than on other projects.

The need and requirement for a post engagement evaluation survey was considered but not undertaken as more engagement will occur as we move into construction. Ongoing evaluation on engagement was undertaken as we moved through each phase and we adapted our engagement approach accordingly. The intense public participation and interest, as well as the support from stakeholders speaks volume of the engagement method.

Acknowledgements and to find out more

We would like to thank Melbourne Water for agreeing to share this case study and insights to advance engagement practice. This case study was authored by Jacqueline Novoselac.

Jacqueline Novoselac is a Communications and Engagement Advisor with Melbourne Water. Jacqueline is passionate about delivering good quality engagement and has experience in the transport, infrastructure and water sectors and expertise in working with diverse, multifaceted communities to develop and deliver project outcomes and ensure all voices are heard and represented.

Lucy McLaren is a Senior Consultant for Struber, engaged by Melbourne Water to support the design and delivery of the project. Lucy is highly motivated and has developed in-depth and adaptable strategic communications and engagement plans for a wide range of target audiences. Her experience spans across stakeholder engagement, public engagement, community consultation, environmental science, and research with a demonstrated history of working in the transportation, trucking, and railroad industry.

For more information about this project see:

- yoursay.melbournewater.com.au/reimaginingmooneeponds-creek
- youtube.com/watch?v=hC5PtnJmmS8and
- youtube.com/watch?v=TskXkWbc-UE
- melbournewater.com.au/building-and-works/projects/reimagining-your-moonee-ponds-creek

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