



ASSET PLAN 2026-35

Reconvened Focus Group Engagement Summary
14/11/2024

Introduction

Previous participants from the Asset Plan focus groups held in May and June 2024 were invited to come together once more to deliberate further on the asset plan and specifically the dilemma of renewing versus maintaining assets. The reconvened focus group session was held on Thursday 14 November 2024 from 7pm -9pm in the Fountain View Room located at the Civic Centre.

How we engaged you

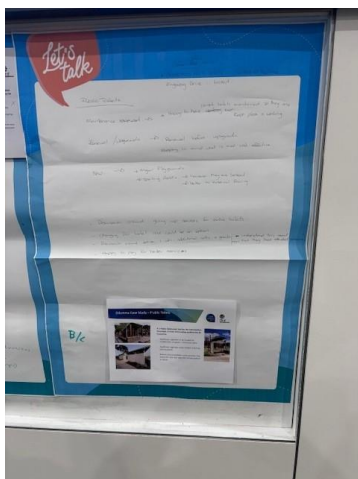
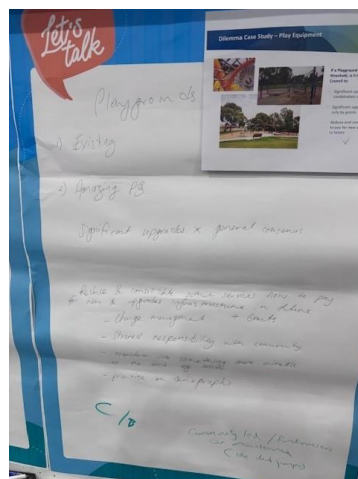
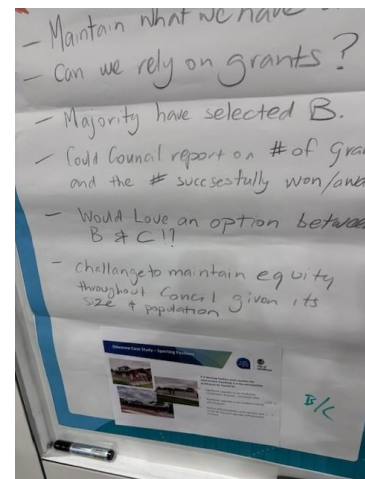
At the focus group participants worked in small table groups to deliberate on the question:
When considering the management of our community assets which approach would you prefer Council to adopt for future budgets?

- Continue maintaining current assets at their current standard, with any significant upgrades to be funded by combination of grants + increased rates*
- Continue to maintain current assets at their current standard, with any significant upgrades to be funded in full by only by grants*
- Reduce and consolidate some services now to pay for new and upgrades infrastructure in future?*

Each table applied the question to commonly used assets that came up in discussions during the previous focus groups, such as public toilets, park play equipment and sports pavilions.

A post session evaluation survey was also presented to the group that asked if they had gained a better understanding of the challenges associated with maintaining versus renewing assets.

Below: key notes presented by each table group after deliberation.



Below: Focus group participants deliberating.



Participation

A total of sixteen community members participated in the focus group. These were a mix of those that participated in the three focus group held between 20 May and 4 June 2024.

Snapshot of Demographics

Below is a snapshot of the diversity of participation in the focus group:

Gender identity



50% Male, 50% Female

Age



Ranged from 26 to 66+ years, 66+ being the highest represented group with 38% of participants in this age bracket

Suburb



Participants came from eight suburbs with 31% living in Whittlesea Township

LGBTQIA+ community



6% of participants identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community

Multicultural community



44% of participants identified as being part of our multicultural community

What we heard

Below is a summary of the findings from each table group to the question *When considering the management of our community assets which approach would you prefer Council to adopt for future budgets?*

- *a) Continue maintaining current assets at their current standard, with any significant upgrades to be funded by combination of grants + increased rates*
- *b) Continue to maintain current assets at their current standard, with any significant upgrades to be funded in full by only by grants*
- *c) Reduce and consolidate some services now to pay for new and upgrades infrastructure in future?*



Public toilets

Deliberations on managing public toilets saw options B and C as the most appropriate.

The challenges of each of the options was discussed and the group unanimously agreed that maintenance was a better option than renewing.

Community facilities were also discussed with consideration on making toilets at these facilities accessible from an external part of the building. The group also discussed whether Council could charge users a small fee to use public toilets to make the maintenance cost neutral. When presented to the wider group many participants were not supportive of the idea due to affordability concerns for community.



Park play equipment

Deliberations on managing park play equipment saw options B and C as the most appropriate. Challenges discussed by the group included defining grants, change management opportunities and prioritising based on demographics. Discussion focused on new playgrounds built by developers and handed to council to maintain adding to ongoing costs. The group questions what role Council could play in ensuring the same standard of park being built by developers as many use materials that are not long lasting and have higher maintenance costs.

The group also suggested Council exploring sharing responsibility of parks with the community such as the recently opened Doreen Dirt Jumps which saw Council develop the area and community maintaining it. Another suggestion by the group focussed on community fundraising initiatives with funds used to develop the playground and council maintaining it from there on.



Sporting pavilions

Deliberations on maintaining sporting pavilions saw options B and C as the most appropriate, with option B seen as the preferred.

The challenges discussed by the group included whether Council could rely on grants for funding with the group suggesting that Council report on the number of grants applied for and not just the number of successful grant applications. There was also discussion around the challenge of equity across the municipality given its size and population.

The post session evaluation survey asked if participants felt they had gained a better understanding of the challenges associated with maintaining versus renewing assets. Fifteen of the sixteen participants completed the survey. The results of this survey are as below:

- Eight participants (53%) felt they had gained much more understanding
- Four participants (27%) indicated they gained a little more understanding
- One participant (6%) felt they knew the same amount as before
- Two participants did not respond to the question.

Some comments from those who attended.

"Great intro making everyone feel comfortable, clear structure, well explained at the beginning"

"Amazing collaboration process"

"George wanted everyone's voice to be heard"

"I really loved participating, thank you"

Next Steps

The draft Asset Plan 2026-35, once endorsed by Council for community consultation will then be shared for community feedback before being presented for final endorsement by Council in mid-2025. <https://engage.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/assetplan25>