



## Darebin City Council Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2021-2041: draft guiding principles

Darebin City Council's approach to early years infrastructure planning and provision will be guided by the Darebin 2041 Community Vision:

*Darebin is an equitable, vibrant and connected community.*

*Darebin respects and supports First Nations People, values country, our diverse communities and places.*

*Darebin commits to mitigating the climate emergency, creating prosperity for current and future generations.*

The following planning principles will guide our decision-making:

**Equity.** Ensuring equitable access to affordable and high-quality services across Darebin is a key objective of the Plan. Guided by *Towards Equality – Darebin City Council's Equity, Inclusion and Human Rights Framework 2019-2029*, we aspire to create a community where everyone can thrive and belong. The provision of early years infrastructure should contribute to reducing the impact of poverty and disadvantage on our community by ensuring that all children and families have access to the services they need to thrive.

**Access.** All early years facilities should be accessible and inclusive for all children and families, including those with disability, underpinned by the application of universal design principles. Children and families should be able to access the services they need in facilities that are conveniently located and accessible by public transport.

**Diversity and inclusion:** Facilities and services should be welcoming, culturally safe and inclusive for all children and families across all dimensions of diversity including, but not limited to, cultural background/identity, language, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion and family structure.

**Choice.** Council values a mixed market in the childcare and kindergarten sector, so that families are able to choose services that suit their circumstances, preferences and needs from diverse options across community-managed services, other not for profits and commercial services, and from a range of service delivery models including both sessional and integrated kindergarten programs.

**Quality.** High quality standards in early years services are fundamental to delivering the best possible long-term impacts on children's development, wellbeing and learning. High quality physical environments are critical to enabling high quality service provision, keeping children, families and staff safe, and providing the best possible experiences for children and families in all services. Council is committed to ensuring that all our early years facilities are fit-for-purpose and well-maintained.

**Integration.** The integration of early years services provides significant benefits to children and families and is recognised to be particularly important for families who experience disadvantage or other barriers to accessing services. We aim to enable children and families to access a range of services at the same location, including universal and targeted services, and to enable collaborative and integrated service planning and programming. Integration requires more than just the co-location of services; it is supported by high quality shared spaces and amenities, organisational commitment from all relevant parties, governance mechanisms, facilitation and resourcing of shared functions.



**Whole of community approach.** Council's early years facilities are assets that the whole community should benefit from. They should not only be sites for service delivery but should be active community spaces that bring the community together across generations. By opening these assets to a broader range of uses their benefits to the community can be realised over extended hours, throughout the week and at weekends and at all times of the year.

**Community engagement.** The planning and design of early years facilities must be informed and guided by strong community engagement, to ensure that the views of the community are central to decision-making and co-design about the facilities that they will use. Place-based planning models that bring together local stakeholders and community to develop locally tailored solutions are particularly important in areas of vulnerability. Crucially, engagement must include the voices and views of children and young people in line with Council's commitment as a signatory to the Victorian Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter.

**Environmental sustainability.** Council is committed to a safe climate future for all. We aim to ensure that current and future facilities are sustainable, have low emissions and are resilient to changing climatic conditions.

**Access to natural environments.** Council recognises the important role that access to natural environments plays in the healthy development of children and is committed to increasing opportunities for children to engage with nature. Bush kindergarten programs are an important contributor to this goal. The incorporation of natural features in outdoor play spaces in early years facilities creates a stimulating environment for play, as well supporting children to become environmentally responsible and show respect for the environment.

**Arts and creative culture.** Access to arts and cultural experiences in early childhood settings plays an important role in supporting children's development and wellbeing and creates important connections between children and the wider community in which they live. Early years facilities that enable and support creative and cultural expression including through artist and community-led collaborations have the potential to deliver wide-ranging benefits to children, families and the wider community.

**Economic development.** The significant investments in early years infrastructure recommended by the Plan have the potential to deliver substantial economic benefits to the Darebin community, during both the construction phase of infrastructure projects and on an ongoing basis through the delivery of more jobs in early years' service delivery. In line with Council's Social and Sustainable Procurement Policy, planning and procurement for these investments should aim to ensure social, economic and environmental value and benefit for our community.