



## FORM BEST PRACTICES CONTEST

Municipality: Alexandrina Council

Country: South Australia, Australia

Contact person: Linda Scholz (OPAL, Obesity Prevention and Lifestyle Manager)

Telephone: 08 8555 8000

E-mail: linda.scholz@alexandrina.sa.gov.au

Name project

**BRISTOW SMITH RESERVE NATURE PLAYSPACE, GOOLWA – AUSTRALIA; AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY**

Category Certification Criteria: mark the category of your project

- Energy and environmental policies (politiche energetiche e ambientali);
- Infrastructure policies (politiche infrastrutturali);
- Quality of urban life policies (politiche per la qualita' urbana);
- Agricultural, touristic and artisan policies (politiche agricole, turistiche, artigianali);
- Policies for hospitality, awareness and training (politiche per l'ospitalita, la consapevolezza e la formazione);

**X Social cohesion (coesione sociale).**





Summary project



The Bristow Smith Reserve Nature Playspace, completed in December 2015, is a unique, all ages, all abilities, nature-based playspace on the Goolwa river foreshore. It is the third and most ambitious of Alexandrina Council's playground projects based on the 'nature play' concepts of Canadian Adam Bienenstock, an international leader in natural playground design and construction. Natural playspaces are designed to connect children to nature, engaging them in open-ended, imaginative and challenging play and promoting the concepts of risk benefit and natural play. The Bristow Smith Nature Playspace is an outstanding example of these principles in action.

The Alexandrina Council partnered with the State Government, local designers, autism advocates, landscapers, artists, Indigenous communities, schools, kindergartens, community groups, grandparents, parents and children to create a beautiful natural playspace in a stunning waterfront location along the Encounter Bikeway in Goolwa. The Playspace features many natural, recycled and culturally respectful elements including a carefully restored 1911 10-metre wooden fishing boat, a natural timber and sand parkour course, water play with a creek bed, fresh water beach swimming, sensory wall, climbing nets, basket swings, stepping logs and musical elements. Interpretive artwork is a key element throughout the site, reflecting local Indigenous and European cultural heritage, the natural environment and community ownership. An upgraded beach area and new barbecues and shelters encourage families to stay and play all day.

The Bristow Smith Playspace represents the best of planning and partnerships at work: in the planning which was clearly aligned from long term strategic directions to detailed design, construction and project plans; in the partnerships, collaboration and community engagement which occurred at every stage and every level of planning, design, construction, creation and celebration.

Council's cross-functional Project Team coordinated all aspects of the project including design, tendering, contract management, communication, administration, arts projects and the grand opening event. The Project Team consisted of staff from across all Council divisions and across all levels of management. A cross functional approach was ideally suited to the Bristow Smith Reserve Nature Playspace project which clearly aligned with strategic community and Council objectives as well as those of the State Government's OPAL (Obesity Prevention and Lifestyle) program.

"The Bristow Smith Reserve Nature Play space presented a unique opportunity to think big, dream and deliver something very different and dynamic for the greater community - for all ages and abilities", said project team member Stewart Ratcliff.



(Mayor Keith Parkes at the Official Opening Day)

Goal project



The vision for the Bristow Smith Reserve Nature Playspace was to highlight the close and respectful relationship between Alexandrina Council and its communities. The vision was to engage community in clearly identifying their aspirations, interest and priorities for the places where they live, work and visit.

This vision and these key themes are reflected in all of the Council's strategic, annual, business and project plans including the 2015 Regional Health Plan *Alexandrina's response to Public Health*. In this way, everything that the Council plans and does is aligned with its communities' vision for the future.

The Bristow Smith Reserve Nature Playspace was a project that ticked all the theme boxes in the Community Plan: *innovation* in its planning and in its concepts, community and cultural *participation*, *activation* of public spaces and ensuring a clean green future for people and the environment to *thrive*.

The community was engaged throughout the development of the Playspace - from the initial community consultations, through to a grand opening event, attended by over 400 people. The Project Team had a strong focus on keeping everyone informed on progress through their publications, social media, promotional materials and the special Bristow Smith Reserve project page on the Council's website which included photos and video updates. Hundreds of local residents and visitors observed progress on the site with intense interest.

Arts and cultural installations that draw on the cultural and environmental significance of the site are a strong and highly visible feature of the Nature Playspace. Council arts project officer consulted with local Ngarrindjeri elders whose culture and stories have informed a number of the projects. The traditional European fishing boat artworks and Indigenous art pieces within the playspace each represent the varied local cultural values of the area and demonstrate that these values can co-exist in one place that welcomes all.

At a more hands-on level, local community members were actively involved in learning new and old skills to create Playspace art features. Community groups, including the Goolwa Sea Scouts, the S.A Wooden Boat Association and the Aboriginal Youth Advisory Committee, worked alongside local artists to incorporate Indigenous-inspired art features into the playspace that celebrate our community's history and Ngarrindjeri culture in a unique and engaging way

The clear and sustained focus on engaging the community throughout the project has created a profound sense of community ownership of the Nature Playspace, because its evolution has been genuinely guided by their voice and their endeavour. Mayor Keith Parkes sees it as a symbol of healing for the community: 'It's such a good thing for the community to see something so positive n that space that was really a disaster area during the drought.'



Result project



It's generally agreed that it's a good thing to create beautiful natural playspaces but how can their success be measured? In the view of the project team, the Mayor and Council staff, the major determinant of the Nature Playspace success is usage: visitor numbers, length of stay, diversity of ages and abilities, exposure to the greater Fleurieu Peninsula region and return visits. Although there is no quantitative evidence yet available, the experience of all three Alexandrina Council's Nature Playspaces, Amelia Park, Forrest Reserve and Bristow Smith Reserve, has been that 'if we build it, they will come'.

Staff and community members observe that the playspaces are always in use. Neighbours comment that they are especially delighted to see these once underused places being activated - coming alive with grandparents, parents, children, groups and individuals using and exploring them in many different ways, all day long.

Community feedback and observation also indicates that the initial aim for the spaces to have intergenerational appeal has been achieved. Interest for all age groups has been generated through many of the elements, particularly in Bristow Smith Reserve with its strong focus on incorporating art, Indigenous culture and history as well as the use of restored and recycled materials such as salvaged timber. 'A lot of the old wood is of huge interest to older people,' says David Mullins, project team member.

The Playspace has only been open for a short time but the early response from the community has been overwhelmingly positive. Here are a few examples of user feedback:

- Amazing imaginative playspace for all ages and great to see facilities for all kids!
- Brilliant - well done Council!
- Fantastic! Amazing place to play ❤
- Ab Fab. Great concept and love the recycled boat!
- OMG fantastic.
- Brilliant. We will be back 😊
- Great place for family to hang out.
- Terrific. Awesome fun.
- Great work to all involved.

There are multiple benefits for the Goolwa community as well as more broadly for Alexandrina and for South Australia. These include enhanced outcomes in relation to health and wellbeing, community development, public amenity and the environment.

Bristow Smith Reserve Nature Playspace is expected to provide significant economic benefits to the Goolwa area. It provides a unique tourist offering within an easy drive from the city of Adelaide: a beautifully sited large and attractive nature-based playspace for all ages, abilities and interests. It offers a diversity of possibility for imaginative and challenging play as well as water-based activities along the foreshore. It has all the amenities required for families or groups to make a day of it with shelters, barbecues, tables and seating and elements to interest all generations. It provides a significant new point of interest as part of the Council's long term plan to expand and



Finance (costs and benefits)

The total project cost was \$751,000.

Staff (staff involved and use of time)



The six-member Council project team brought together all aspects of the project: planning, design, construction, contract management, communication and community engagement in a genuinely integrated approach involving local and state government collaboration. And the strong support of the elected members and the wider community provided added motivation to achieve the best possible outcome on their behalf.

The size of the project required a group that could make decisions and take responsibility for project progress and outcomes - to generally keep the work moving along and avoid unnecessary delays. It was an effective approach according to team member Alan Harvey, 'The team members all brought different areas of focus, knowledge and expertise so, as a group, we could deal with most issues that arose'. Similarly, the rich diversity of knowledge and experience often enabled potential issues to be identified well in advance and creative and innovative solutions devised to address them. An added benefit was that the range of skills and experience available in the team assisted in managing the different requirements and expectations of all the project funding partners.

Each team member had a clear role and subgroups were established to manage different aspects of the project such as tendering, contract management and administration, arts and philanthropy, communication and community engagement. It was a non-traditional approach in many ways. For example, it is unusual to have the design element included in the team – such projects are generally designed first and then handed on to engineering staff for construction. "I think bringing people from across the organisation together in the project team enabled a variety of ideas to be generated - this is reflected in the diversity of elements in the playspace", said Chief Executive Peter Dinning.

The cross functional theme extended across the Council through the use of in-house skills, expertise and creativity wherever possible. This included the meticulous and painstaking restoration of the MV Premier and the intricately carved animals and birds on the giant tree stump that welcomes visitors to the park. Alexandrina staff volunteered their free time to work on the site and kept their eyes open for materials that could be reused or restored to add to the natural play environment they were creating for their community. Another staff member took photos to document the progress of construction. These were posted to the Council's project page to keep the community informed and formed part of a professionally produced film that tells the project's story.

The project demonstrates how the work of local government covers many different functions but its overall community objectives are aligned. A small example is that Council staff members now better recognise how their work in parks and gardens or recreational services supports the public health objectives of both their own organisation and the South Australian Government through the OPAL program - and the valuable contribution they are making to the health of their community.



(this is a before shot of the reserve, beautiful location but no community utilisation)

Additional information (if necessarily)



As in previous Council playspace builds, many of the features in the Bristow Smith Reserve Nature Playspace were sourced from recycled or found materials. This included the meticulously remodelled 10 metre fishing boat (this was found in a yard in the river township of Milang). Ingeniously, during a tree removal program along the foreshore (just prior to the commencement of the project), a trunk and major branches from an enormous native pine, were requested to remain in-situ, this was later carved into a magnificent sculpture, receiving an unprecedented amount of positive community feedback.

Other unique features which support environmental sustainability in the playspace include:

- A rainwater tank with a holding capacity of 5400 litres supplies the waterplay equipment from a dual use electric pump. Water is captured from the two shelter roofs and directed into the rainwater tank where the pump feeds the play facilities. Once these tanks are empty the water play features are “waterless”, which does assist with educating children who use the park, that whilst enjoying water play, also being mindful of water conservation
- Recycled stormwater is used to irrigate garden beds, advanced trees and open turf areas. The recycled water is provided from a pressurised system that pumps from a wetlands and basin area approximately 2.5 kilometres N/W of the playground. The irrigation system is automatic and programmed to operate late night/early morning to increase efficiency and reduce evaporation loss.

The nature play approach to play area design is one that is eminently transferable to future generations. The principles can be applied on any scale, large or small, and within most budgets, particularly if existing natural features or salvageable materials are available.

It is particularly appropriate for use by other councils because it relates to their areas of responsibility and capitalises on the wide range of staff knowledge, expertise and ingenuity already available in councils. It has a strong community engagement element which is a natural fit for councils. And the social, economic and environmental outcomes align strongly with local government objectives.

OPAL's Linda Scholz also feels there is a role for councils in educating the community about natural play for children.' I think there is an educational role in moving beyond an open grassed area to drawing families in and demonstrating the value of free play in a natural environment. A lot of these ideas can be used in your own backyard.'

The nature play approach is supported by a considerable body of international research and evidence of its benefits for the mental and physical health of children. It is part of a world-wide trend towards reconnecting children with nature.

Through their ‘Playspace evolution’ over recent years, Alexandrina Council and their partners have developed a strong base of knowledge and understanding about the design and construction of natural playgrounds and their value to the community. The experience will inform their approach to public spaces and future planning for the Council.



Link website: <https://youtu.be/qxiD7ub5muk>

This film highlights the journey of transforming the reserve into a place community pride.

(if available)

**Once filled in this form please send it to: [info@cittaslow.net](mailto:info@cittaslow.net)**  
**- Participation Deadline 15 May 2016 -**