



2 Introduction

2.1 Victoria Park

Victoria Park is 131 Ha in size and located at the heart of the city's existing urban areas and major growth areas to the west. The Park fronts onto Ballarat's principal avenue, Sturt Street, to the north which provides connection to Lake Wendoree and the Gardens Precinct. Russell Street bounds it to the east, Winter Street to the south and Gillies Street to the west. The immediate surrounds include a number of schools - Ballarat High School, Loretto College, St Patricks College, Urquhart Park Primary School - and commercial/industrial areas (including the Sale Yards) and residential properties.

The Park is a significant asset that provides numerous recreational opportunities. It is heavily utilised for both passive and active recreation and is equipped with a range of facilities including playing fields and club rooms. A portion of the southern part of the Park is used for equestrian events and the numerous ovals and existing clubrooms currently service junior cricket, school sports and the Ballarat Dog Obedience Club. The Park is also heavily used for dog walking, cycling, picnics, children's playgrounds and various other pastimes.

It is a culturally and historically rich landscape and a notable example of European style parkland in Australia with significant exotic tree plantings as well as indigenous grasslands. The landscape is predominantly flat and open with curving avenues of established European trees and open grassed areas and clumped plantings of large tree species. The Park was the site of Victoria's first Arbor Day planting which took place in 1890. Historically the Park has accommodated a variety of activities including gold mining, motor racing events and the 16th Australian Scout Jamboree, as well as operating as a base for the military during World War Two.

Council managed the Park under a restricted Crown Grant from 1888 to 2006. It is now under a Committee of Management arrangement which allows a greater degree of flexibility in terms of leasing arrangements and funding opportunities. It is classified as a regional open space asset in the Ballarat Open Space Strategy due to its size, location and the diversity of recreational opportunities it presents. It is currently zoned Public Park and Recreation Zone and is a designated heritage precinct.



2.2 Master Plan Background

Numerous reports have been prepared over the years detailing proposed future directions and management strategies for the Park. Proposals have raised issues around competing interests that require further resolution, and strategies for management including traffic and vegetation require updating.

The City of Ballarat has carried out extensive consultation with stakeholders and the community including a comprehensive visioning exercise in 2012 which developed a community backed vision for the future of the Park. Issues have arisen about the appropriate type, scope and scale of improvements, and the desire to preserve and enhance the existing landscape character. The Master Plan aims to clearly articulate how these issues can be resolved to achieve the best possible outcome for all users.

In recent years Victoria Park has been subject to increasing and often competing infrastructure development challenges and opportunities including:

- Preserving and enhancing the Parks historical plantings, landscape character, native grasslands and environmental and historical values.

- Addressing increasing traffic issues and flooding issues throughout the Park.
- Existing user group and stakeholder desires for improved ovals, upgraded or new clubrooms, lighting, improved road surfaces and car parking.
- Community desires for improved access, connections, passive leisure opportunities and improved amenity and safety.
- The need for a venue for a major events facility within the Ballarat region.
- Community demand for new and improved facilities for shared and multi -functional use to cater to Ballarat's growing population.

The Victoria Park Master Plan considers these challenges and opportunities and provides the next level of detail required to move the project forward and consolidate the prior work into a cohesive plan for the Park. It will be used to guide Council in the prioritisation and provision of funding for upgrades and on going maintenance to the Park. It will also equip Council and stakeholders with visual material that clearly illustrates the potential to achieve the multiple aspirations for the Park without compromising its character.

2.3 Master Plan Format

The Master Plan consists of two parts:

Volume 1

The Master Plan report which provides summaries of issues, consultation process, vision, principles, objectives, directions, recommendations and drawings.

Volume 2

The supporting documents and reports.

2.4 Site History

European Settlement

Prior to European settlement, the site of Victoria Park is thought to have been Plains Grassy Woodland and was occupied by the Wathaurong (Wadda-Warrung) people. While the site has been significantly altered in both character and land management since European settlement, indigenous grasslands and trees (including River Red Gums, Blackwood and Drooping She-oaks) exist on site as an indication of that history.

Park Designation

In 1858 the Chairman of Ballarat Council appealed to the President of the Crown Lands and Survey to have the area ‘specifically reserved for a park and Gazetted as such’. As part of process, Council agreed to compensate owners of small tenements located within the park area and the land was temporarily gazetted on August 12. The Park was known and referred to as ‘Royal Park’ during this period.

Mining

In 1866 the largest mining companies of the time - United Hand-in-Hand and Band of Hope (who later jointly became Park Company) - sunk a shaft within the Park as part of exploration of the Inkerman Lead. The value of gold obtained from this area was 4517 pounds. By 1898 the site had been mined intensively by Park Company. The mullock heap known as Mt Holled Smith was formed during this time from the dumping of mining spoil.

Crown Grant

On August 6th 1888 the Governor in Council approved the Crown Grant for permanent reservation of the park and the name was changed to Victoria Park. The Crown Grant was ‘for the purpose of a public park and offices and convenience connected therewith and for no other purpose whatsoever’. In 2006 the City of Ballarat surrendered the Crown Grant and was appointed ‘Committee of Management’ of Victoria Park as a ‘Permanent Public Park Reserve’ by the Minister for Planning.

Park Design and Planting

The original design layout of the parkland was modelled on popular English country estates and London parks. It was designed by Messrs Clegg and Nicholls and modified by William Guilfoyle (curator of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne).

On 23 May 1890 Victoria Park was the site of Victoria’s first Arbor Day Planting, a large-scale event initiated by William Little (mayor

at time). Citizens were invited to share the planting of 3000 trees, including species such as elm, plane, cedar, oak, poplar, eucalyptus and indigenous trees. The planting commenced at the sound of a bugle and within ten minutes many of the avenues and clumps of trees which characterise the Park today were planted.

By 1914 considerable public works and improvements had been carried out within northern sections of the Park. Established tree lined avenues were interspersed with flowers, paths and roadways that provided public access through the Park and to playing fields (three grounds for football and cricket). Two shelters, fencing, hedges and a curator’s residence had also been installed. Cedars in the central drive were in poor condition, so Golden Cypress (Cupressus macrocarpa) were planted in-between them with the aim of eventually replacing them.

The original park plan did not include the southern part of the Park that now incorporates the equestrian precinct and Winter Street frontage. Southern portions of the Park were given to commercial plantations of *Pinus radiata* until 1929, a remnant of which exists today as a dense forest of pines in the southeast corner.

A specimen tree was planted in 1944 in memory of W.O Allen, a curator who faithfully served the Ballarat community for 60 years, marking his death. The Victorian Tree Planters Association planted the tree.

Local printing company F W Niven & Co. produced a souvenir plan of Victoria Park to commemorate Arbor Day (See page 6).

Military Use

The mullock is known locally as ‘Mount Holled-Smith’ and was named in honour of Major General Sir Charles Holled-Smith (British commander of the Victorian Defence Force) who supervised military exercises involving 3000 men at the Park during Easter 1898.

During the Second World War part of the Park facing Sturt Street and extending south towards Eyre Street became occupied by ‘Military Authorities’; this served as an army base to house United States servicemen, home to 8000 US troops until May 1943. A military hospital was also established.

Events

Over the years the Park has been used for various large-scale events including:

- Car rallying and motor cycle racing (1940’s - 60’s)
- 16th Australian Scout Jamboree (1992)
- International Equestrian Events (present)

Site History sources include:

- Ballarat Historic Trees and Gardens Part 1 Department of Crown Lands and Survey, 1983.
- Victorian Heritage Database Report - Victoria Park Precinct, City of Ballarat, 2015.



Aerial Photo 1930 - The white areas show where mining spoil was dumped.



Commemorative Tree 1944