

MURRAY RIVER MASTER PLAN, ALBURY



Building a stronger connection between the town and the river through community involvement

Better look and feel:

The Bigger Picture, Katrina Weston, 2014 – one of the sculptures installed on the Yindyamarra Sculpture Walk along the banks of the Murray River. Image: Albury City Council.

QUICK FACTS

PROJECT TYPE:

Master planning on a landscape scale, including landscape design and designing for recreation

LOCATION:

Murray River, Albury, on the border of NSW and Victoria

REGION:

Riverina Murray

ABORIGINAL CUSTODIANS OF THIS COUNTRY:

Wiradjuri people

CLIENT:

Albury City Council

PROJECT SCALE:

Landscape:

SITE AREA 1245 ha

WATER FRONTAGE 82 km

PROJECT COST:

\$10.1 million committed to date, from the:

- Regional Growth – Environment and Tourism Fund (NSW Government)
- Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program (Australian Government)
- Better Boating Program (NSW Government)

Local, State and Federal funding on a project-by-project basis

YEAR:

Started 2007; ongoing

PROJECT TEAM:

MASTER PLANNING
Urban Initiatives

ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING
Meinhardt Infrastructure and Environment

PROJECT MANAGEMENT
Albury City Council

ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Saturn Corporate Resources

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
Aquatic Systems Management

PROCUREMENT PROCESS:

Open competitive tender. Multi-disciplinary team and a strong focus on collaboration and community involvement.

The Murray River Experience Master Plan is a success story for local community involvement in planning. Ongoing consultation and collaboration between the community and local council has created an aspirational and inspirational planning framework that has transformed Albury's relationship with its river.

Informed by the community's input into the master plan, a series of ongoing projects has improved access to the Murray River and provided opportunities for a range of activities, all contributing to the health and improvement of the river system.

Starting with the place

The impetus for the master plan was a local government boundary change which resulted in Albury City Council inheriting responsibility for a large area of river frontage and associated lands.

The plan emerged through extensive community engagement, becoming an overarching guide to realising a shared vision for the river and the town. Local knowledge of history and culture has been an essential ingredient, supported by research. As individual projects have been built, based on the plan, the community's involvement has extended beyond consultation to include the construction and operation of new facilities.

Visualising ideas

Comprehensive mapping of the river and lands was the starting point, to identify the potential for new spaces and uses. Maps and plans have been supplemented with artistic watercolour drawings, specially commissioned to describe potential projects. These have been an indispensable tool, helping the community to participate in the planning process, assess proposals, and provide invaluable feedback.



Improving connections:

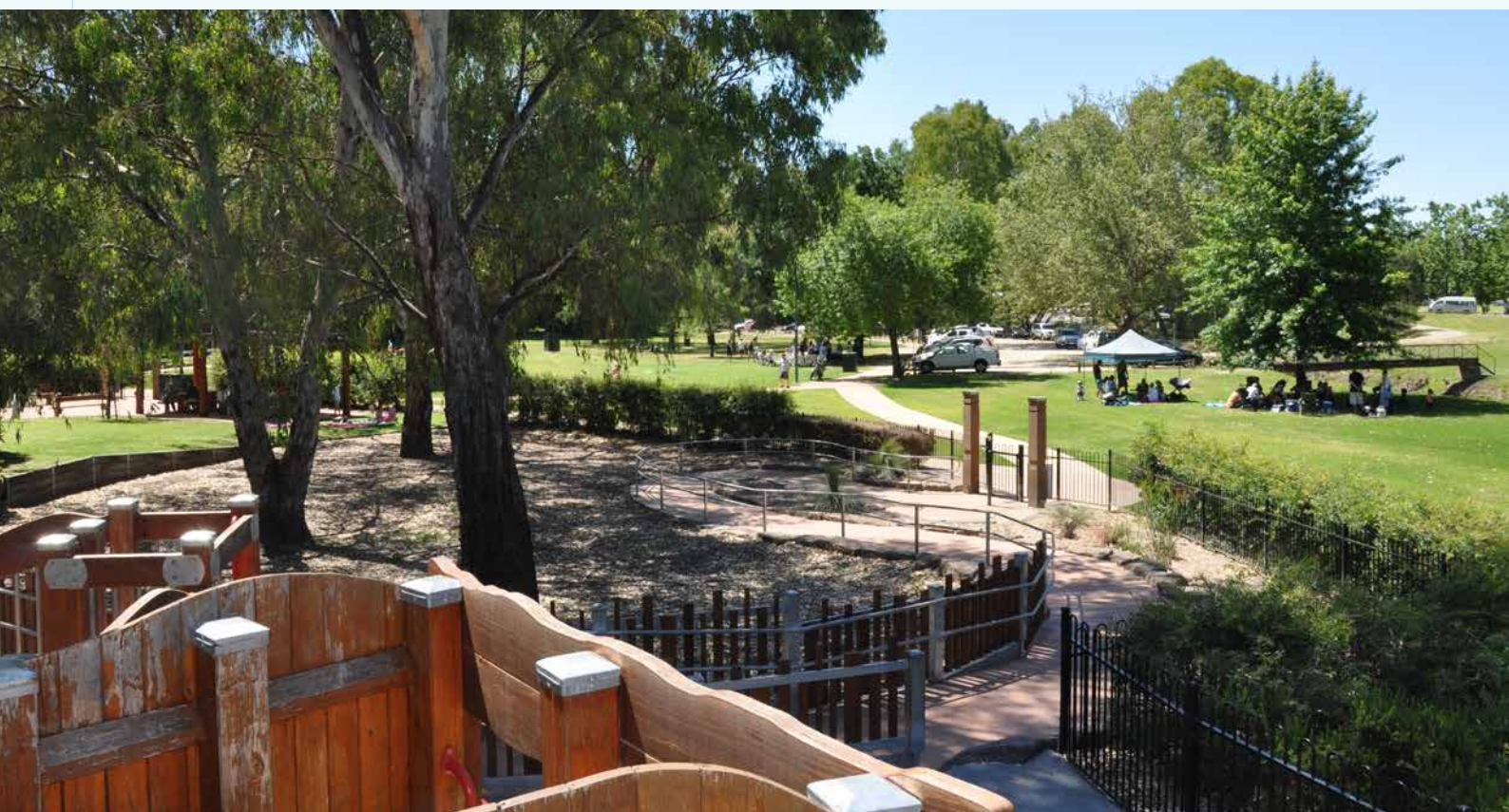
Cycling opportunities are improved, along with community accessibility to cultural heritage. *Reconciliation Shield* by Barkindji/Yorta Yorta artist Tamara Murray is one of the sculptures installed on the Yindyamarra Sculpture Walk. Image: Albury City Council.

Engaging with the community:

Council commissioned a set of drawings to help communicate what the planned improvements will look like. Image: Albury City Council.

Better for community:

Extensive landscaping to better connect the town and the river includes planting, improving usability and access, and providing facilities for recreation. Image: David Armstrong.



Improving connectivity, walkability, and cycling opportunities

The physical connection between the town centre and the river has been strengthened with street improvements and new tree planting, encouraging pedestrian access along the river edge, extending cycling paths, providing opportunities for fishing, improving canoe and boat launching facilities, and better managing car access.

The master plan also highlights views across and along the river as an important urban design consideration that can increase awareness of the river's presence.

Integrating with the natural environment and landscape

As part of the plan, significant engineering works have been completed to manage risks due to flooding. This has helped to change public perception of the river, turning it from a threat into an opportunity.

Improvements to the condition of the natural environment include returning the river to the natural water cycle, riverbank restoration, wetland conservation, vegetation management, removal of weeds, encouraging bird diversity, improved stormwater control, wastewater re-use, and erosion control works.

Engaging with Albury's cultural heritage

Acknowledging both the Aboriginal and European heritage of the Murray River has been an integral part of the plan, expressed through a series of interpretive works. One example is the Wagirra Trail ("wagirra" is a Wiradjuri word meaning "to walk on ground"). Eleven public artworks have been commissioned from local Aboriginal artists and installed along the trail to develop the Yindymarra Sculpture Walk.

Additional research has brought a deeper appreciation of the significance of the river. One result is that Mungabereena Reserve has been named as an Aboriginal Place under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*.

Better for community:

"Maya" Fish Trap, Uncle Ken (Tunny) Murray, Darren Wighton, Androm Rendell, 2014 – one of the sculptures installed on the Yindymarra Sculpture Walk along the banks of the Murray River. Image: Albury City Council.

Better performance:

Ongoing rehabilitation works include removing woody weed species and stabilising the riverbanks using a variety of rock and log treatments; native trees such as river red gums are being retained and protected. Image: David Armstrong.

The project is part of a long-term partnership between Albury Council and local Aboriginal groups to build valuable infrastructure, provide visitor experiences, and create leadership opportunities, training, and employment for the Aboriginal community.

Increasing options for diverse and healthy living

New opportunities for active and passive recreation have been developed, ranging from remote natural landscapes to urban parkland, aiming to meet community expectations, and helping to support Albury as a tourist destination.

Each experience is suited to its location, taking advantage of natural features and limiting its environmental impact. Activities and facilities include sporting grounds, exercise equipment, "all-abilities" children's playgrounds, retail and cafés, community wood-fired ovens, dog walking, cycling, bushwalking, birdwatching, fishing, lookout points, picnic facilities, and an "eco" park.

New tree plantings, open areas, lighting, signage, rest areas with park furniture, and amenities such as barbecues, all contribute to enhancing the experience of the river. As well as capturing the big-picture vision for the Murray River experience, the plan provides consistency across multiple projects for smaller details like high-quality fixtures, fittings, and furniture.

The nature of the project, and its success, means there is ongoing demand to expand and deliver new experiences and opportunities, all of which support the health and wellbeing of the local population.



Design objectives for NSW

Seven objectives define the key considerations in the design of the built environment.



Better fit
contextual, local
and of its place



Better performance
sustainable, adaptable
and durable



Better for community
inclusive, connected
and diverse



Better for people
safe, comfortable
and liveable



Better working
functional, efficient
and fit for purpose



Better value
creating and
adding value



Better look and feel
engaging, inviting
and attractive

Find out more
ga.nsw.gov.au

Good process: engage with the community to develop a shared vision

The key to the success of this ongoing project is a well-managed, collaborative master planning process. Starting by engaging specialist urban design skills, the process has integrated many streams of expert knowledge, including planning, engineering, landscape design, natural resource management, and communication expertise.

The master plan has stood the test of time, being flexible enough to adapt to change without losing sight of its original aims. Successive local councillors have embraced the plan, and new works have been delivered every year since it was conceived, with ongoing consultation reaffirming the plan's principles and paving the way for future projects.

The master plan document itself, as well as the series of works developed from it, has helped Albury City Council to attract further funding over time and extend the project. Ideas for the future include extending the scope to Wodonga in Victoria, taking in both sides of the Murray River, and acknowledging the river as a central feature of the regional landscape.



Better for people:

All-weather walking and cycling tracks along the river link together places and experiences. Image: Albury City Council.

Better performance:

The master plan provides guidance for details like play equipment and street furniture, as well as setting out the bigger picture concepts and layout. Image: David Armstrong.



Key considerations

With the place and its people being at the centre of this approach, the various projects have reinforced local identity, established a sincere “buy-in” from the community and contributed to the plan's ongoing influence.

The plan's cumulative approach, curating many smaller projects over time within the framework of an overall agreed vision, has enabled council to successfully deliver important large-scale community infrastructure.

MORE INFORMATION

GANSW policies:

Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW

Greener Places: An urban green infrastructure design framework for NSW

GANSW guides:

Integrating Urban Design

Urban Design for Regional NSW

Design Guide for Heritage

GANSW advisory notes:

How to develop a design brief

How to select design consultants

Collaboration

Strategic visioning

Urban design frameworks

Master plans

This case study has been developed in conjunction with the Urban Design for Regional NSW guide.

1. Horton D (creator) & AIATSIS (1996), AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia, Aboriginal Studies Press, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz.