

# Changing Places: Green Space Enhancement Project

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Get ready for an adrenaline-packed journey into the realm of Year 9 Geography! Breaking free from the post-exam slump, we embarked on a mission to transform learning into a hands-on exploration that resonates with our students. Creating a project where theoretical knowledge collided with the real world, sparking curiosity and excitement.

Our Year 9 Geography students had spent Semester Two exploring the topic of Changing Places through a range of exploration activities and case studies.

This article unveils the secrets behind the Green Space Enhancement Project Excursion with an explanation of the key concepts. This will allow teachers to re-create and adapt this learning opportunity, whilst also providing a sneak peek into the activity booklet that activated prior knowledge, sparked their curiosity, and kept them engaged throughout the entire day.

## The Aim

After heavy exploration of large-scale changing places, we thought it was necessary to develop the significance of Changing Places in a local setting that had significance to our students. We also thought it was necessary to deepen their understanding of geographical processes, fieldwork and encourage inquiry skills.

The task aimed for the students to engage in primary research (through fieldwork) to understand how the local council had responded to the changing urban dynamics of Newcastle. Students were exposed to the plans the council has prepared to overcome the social, environmental and economic challenges while ensuring a sustainable future for the growing regional centre. Students were to analyse the current strategies employed to revitalise places in Newcastle. Groups were tasked to use these findings and their own knowledge to create an A3 proposal to the council for the redevelopment of another urban green space in the area.

Students were provided with a note from the 'local council' (a.k.a. the teachers) to set the scene of the excursion.



Figure 1: Letter from the 'council'

# Changing Places: Green Space Enhancement Project

## Pre-Work

As a Deep Learning school, students were encouraged to actively engage in the dimension of Critical Thinking through an exploration of “experimenting, reflecting, and taking action”. Students engaged in group Critical Thinking Puzzles such as “How many squares in the following shape?” and “Connect the dots” to start developing language of experimenting and reflecting. This was completed in the lesson prior to the excursion as it is a key strategy that is needed when conducting research in the field.

Students were inspired by promotional videos from futuristic cities such as Neom (Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kz5vEqda9>) and Telosa (Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5Z8XZVdm50>) to understand the need to manage and plan for Australia’s urban future. They were given the opportunity to experiment and reflect on ideas created by others to develop their critical and creative thinking skills.

With an understanding of the aim of the excursion, students were tasked to create a mind map on how they could experiment, reflect and take action during the excursion in their data collection and output creation.

## The Excursion

As it was essential for students to understand the significance of urban planning, an urban sociologist, Duncan McDuie-Ra (PhD Professor of Urban Sociology at Newcastle University) was invited to start off our exploration excursion to set the scene for the students in terms of how cities function around the world and the importance of considering spaces for people to stay, play and be entertained. Establishing this learning partnership with the University of Newcastle is an element of Deep Learning that we wanted to leverage. Students appreciated the lecturer’s depth of knowledge and passion, which set the scene for the excursion. Now that they had built their foundational knowledge (throughout the course, pre fieldwork and the lecture), they were able to apply their understanding to the real world.

To ensure students understood the expectations and requirements at each location of the excursion, a mission was provided to the students (Figure 2).

### Your Mission

Location	Task
<b>The Station</b>	<p><b>Aim:</b> You are to assess the effectiveness of the revitalisation strategies employed by the Newcastle City Council.</p> <p><b>Key Questions:</b>                      Do you think The Station is an effective use of space?                      Does it bring the community together?                      Does it build connections?                      Is it inclusive and safe?                      Is it a hub for business and people?                      Does it maintain its historical significance?</p>
<b>Foreshore Park</b>	<p><b>Aim:</b> Conduct fieldwork to determine the effectiveness of the green space                      Determine what the positives and negatives of this space.                      Make a judgement on its condition, inclusivity, safety, comfortability.</p> <p><b>Key Questions:</b>                      What needs to be revitalised to be a Stay – Play – Entertain space?                      Are there any historical components that need to be preserved?                      Does it meet the needs of the current population of Newcastle?                      What changes need to be made in order for it to meet the future population of Newcastle?</p> <p><b>Key Locations:</b>                      Railway Carriage Shed, Playground, Sandhills Community Garden, frog pond and surrounds.</p>
<b>School</b>	<p><b>Task:</b> Construct your A3 Map Proposal for the council.</p> <p><b>Steps:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using the map provided in your booklet, construct a revitalised map of your NEW Foreshore Park.</li> <li>Once you have an idea, construct your map using the document provided on your Year 9 Geography Schoolbox pages or the hardcopies provided. Remember that maps need a KEY to explain each component of your proposal.</li> <li>Once completed, you will print your presentation on 1 A3 page for evaluation.</li> <li>You will need to score the other groups over Week 8.</li> </ol>

Figure 2: Mission provided to students on the day of the excursion to ensure they understood the aim for each location of the day

We broke up the excursion into two parts already revitalised area and the proposed area to be revitalised. We wanted students to explore an area that was already revitalised so they were able to assess the effectiveness of that space by observing who was able to access the space, how people were using the space and whether it met the necessary requirements for it to be considered an Urban Green Space.

At the second location, students used fieldwork tools to obtain primary research by observing, measuring, collecting and recording data of the space. The booklet created encouraged students to analyse the social, historical and environmental aspects of the space. Students were supplied with a satellite image of the area, a section to create a precis sketch and a table to undertake an audit of the facilities and amenities that exist within the space (see Figure 3).

## Changing Places: Green Space Enhancement Project

### Activity 2: Amenities Audit

AMENITY	DISTANCE TO CLOSEST...	CONDITION		
		Poor	Good	Excellent
Toilet		Poor	Good	Excellent
Drinking Station		Poor	Good	Excellent
Charging Stations		Poor	Good	Excellent
Shaded spaces		Poor	Good	Excellent
Seating area		Poor	Good	Excellent
Cafés and eateries		Poor	Good	Excellent
BBQs		Poor	Good	Excellent
First Aid		Poor	Good	Excellent
Public Phones		Poor	Good	Excellent
Bins		Poor	Good	Excellent
Equipment		Poor	Good	Excellent
Play Spaces		Poor	Good	Excellent
Parking		Poor	Good	Excellent

### Activity 3: Analysis of community spaces

Are there places for people to gather, to play, to stay and to be entertained? What elements are encouraging community connection? What needs to be improved? Are the spaces inclusive?

Community Gardens	Playground	Tramsheds

Figure 3: Example of some the fieldwork activities completed by the students at the second location

# Changing Places: Green Space Enhancement Project

## The Output

Upon returning to school, students were given the opportunity to study their fieldwork analysis from the day and brainstorm effective strategies they had seen either through their experiences from the day or prior case studies to start developing key ideas for the Urban Green Space Enhancement Project proposal to the council.

Students were given the scoring card (Figure 4) and explanation (Figure 5) to assist them in establishing a goal for their proposal.

**Feedback Evaluation for Newcastle's Urban Green Spaces Enhancement Project**

CATEGORY	RATING				
	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Inclusivity	1	2	3	4	5
Amenities	1	2	3	4	5
Comfortability	1	2	3	4	5
Safety	1	2	3	4	5
Natural Features	1	2	3	4	5
Vibrancy	1	2	3	4	5
Community Experience	1	2	3	4	5
Play Elements	1	2	3	4	5
Historical Elements	1	2	3	4	5
Cultural Inclusion	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Total Score</b>				<b>/ 40</b>	

Figure 4: Scoring Card for the Urban Green Space Enhancement Project



# Changing Places: Green Space Enhancement Project

## Category Explanation

Inclusivity	Spaces intentionally designed to welcome and accommodate individuals from diverse backgrounds, abilities, and demographics, fostering a sense of belonging and accessibility for all members of the community.
Amenities	Variety of facilities and services that enhance the overall experience, such as picnic areas, toilets and other features that contribute to the functional aspects of the space.
Comfortability	Design elements that promote a sense of ease and wellbeing, including factors like well-maintained seating, shading, cleanliness that contribute to a pleasant and relaxed environment for visitors.
Safety	Ensuring the safety of all users by implementing measures that prevent accidents and injuries. This includes well-maintained paths, appropriate lighting, and clear signage.
Natural Features	Natural elements within a green space, including diverse flora and fauna, geological formations, water bodies, and ecosystems, contribute to its ecological history and environmental significance.
Vibrancy	Dynamic and lively atmosphere, characterised by vibrant coloured equipment and public art.
Community Experience	The collective history of social gatherings, shared traditions, and the evolution of community engagement, reflecting the space's role as a hub for communal identity.
Play Elements	Multiple elements of a space that inspire people of all ages to engage in physical activity, such as: playgrounds, ovals, skatepark and pools.
Historical Elements	Historical elements of a green space encompass features such as Newcastle's convict history such as the metalworks, coal mining, and ports.
Cultural Inclusion	Cultural elements encompassing our Awabakal and Worimi peoples as well as consideration for our multicultural society and migrant population.

## How you rate each category:

<p><b>Poor:</b> ★</p> <p>Indicates a very low or unsatisfactory consideration. Significant issues or shortcomings.</p>
<p><b>Fair:</b> ★★</p> <p>Suggests an average or acceptable consideration. Some positive aspects, but notable room for improvement.</p>
<p><b>Good:</b> ★★★</p> <p>Represents a solid and satisfactory consideration. Generally positive, with a few areas that could be enhanced.</p>
<p><b>Very Good:</b> ★★★★</p> <p>Signifies an above average and enjoyable consideration. Notable strengths with only minor areas for improvement.</p>
<p><b>Excellent:</b> ★★★★★</p> <p>Reflects an outstanding and exceptional consideration. Virtually flawless, exceeding expectations in all aspects.</p>

Figure 5: Explanation of Components of the Scoring Card

# Changing Places: Green Space Enhancement Project

Students had one hour to complete their proposal and hand it in for judging. The A3 proposals were converted into a PowerPoint presentation (see Figures 6, 7 and 8) with an attached Microsoft Form to allow all students in Year 9 and a range of staff members to vote on the proposals. In future, we hope to further our Learning Partnerships by establishing connections with the council to allow the council to vote on the proposals.



Figure 6: Example of group output



Figure 7: Example of group output



Figure 8: Example of group output

We have had many students ask throughout the week when the finalists will be announced, and it has been great to receive their feedback from the day.

Some of the feedback included:

“The day was far better than I expected, there was a good balance of activities for us to complete and time for us to explore. I felt like I was learning with my group at our own pace, and I wanted to make the park better because I use it.”

“I never thought about what the park had and didn't have. It made me realise the importance of having a park for everyone to have fun but also relax. I wish they could make my proposal into real life.”