

JOHN COUTTS RESERVE CONSULTATION

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Over a number of years Hume City Council has received feedback about opportunities to improve John Coutts Reserve, which sits to the south of Gladstone Park, adjacent to the Western Ring Road, and connects to Jacana Valley.

One of the options being explored to assist in enhancing the reserve is the inclusion of additional housing overlooking the reserve. The aim of this is to enhance safety (through passive surveillance) and to help provide funding for improvements to the reserve. While this idea is being explored, there have been no commitments or decisions made about future enhancements to the reserve.

The objective of the John Coutts Reserve Consultation was to understand how residents of Gladstone Park feel about this idea and what improvements or enhancements they would like to see in John Coutts Reserve.

METHODOLOGY

Consultation on John Coutts Reserve was open from 2 September to 2 October 2022. A number of engagement methods were available during this time.

555 letters were mailed to residents surrounding John Coutts Reserve in an approximate 500m catchment. The letter contained background information and a QR code to a Participate Hume page and online survey. Options to email feedback and call the Council were also made available in the letter and via the Participate Hume page.

The online survey asked both qualitative and quantitative research questions and was administered via the Alchemer online survey platform. The survey data was exported to Microsoft Excel and SPSS for cleaning and analysis which was undertaken by Council's Organisational Performance & Strategy Department. All data and information was managed in accordance with the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)*.

This report contains a coded analysis of the qualitative open text responses and notable quotes to accompany this analysis. An addendum to this report contains all verbatim qualitative open text responses from the survey.

CONSULTATION REACH SUMMARY

The Participate Hume page received 415 views and there were 229 valid responses to the online survey.

Twelve respondents engaged via other methods – nine via email, one through a social media comment and two via Hume Connect. A summary of these twelve responses is included in this report after the survey analysis.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Demographics of survey respondents

There were 229 responses to the survey. Of that, 222 provided their suburb. The vast majority of respondents live in Gladstone Park, which is not surprising given the targeted mail out and the location of John Coutts Reserve.

Table 1: Suburb of respondents

Suburb	Count	Percent
Gladstone Park	207	93.2%
Westmeadows	4	1.8%
Broadmeadows	3	1.4%
Meadow Heights	2	0.9%
Tullamarine	2	0.9%
Attwood	1	0.5%
Glenroy	1	0.5%
Jacana	1	0.5%
Preston	1	0.5%
Total	222	100.0%

Table 2 shows that the majority of survey respondents identify as women.

Table 2: Gender breakdown of respondents

Gender	Count	Percent
Woman or female	131	58.5%
Man or male	78	34.8%
Prefer not to say	15	6.7%
Total	224	100.0%

Table 3 shows that the majority of respondents are aged between 25 and 74.

Table 3: Age of respondents

Age	Count	Percent
Under 18	5	2.2%
18 to 24 years	8	3.6%
25 to 34 years	62	27.7%
35 to 44 years	46	20.5%
45 to 54 years	33	14.7%
55 to 64 years	30	13.4%
65 to 74 years	20	8.9%

75+	9	4.0%
Prefer not to say	11	4.9%
Total	224	100.0%

Table 4 shows the majority of survey respondents were born in Australia. 19 respondents stated that they were born in other countries, which included:

- Scotland
- England
- Chanel Islands
- Egypt
- Italy
- Ukraine
- New Zealand
- Hong Kong
- North Macedonia

Table 4: Respondents' country of birth

Country	Count	Percent
Australia	188	84.7%
Elsewhere	19	8.6%
Prefer not to say	15	6.8%
Total	222	100.0%

Table 5 shows responses to the question: 'are you a dog owner?' The majority of respondents are dog owners.

Table 5: Respondents that are dog owners

Response	Count	Percent
Yes	146	65.2%
No	78	34.8%
Total	224	100.0%

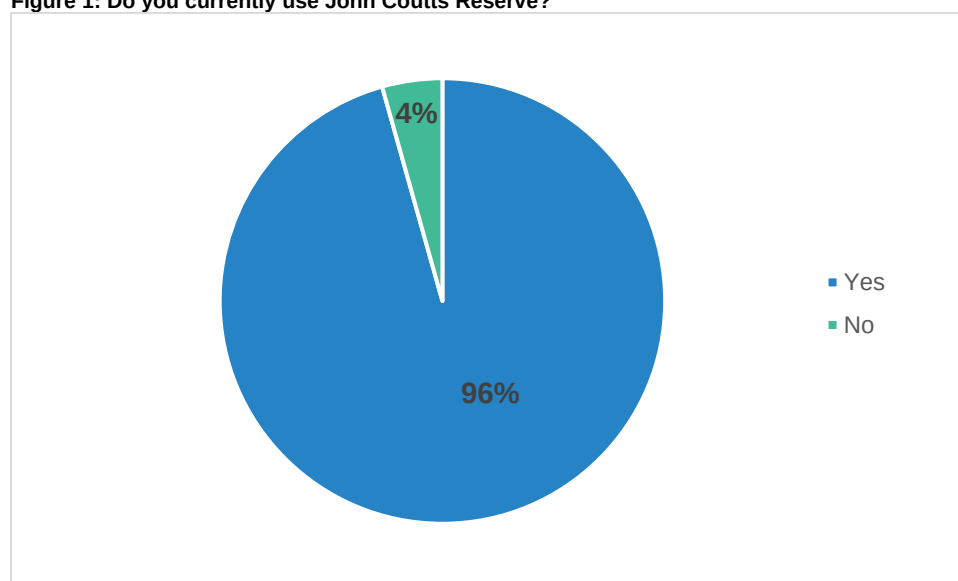
Usage of John Coutts Reserve

Survey respondents were asked whether they currently use John Coutts Reserve. The majority of respondents indicated that they do, with only 10 respondents saying they don't use the reserve.

Table 6: Do you currently use John Coutts Reserve?

Response	Count	Percent
Yes	219	95.6%
No	10	4.4%
Total respondents	229	100.0%

Figure 1: Do you currently use John Coutts Reserve?



N=229

Of the 10 respondents that don't use the reserve, eight provided a reason why, with the majority noting that they felt there was nothing to do in the reserve.

Table 7: Reason for not using John Coutts Reserve

Response	Count	Percent
Nothing to do there	4	50.0%
Don't use it, but still appreciate the green space	2	25.0%
Mobility issues	1	12.5%
Use other reserves	1	12.5%
Other	1	12.5%
Total respondents	8	-

Rows will not add up to 100% because respondents could respond with more than one answer.

How respondents use John Coutts Reserve

Survey respondents that indicated they currently use John Coutts Reserve were then asked how they typically use the reserve. Respondents were able to tick as many activities that apply to them.

The majority of respondents use the reserve for walking by themselves or with others (92.2%), walking their dog (61%) or for informal play (kicking ball with kids, flying kites, practicing general sports) (50.4%). A large portion of respondents also use the reserve for sitting or relaxing in the open green space (45.9%), exercising their dog off leash (35.3%) and general fitness (32.6%).

Table 8: How respondents currently use John Coutts Reserve

Usage	Count	Percent
Walking	201	92.2%
Walking dog	133	61.0%
Informal play (kick about, flying kites)	110	50.4%
Sitting/ relaxing	100	45.9%
Exercising dog off leash	77	35.3%
Fitness	71	32.6%
Socialising/ meeting others	63	28.9%
Cycling	62	28.4%
Total respondents	218	-

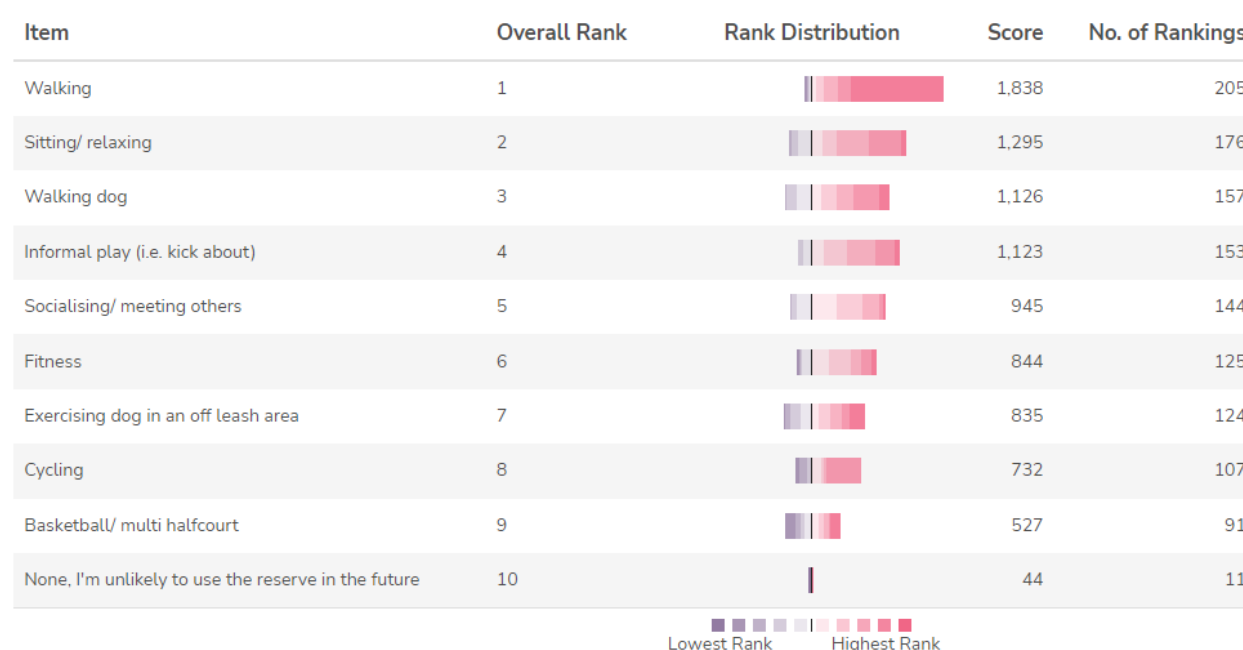
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Respondents were asked to rank from a list, in order of priority, what activities they would like to use John Coutts Reserve for in the future.

The responses to this question generally reflect the responses given regarding what people use the reserve for currently. Figure 2 shows the activities ranked from highest priority to lowest priority by respondents. The top five activities are:

- walking
- sitting / relaxing
- walking the dog
- informal play (kicking ball with kids, flying kites, etc)
- socialising / meeting others.

Figure 2: Ranking of how respondents would like to use John Coutts Reserve in the future.



Respondents were able to list any other activities they would like to use John Coutts Reserve for. 113 respondents answered this question, with the majority (60.2%) stating that they would like a playground or various types of kids play equipment in the reserve.

This was followed by barbeque facilities, including tables, seats and bins (29.2%), and various sporting facilities such as a pool, basketball, netball, tennis courts etc (14.2%).

A number of responses have been categorised as 'other,' which includes responses such as:

- the need to level the ground, as it gets bogged and swampy after rain
- planting more trees and creating some wetlands
- the need for more lighting so walking at night feels safer
- a café, food truck or market precinct
- a place for large community events
- a velodrome
- an enclosed off leash dog area
- general parkland for general use.

Table 9: Other activities respondents would like to do in John Coutts Reserve

Activity	Count	Percent
Kids playground / play equipment	68	60.2%
Barbeque area and facilities (tables, bins etc)	33	29.2%
Other	19	16.8%
Sport facilities (pool, basketball court, etc)	16	14.2%
Skate park	7	6.2%
Fenced dog off leash area	7	6.2%
Bike and running tracks	6	5.3%

Activity	Count	Percent
Public toilets	5	4.4%
Fitness facilities	3	2.7%
Community garden	2	1.8%
Total respondents	113	-

Rows will not add up to 100% because respondents could respond with more than one answer.

Some notable comments include:

Playgrounds and BBQ. Currently there aren't any nearby playgrounds to take the children/grandchildren without crossing Carrick Drive. Other than installing paths to cross the reserve, there has been no investment, to encourage the use of the reserve.

It's a great space to input a netball/basketball courts. As well as a potential to build up a playground, dog off leash space and bbq area. I'm only 25 years old and I would continue to use/ use it more if these things were built. We need to work to get kids active and people outdoors. Not much area for that in Gladstone Park. But there is plenty of housing already.

A multi purpose court like in Gowanbrae would be excellent. Otherwise some recreation for children, even a bike/skate ramp like the one they put outside the new Keilor leisure centre.

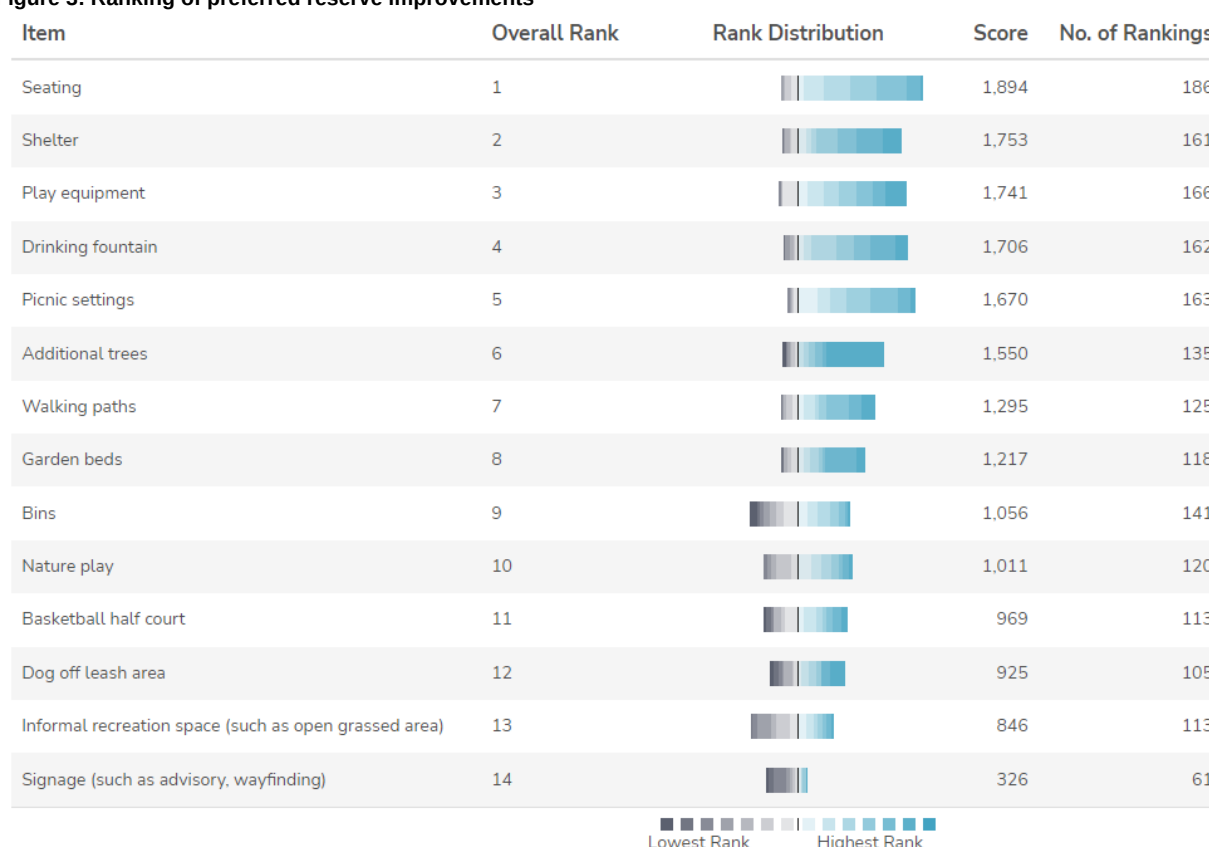
There should be a playground in the reserve. It is a large area and is a waste of space in that its just open land. A fenced playground would assist the growing number of young families that buy into Gladstone Park, and the fencing around the playground would allow the off-leash dog walking/play to continue with no harm to children (many playground have enclosed fencing around them in parks and reserves). There are only 2 playground in gladstone park and they are old and far apart.

Suggested improvements to John Coutts Reserve

Respondents were asked to rank from a list, in order of priority, improvements they would like to see considered for John Coutts Reserve. Figure 3 shows the improvements ranked from most preferred to least preferred by respondents. The top five preferred improvements are:

- additional seating in the reserve
- shelter and shade in the reserve
- play equipment
- drinking fountains
- picnic settings.

Figure 3: Ranking of preferred reserve improvements



Respondents were able to list any other improvements they would like to see in John Coutts Reserve. 69 respondents provided an answer to this question, with some responding to the question and others providing a general comment. Both have been captured in Table 10 below.

Many respondents reiterated the need for a playground or kids play equipment (23.2%) as well as their opposition to housing on the reserve (21.7%). Respondents also indicated the need for better lighting (17.4%), barbeque areas and facilities (13%) and public toilets (11.6%).

A number of responses have been categorised as 'other,' which includes responses such as:

- the need for better drainage, as the reserve gets bogged and swampy after rain
- the need for more lighting and car parks
- fencing for both the dog off leash area and around the reserve to stop motor bikes and dirt bikes on the reserve
- a velodrome
- an enclosed off leash dog area.

Table 10: Other improvements and comments by respondents

Improvement / comment	Count	Percent
Kids playground/play equipment	16	23.2%
No housing	15	21.7%
Lighting	12	17.4%
Other	10	14.5%
Barbeque area and facilities (tables, etc)	9	13.0%
Public toilets	8	11.6%
Regular maintenance	3	4.3%
A cafe/ food options	3	4.3%
Security cameras/CCTV	3	4.3%
Skate park	3	4.3%
Trees and general gardens/natural bushland	3	4.3%
Bike and running tracks	2	2.9%
Sport facilities (pool, basketball court, etc)	2	2.9%
No improvements needed	2	2.9%
Better car parking	2	2.9%
Total respondents	69	-

Rows will not add up to 100% because respondents could respond with more than one answer.

Some notable comments include:

There needs to be some lighting and a pedestrian gate at the entrances to stop hooners from riding their dirtbikes through the area

Please do not build on the reserve. What we need is monitoring equipment like motion activated CCTV cameras and more lights. If you build more houses on it there wouldn't be much of a reserve left.

Please don't turn this into housing. Gladstone Park has lots of families now and we need additional play areas like similar growth suburbs in our council

A playground that is separated from the dog off leash area and the dog off leash area should be fenced off.

If more trees are to be planted please do not plant them on both sides of the walking paths which can hide the path from view and be potentially dangerous by providing a haven for an attacker to hide & wait for a random victim. There is already one section that I walk through daily which makes me feel quite vulnerable & unsafe at times.

Consideration of a public toilet - for walkers who are doing the walks on the Western Ring Path. There are currently no restroom facilities nearby.

Mowing the grass on a regular basis. The grass is always left to grow to long

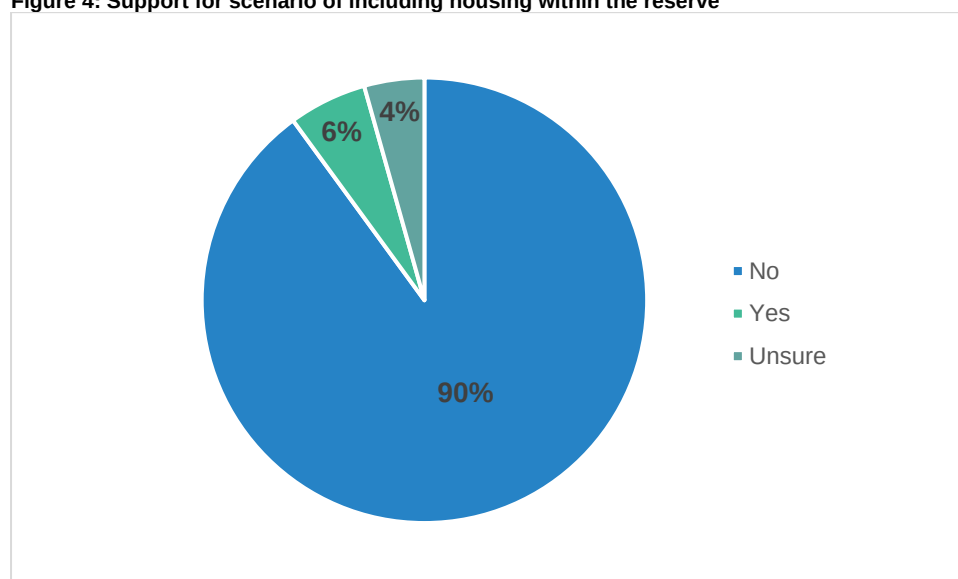
Inclusion of housing on John Coutts Reserve

Respondents were asked whether they support the idea of including housing within John Coutts Reserve. The overwhelming response was 'No' (90%). Only 5.7% of respondents said 'Yes' and 4.4% said they were 'Unsure'.

Table 11: Support for scenario of including housing within the reserve

Response	Count	Percent
No	206	90.0%
Yes	13	5.7%
Unsure	10	4.4%
Total respondents	229	100.0%

Figure 4: Support for scenario of including housing within the reserve



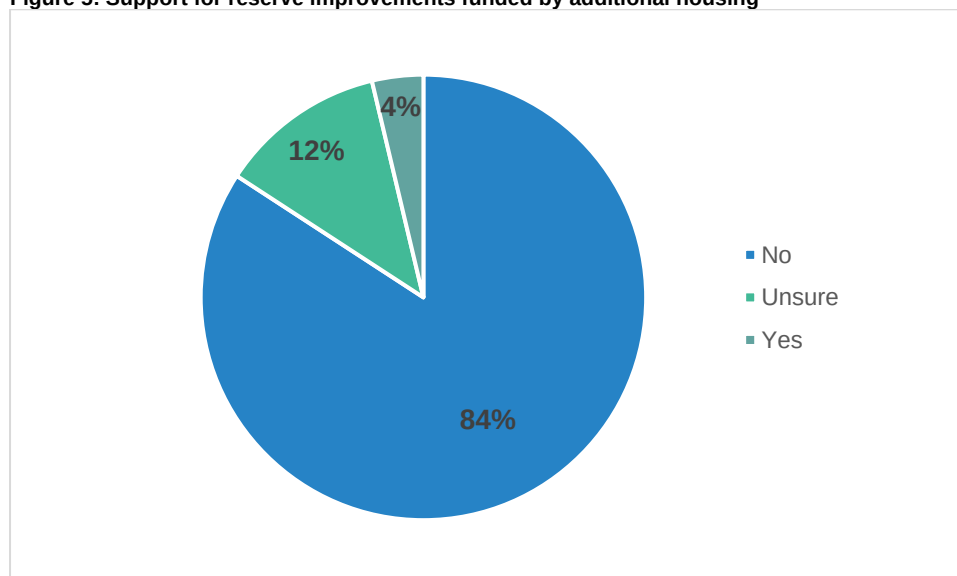
N=229

Respondents were then asked whether they supported additional housing if this was the only way to fund improvements to the reserve. The overwhelming majority of respondents again said 'No' (84.2%), with only 3.7% saying 'Yes'. However, slightly more respondents seemed 'Unsure' about their opinion to this question (12.1%) compared to the previous question (4.4%).

Table 12: Support for reserve improvements funded by additional housing

Response	Count	Percent
No	181	84.2%
Unsure	26	12.1%
Yes	8	3.7%
Total respondents	215	100.0%

Figure 5: Support for reserve improvements funded by additional housing



N=215

Reduction or removal of dog-off leash area

The survey noted that improvements or enhancements to John Coutts Reserve may potentially reduce or remove the dog off leash area. Respondents were asked to choose which of the following deliberative engagement statements best applies to them:

- I would support open space enhancements, even if it meant there was a **reduction in dog off leash area**
- I would support open space enhancements, even if it meant there was **no dog off leash area**
- I would **not support** open space enhancements if it meant there was a reduction or removal of the dog off leash area.

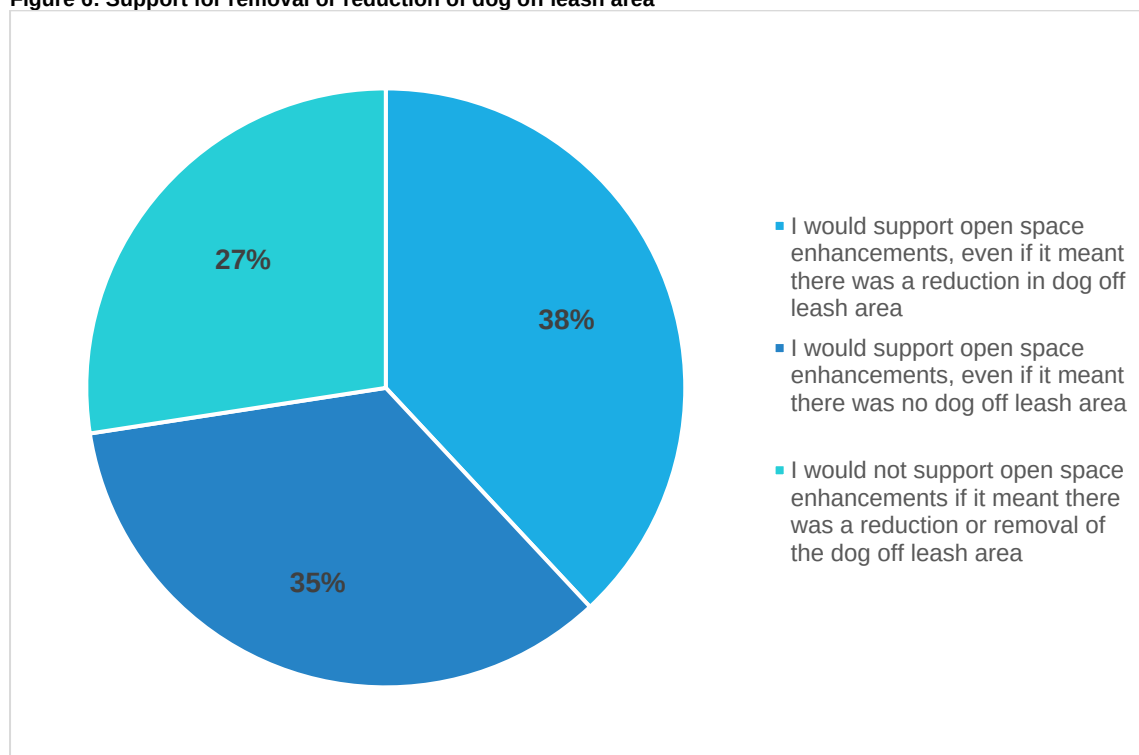
226 people responded to this question, with the results being almost evenly split between all three options. Support for enhancements to the reserve with a reduction in the dog off leash area was the most popular choice (38.1%), however this was closely followed by support for enhancement resulting in the removal of the dog off leash area (34.5%).

Opposition to reserve enhancements that reduce or remove the dog off leash area scored the lowest (27.4%), indicating that respondents favour reserve improvements and enhancements over keeping the existing dog off leash area as is.

Table 13: Support for removal or reduction of dog off leash area

Response	Count	Percent
I would support open space enhancements, even if it meant there was a reduction in dog off leash area	86	38.1%
I would support open space enhancements, even if it meant there was no dog off leash area	78	34.5%
I would not support open space enhancements if it meant there was a reduction or removal of the dog off leash area	62	27.4%
Total respondents	226	100.0%

Figure 6: Support for removal or reduction of dog off leash area



N=226

Given any changes to the existing dog-off leash area would impact existing users of the park who own dogs, survey participants were also asked if they were a dog-owner. Of the 223 respondents to this question, 146 were dog owners, while 77 participants indicated they did not own a dog. Responses between these two cohorts are compared in Table 14 below.

Of the dog owners, the majority would prefer enhancements that only reduce the off leash area, while the least favourable option was enhancements that remove the dog off leash area (40.4% versus 26.7% respectively). 32.9% said they would not be in favour of enhancements to the reserve if there was a reduction or removal of the off leash area.

However, of the respondents who do not own a dog, the majority are in favour of enhancements that remove the dog off leash area, followed by enhancements that reduce the off leash area (48.1% versus 33.8% respectively).

Table 14: Support for removal or reduction of dog off leash area by dog owners

Choice	Dog owner		Not dog owner		Total	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
I would support open space enhancements, even if it meant there was no dog off leash area	39	26.7%	37	48.1%	76	34.1%
I would support open space enhancements, even if it meant there was a reduction in dog off leash area	59	40.4%	26	33.8%	85	38.1%
I would not support open space enhancements if it meant there was a reduction or removal of the dog off leash area	48	32.9%	14	18.2%	62	27.8%
Total	146	100.0%	77	100.0%	223	100.0%

General feedback on John Coutts Reserve

Respondents were asked if they have any other feedback they'd like to provide regarding John Coutts Reserve. 98 respondents gave an answer to this question, with 71.4% of respondents explicitly stating that they oppose housing on John Coutts Reserve for various reasons. Table 15 below splits these reasons out into the following categories:

- general comment (35.7%)
- opposition to taking away the green space (20.4%)
- additional housing would not address the safety/surveillance concerns (8.2%)
- minor enhancements only needed in reserve (4.1%)
- community does not want it (2%)
- would affect liveability and/or property values of houses already backing reserve (1%).

A number of responses have been categorised as 'other,' which includes responses such as:

- reiterating preference for food options, fitness and outdoor equipment in reserve
- reiterating need for reserve to be better maintained (mowed more regularly, better drainage etc)
- general comments noting how long respondent has lived in the area and the changes they have seen
- comments expressing dissatisfaction with council spending
- general comments around the importance of the reserve to the local area
- comments comparing John Coutts Reserve to parks and reserves in other areas.

Table 15: General feedback provided by respondents

Comment theme	Count	Percent
No housing - general comment	35	35.7%
No housing - don't take away the green space	20	20.4%
Other	16	16.3%
There should be other ways council can fund enhancements	12	12.2%
Need for kids playground	10	10.2%

Comment theme	Count	Percent
No housing - additional housing would not address the safety/surveillance concerns	8	8.2%
Extra housing means additional infrastructure (roads, public transport) will be needed	6	6.1%
No housing - minor enhancements only needed in reserve	4	4.1%
Need for lighting	3	3.1%
Need for shaded seating areas, BBQ areas etc	3	3.1%
Disappointed that enhancements to reserve have been talked about for years, but nothing has been done	3	3.1%
No housing - community does not want it	2	2.0%
Need for fenced dog off leash area	2	2.0%
No housing - would affect liveability and/or property values of houses already backing reserve	1	1.0%
General approval of idea	1	1.0%
Total respondents	98	-

Rows will not add up to 100% because respondents could respond with more than one answer.

Some notable comments include:

John Coutts reserve is unique in Gladstone Park. Please don't destroy it by building anything on it! It should be reserved for residents recreation. Barbecue and playground equipment as well as extra native trees are all that's needed for a public space as unique as this.

Making housing in the area will change the area and ambiance. We are concerned about the safety and noise of mass construction. As a Dad with a small family and dog the area is important to us and improved family facilities would be fantastic. We strongly disagree to this development as a user of the park everyday and neighbour.

Gladstone Park is a nice place to live because it has plenty of open space and has not fallen prey to development. Allowing housing development means more people, more cars and a lower quality of life for existing residents. Although this is a small development it opens the door to greater development that has ruined many suburbs of Melbourne, I would not want to see that here. Quiet leafy suburbs are hard to come by these days, let's keep ours that way.

Leave our open spaces alone. It's an already congested suburb and this is one area that gives us a sense of open air and helps with mental state of mind to get out and exercise or just have some cleaner air time.

Why state safety as a concern? The majority of the walking trail is behind houses/out of site. The council should be able to support/budget for projects without the need for privatisation of community accessible land.

This area could really be a central point for the Gladstone Park community to spend time outdoors. The council should fund the development without housing which would cut in significantly to the space and will not improve security given most of the perimeter is housing already. If designed correctly can meet so many of the suggestions in this survey. I currently

travel to Moonee Valley or Moreland facilities because Council has done very little in this area for a very long time. We happen to be rates payers too.

FEEDBACK THROUGH OTHER CONSULTATION METHODS

Twelve respondents gave feedback about John Coutts Reserve through other engagement methods – nine via email, one through a social media comment and two via Hume Connect.

The feedback that came through these methods was very similar to the feedback in the survey, with all twelve respondents opposing additional housing on John Coutts Reserve.

Table 16: Themes of feedback through email and other methods

Feedback theme	Count	Percent
No housing, but enhancements/ park upgrade needed (amenities, playground, fenced dog off leash area, new trees and plants, etc)	8	66.7%
No housing - don't take away the green space / our recreation space	5	41.7%
No housing - will increase traffic and parked cars in area	3	25.0%
No housing - additional housing would not address the safety/surveillance concerns	2	16.7%
No housing - would affect liveability and/or property values of houses already backing reserve	1	8.3%
Site not suitable for housing (creek bed/floods)	1	8.3%
Total respondents	12	-

Rows will not add up to 100% because respondents typically wrote in about more than one issue.

Some notable comments include:

...I am aware about the concerns the community has around "Safety" in the area but I don't believe housing will resolve the issue. It will only serve to devalue properties that overlook this area...

...I have been a resident of Gladstone Park for over 40 years and I believe any housing proposed in the allocated area will be of no benefit to the citizens of Gladstone park while it would greatly benefit monetary wise for the council. The public uses this reserve for many things and if proposal of housing along that area would almost take up half of the reserve with access and block division, leaving not much area for leisure activities, dog walking or off leash area. I do not propose any new housing. New amenities, playground would suffice.

...why are you considering housing in what is essentially a creek bed/bog? This reserve isn't being mowed due to the amount of water in the ground.

...As this is one of only a few off dog leash areas we would like to see it partially developed into a fenced area with activities for the dogs to experience, like tunnels, jumps, ladders etc.... We would also like to see a fenced off playground for young children. There isn't a decent one this side of Carrick Drv. Young children shouldn't have to cross a busy road to get to a decent playground.