"We spent a lot of time playing down by Moonee Ponds Creek. Before it was all concreted up and the freeway built it was a beautiful creek." — Archie Roach
C.01 INTRODUCTION

“The year is 1946; I am 4 years old and my parents have put their first payment down on a 3 small-roomed weatherboard house on a 1/4 acre piece of land with the title on one side ending in the creek. Some years later, the paddock out the front of the house became Margaret Street.

Our mail was delivered to the Post Office at the bottom of Gaffney Street across from the Pascoe Vale Station and our suburb had several name changes – Essendon North, Happy Valley and finally Oak Park. We had our own chickens, a cow, vegie garden and fruit trees. Our water supply came from two huge tanks and a spring on the bank of the creek on our land which is now covered in cement.

The natural Farmer’s Market we topped up from was found in and around the Moonee Ponds Creek. There were eels, yabbies and rabbits and once a year mushrooms galore.

Dad would chop a pathway through the boxthorn hedges and wild aniseed plants to the base of the creek, and then roll stones to make a crossing to the other side. This was replaced after every flood that would run a banker and finish at our own doorstep. The widening of the creek and the footbridge that was built when Strathmore North State School opened made life easier.

Sadly to me, the covering of smooth cement with its harsh never changing appearance was like Botox on a face that loses its movement. As a small child, my family and our visitors enjoyed the freedom and adventures around this untamed country creek, but as the years rolled on a hardworking group joined as ‘Friends of the Creek’ to deliver a growing green wardrobe that brings colour and wildlife back into my little corner of the world.”

by Elaine of Strathmore.

The story and photograph on the previous page was provided by Elaine of Strathmore, gathered as part of the community consultation for the project. The story is an excellent reminder that landscapes are given life and colour by the many different memories and stories that are written and rewritten by the people who use and love the site.

We call these ‘creek stories’ and they form an invaluable and intrinsic part of the Moonee Ponds Creek. No two stories are the same; they are written from different viewpoints and capture the diversity present within the site. Everyone’s story is different. Importantly for sites like the Moonee Ponds Creek, most of these stories remain invisible to us, an unseen and intangible tapestry of ideas and memories that collectively form the community attitude towards the creek. It is these memories and associations that we are interested in, so assist in the development of suitable ideas that will strengthen the relationship between people and the creek.

Reading The Landscape

An important component of this project is engagement with the community to unearth some of these many stories which add detail, character and meaning to the creek and to make the people aware of the many, often different and conflicting views that are present in the community.

Such an appreciation promotes greater understanding of both the people and the landscape, and the wide range of attitudes towards the creek. Landscape architect Anna Whiston Spirn calls this process ‘landscape literacy’. As she describes ‘...landscape literacy is a cultural practice that entails both understanding the world and transforming it. To be literate in landscape is to recognize both the problems in a place and its resources, to understand how they came about, by what means they are sustained, and how they are related.’

This project seeks to enhance landscape literacy around the Moonee Ponds Creek that will help the community come to terms with both the creek’s history, as well as develop suitable strategies for improving the creek into the future.
Committee capture the spirit and intent of the investigation. The thoroughness of the investigation extended to the public conference in June 1975. The Northern Melbourne Waterways Study (1975) represents a ground breaking document in the changing attitudes towards urban waterways in Melbourne. For the first time, there was a real and palpable sense of urgency to address the deterioration of the waterways within the city, and the need to explore alternative responses to the pressures of urban development on natural systems. Importantly, the study was initiated because of growing community concern about the treatment of these waterways. Community involvement in the Study was actively encouraged by advertising for submissions in the media and by holding an all day public conference in June 1975. The thoroughness of the investigation extended to the inclusion in full of all community submissions and responses, as well as an extensive summary of the results of the public conference. These responses provide a vital clue to the changing attitudes of the time, and the growing environmental awareness developing within the broader community. The following responses cited in the 1975 Study capture the spirit and intent of the investigation.

Submission by the North West Regional Council

Submission by the North West Regional Council, Preston Institute of Technology, 1975

C.02 PREVIOUS PLANS

1975 NORTHERN WATERWAYS STUDY

The Northern Melbourne Waterways Study (1975) represents a ground breaking document in the changing attitudes towards urban waterways in Melbourne. For the first time, there was a real and palpable sense of urgency to address the deterioration of the waterways within the city, and the need to explore alternative responses to the pressures of urban development on natural systems.

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“I do think any of us particularly like miles and miles of impossible concrete channels that just run along side a roadway.”

“If you put concrete in, you take the water away very quickly... It’s dirty, its nasty.”

“You should also think of limited acquisition.”

“I must say it is very nice to see so many people here, but in the context of what I have just said, I am sorry there are not hundreds here, there should be hundreds here, and one hopes that over time more and more people will show an interest in this...”

1992 CONCEPT PLAN

In 1991, the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) and the Moonee Ponds Creek Association jointly sponsored the preparation of the Moonee Ponds Creek Concept Plan, a strategic framework for the future development and use of the creek and its environs.

The most significant factor restricting the wider use of the area is seen to be poor access from nearby residential areas and the quality and diversity of the path networks within the open space. The facilities available limit the use of the area by certain sections of the population especially the elderly and disabled. The existing facilities are too often too narrow to restrict the range of activities possible.

There are a lack of facilities supportive of passive recreation, despite being the most common type of use of the creek and its environment. The bike track is not seen to be suitable as a multipurpose facility and linkage of the track to other paths networks is inadequate. The creek itself is not a feature and restricted or difficult access to the creek is considered to detract from the area.

Air and noise pollution were a problem for people using the creek area in certain sections, and the lack of shade was a significant factor inhibiting the extended use of the area for passive recreation along the whole creek.

The community was particularly interested in the need for more native trees, shrubs and wildlife along the creek, and indicated that this would significantly increase their use of the area. It was however evident that tree planting alone would not change the overall pattern of use without a simultaneous upgrading of access, both to and within the open space.

Key issues were identified, including the provisioon of shade, air pollution, noise pollution, access to the bike track, use of the bike track, access to the creek, site use, habitat and the involvement of the community.

Youth people particularly believed that the community should take an active part in the decision making over the future of the creek, though in general there was difficulty in imagining the creek and its environment in a positive way.

02 Moonee Ponds Creek Concept Plan, Board of Works 1992.

03 Moonee Ponds Creek Concept Plan, Board of Works 1984.
In 2001, Moreland City Council undertook a project to identify resting places along the Moonee Ponds and Merri Creek for people to stop, rest, engage and contemplate the creek environment. A number of stakeholder workshops were undertaken in which the following issues arose as part of this consultation:

- The public perception of the creek’s identity and character revealed a general acceptance that the massively engineered concrete materiality of the creek is its unique character.  
- There is a position amongst stakeholder that the concrete channel provides a provocative canvas for exploration of, and public education about, ecological issues.

Other issues raised in the consultation include:

- Interventions must respond to specific environmental context in a sensitive manner.
- Interventions should defer to better water and ecological regimes.
- Interventions should represent and inform existing ecological and historical environments.
- There are a number of further aspirations, including:
  - create an integrated plan for the entire length of the Creek;
  - improve linkages with other open space areas, community hubs, recreational facilities and residential areas;
  - complete the Moonee Ponds Creek Trail for the full length of the Creek;
  - protect areas of natural and cultural significance;
  - develop cultural heritage and interpretive trails, highlighting both Indigenous and European heritage sites with relevant information;
  - continue to return areas to the north to indigenous vegetation;  
  - improve safety of paths (pedestrian/bike conflict e.g. speed traps, speed humps, segregated paths);
  - improve safety of path and resting structures;
  - integrate with other strategies such as the arts strategy;
  - develop short walking trails/loops from car parks including the Woodlands precinct and Docklands precinct.

In 2011, the Moonee Ponds Creek Coordination Committee oversaw the development of the Moonee Ponds Creek Strategic Plan. The plan involved a review of the 1992 Concept Plan and the development of a revised plan to act as a framework for planning, development and management of the Creek environment. As part of the development of the Plan, discussions regarding potential development or aspirations were held with a range of key stakeholders and community groups. These groups “shared a number of common aspirations that were disclosed during the consultation process:

- at key stopping/rest points along the Moonee Ponds Creek Trail, construct water fountains, toilets and park benches;
- develop a cultural heritage trail/interpretive trail, highlighting both Indigenous and European heritage sites with relevant information;
- identify a strategic location for a daytime café at a key destination point. Seek to utilise existing facilities if available;
- continue to return areas to the north to native parkland;
- develop short walking trails/loops from car parks including the Woodlands precinct and Docklands precinct.

Following this feedback, a workshop was organised to guide the development of the final plan. The workshop reiterated the previous aspirations and identified a number of further aspirations, including:

- improve linkages with other open space areas, community hubs, recreational facilities and residential areas;
- complete the Moonee Ponds Creek Trail for the full length of the Creek;
- protect areas of natural and cultural significance;
- develop cultural heritage and interpretive trails, highlighting both Indigenous and European heritage sites with relevant information;
- continue to return areas to the north to indigenous vegetation parkland;  
- improve safety of paths (pedestrian/bike conflict e.g. speed traps, speed humps, segregated paths);
- improve safety of path and resting structures;
- incorporate overall management cohesion (management and design);
- develop short walking trails/loops from car parks including the Woodlands precinct and Docklands precinct.

In 2015, the City of Moonee Valley undertook an Integrated Transport Plan for Moonee Valley. As part of this project, feedback was sought from the community on a range of transport issues. A number of comments relate to issues along the Moonee Ponds Creek, including:

- “The Moonee Ponds Creek trail is really great and the path itself has good signage. However it's difficult to know where you are...”
- “Can more lighting be added to such areas of the Moonee Ponds Creek Trail?”
- “Extremely dangerous area for cyclists and walkers. Frequently encounter dogs off leashes on these corners.”
- “Blind corners, narrow path, no lighting makes for a dangerous part of a cyclists commute.”
- “Updating this wooden bridge to be concrete and much wider with better visibility around the corners would be fantastic (SAFER).”
- “Trees/bushes are not regularly pruned along the Moonee Ponds Creek Trail.”
- “Drawn and sand got washed onto the path here when it rained. The corner is also a blind corner and very narrow. I've had a big crash here.”
- “Moonee Ponds Creek Trail - pitch black at night.”
- “There are issues with the shared path with regards to separating cyclists and pedestrians.”