

Report



Melbourne Showgrounds Master Plan

Our Showgrounds Our Future

capire

We acknowledge and thank Capire Consulting Group for facilitating stakeholder and community engagement and in the preparation of this report.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement – Phase 1 Key Findings

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Report



Thank you for shaping *Our Showgrounds, Our Future*.

The Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria (RASV) is pleased to release the findings from the first phase of community and stakeholder consultation for the Melbourne Showgrounds master plan – *Our Showgrounds, Our Future*.

Thank you to everyone who kindly contributed to the report by participating in workshops or completing the online survey. We received great insights and ideas for shaping *Our Showgrounds, Our Future* and I thank all of you who took opportunity to provide valuable feedback and suggestions.

In this report, you will find a summary of the wide-ranging conversations the RASV and the consultants involved in the master plan have had over the past months.

You will see detailed in the report many great ideas and an assortment of topics the master plan may be able to address. Although not every idea may eventuate, you can be assured that all feedback and suggestions we have received will be given consideration in developing the concept designs.

The proposed master plan concept is scheduled to be released for public feedback later this year. In the meantime, there is ongoing consultation and discussions with a range of stakeholders as the master plan process continues.

Thank you once again for your interest in the Melbourne Showgrounds master plan and we look forward to sharing the design concept with you in the near future.



Brad Jenkins

Chief Executive Officer

RASV

The master plan

RASV is developing a master plan for Melbourne Showgrounds to shape *Our Showgrounds, Our Future*. *Our Showgrounds, Our Future* will identify how the site can be improved to maximise its potential as a centre for agriculture, events, exhibitions, and wider community use. It will look at options to upgrade or replace ageing infrastructure and how to best integrate transport, exhibition, and accommodation facilities into the precinct.

A new plan for Melbourne Showgrounds will ensure the much-loved precinct can best serve the needs of Victorians now and for generations to come. It is time to create a new plan for its future, building on its legacy of creating enjoyable experiences and memories.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Capire Consulting Group (Capire) was engaged by RASV to lead and report on the community and stakeholder engagement.

Engagement will be undertaken in two phases.

- **Phase One** focused on engaging with the general public and stakeholders to hear their stories, understand their experiences, identify their needs and ideas for the future of Melbourne Showgrounds.
- **Phase Two** will help to seek community and stakeholder feedback on the draft master plan.

This report outlines the Phase One community and stakeholder consultation findings.

Engagement participants

Phase 1 of the master plan engagement saw 3,600+ website visits, 2700 contributions and 288 surveys completed; 103 people registered for project updates. A wide range of workshops were held with stakeholder groups including the RASV Board, staff, members, volunteers, committees, sponsors, suppliers and clients. Other stakeholders we engaged with included local councils, public transport operators, business, food and agricultural industries, local community, neighbouring facilities and government agency representatives.

All engagements were undertaken adhering to current COVID safe regulations.

Engagement questions

During this phase stakeholder and community participants were asked to consider their experience of Melbourne Showgrounds:

- What's your favourite memory of Melbourne Showgrounds?
- What's working well? / What could be improved? / What do you need?
- What's your big idea?

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Engagement insights

The following pages summarise the key themes and ideas that emerged. This report combines insights from face to face consultations and on-line feedback (survey responses and shared memories).

The key master plan engagement themes and ideas were:

1. Create an iconic site
 2. Support the Show and events
 3. Improve transport and access
 4. Create a year-round destination
 5. Celebrate our agricultural legacy
 6. Diversify and upgrade spaces and facilities
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Insights

Theme 1: Create an iconic site

It was generally recognised that Melbourne Showgrounds is a widely recognised and high profile venue. However, it was also acknowledged by many stakeholders that the site lacks identity and it does not have an iconic presence or an 'Instagram-able moment'. The master plan was identified as an opportunity to create a more destinational, more characterful and unique site.

What's working well

- a) Melbourne Showgrounds is widely recognised as one of **Melbourne's major events venues**.
- b) It was widely acknowledged that Melbourne Showgrounds is a **high-profile** venue.
- c) The site's **long history for Victoria's agricultural sector**, strong connection to the Show and many other loved major events has cemented its position as a well-known venue with connections to many parts of the Victorian community.

What needs improvement

There were many suggestions for ways the image and purpose of the Melbourne Showgrounds could be improved. These included but were not limited to:

- a) **Iconic and distinct entrance/s** to welcome visitors and create an easily identifiable presence.
- b) That there is potential for increased **celebration of the site, it's rural Victoria, agriculture, agri-business** industries and heritage including indigenous heritage. Ideas such as more exhibits, permanent displays expressed in **innovative and contemporary ways**.
- c) Enhancing the place character of the site. Could include **distinctive planting and landscaping** that brings forward the agricultural heritage of the site.
- d) Many past and present visitors to the site, as well as producers and exhibitors, identified an opportunity to enhance the **sustainability of the site** through green spaces, sustainable energy, better waste reduction and industry leading recycling and energy facilities.
- e) Stakeholders frequently suggested that the master plan explores a more sustainable approach also linked in with opportunities for **research, training and education**. The promotion of the '**Best of Victoria**' type of events showcasing sustainability, new design/ building and technology including farming practices, agri-food and hospitality industry education, promotions and research.

Observations and Big Ideas

There were many ideas for the image and identity of the Melbourne Showgrounds. These included but were not limited to:

- a) Our Showgrounds, Our Future is an opportunity for RASV to develop a **cohesive, precinct-based approach to create a more integrated facility**.
- b) Creating places that **take advantage of views to the city**.
- c) **Food is an excellent connector** and a space for weekend farmers markets would be appreciated by the local community.

- d) Consider opportunities for city dwellers to **experience and learn about agriculture** – this could be facilitated through an urban garden, demonstration farm or community garden.
- e) The master plan is an opportunity to **improve activation and promote innovation** in the agricultural, and food / beverage sectors. Examples of international precincts with year-round activation, include those with a focus on local produce, such as:

Abbotsford Convent, Melbourne	MONA Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania
Markthal, Rotterdam – market hall underneath residential and office building	Mauer Park and the former no-man’s land, Berlin wall
Eataly, Milan – Italian food marketplace	Bethlehem Steel, Pittsburgh
Urban renewal of Mission Bay, San Francisco	Bilbao, Spain
Riverside Centre, New York	

Theme 2: Support the Show and events

The Show was the most frequently mentioned event across all stakeholder conversations. It is a much-loved community event and integral to the character of Melbourne Showgrounds. It is acknowledged that a year-round program of events and greater activation may be necessary to ensure commercial viability of the site, however there was a reluctance to compromise The Show’s vibrancy, character and offering.

What’s working well

- a) The Show is a **much-loved annual event**, steeped in tradition and is the focus for many visitors to Melbourne Showgrounds.
- b) Survey respondents overwhelmingly listed the **Show as one of the best things about Melbourne Showgrounds**. They spoke about the excitement of seeing high quality competitions and the atmosphere that the Show brings to Melbourne Showgrounds. The sense of community that emerges through the Show was valued by many respondents. Favourite activities and attractions included wood chop, horses, livestock, dogs, food, craft and show bags.
- c) The **agricultural legacy of the site** is reflected through the annual Royal Melbourne Show and Melbourne Showgrounds has an important role to play in maintaining the **connection between city and country**.
- d) The strong association between Melbourne Showgrounds and its flagship annual event is further demonstrated in the stories collected through the website. The Show was the most **prominent theme in the memories shared**, with some people relaying stories going as far back as the 1950s.
- e) Similarly, stakeholders noted that the Show is well regarded by exhibitors and that the Melbourne Showgrounds should aim to **“put on a bloody good Show”**.

What needs improvement

There were many ideas to support the Show and other events at Melbourne Showgrounds. These included but were not limited to:

- a) Improvement to event **‘bump in and bump out’ access** was specifically identified as an issue for Show exhibitors. While stakeholders acknowledge that the process is managed well by site staff, space and circulation constraints on-site and in surrounding areas make access difficult. Access and on-site mobility

improvements are required to manage larger modern vehicles and the expanded programs held on site.

- b) Programming could be reviewed to allow **more events to run concurrently** and improve experiences for Show exhibitors – it is noted that event programming sometimes means that they are unable to explore and relax during Show times. They also noted that being able to spend time and build connections within the Show community was important for exhibitors. Show exhibitors also have many commitments outside of Show times which should be considered in programming as it can affect their ability to participate.

Observations and Big Ideas

There were many ideas for how the Show and Events at Melbourne Showgrounds can be better supported. These included but were not limited to:

- a) Visitors and exhibitors noted that Melbourne Showgrounds is **missing a main arena** and there was significant support for the return of a central arena to provide a focal point for the Show and greater amenity for competitors and audiences. The design of a new arena or common space identified easy access for horses and cattle/ large animals; underground water catchment; commentary/ media boxes; arena lighting for night events; good sound system; super screen (ideally); under cover seating; access for entertainment; storage for large equipment/ trucks, tractors, show jumps and medical facilities.
- b) Participants reported that there is a shortage of appropriate **short stay accommodation** nearby to support large events – we need nearby accommodation for exhibitors, visitors and organisers of multi-day events is limited.
- c) It was widely acknowledged that the VRC at the neighbouring Flemington Racecourse is a **key partner** in the delivery of the Show and other large events, especially regarding visitor parking and access via the existing underpass.

Theme 3: Improve transport and access

Transport and access were strong themes across all stakeholders and community groups as supporting the use of the site.

Opportunities to improve public transport access via tram and train and promote greater pedestrian and cycle links were highlighted by many participants. It was noted that there is a need to ease traffic congestion, and improve the efficiency, accessibility and quality of public transport to the site.

What's working well

- a) Melbourne Showgrounds is **centrally located and easy to get to** - site's central location near the Melbourne CBD and connection to arterial road and public transport network is a strength.
- b) Visitors and exhibitors spoke about **ease of access within the site**, general movement through the site, the traffic management on events and its structural layout accommodates a range of uses.
- c) Visitors and the local community also like the **train that operates during Show** time and would like this service to operate year-round to support other events. Local residents would further benefit from access to multiple modes of transport including tram and train services.

What needs improvement

There were many suggestions for ways transport and access could be improved for Melbourne Showgrounds. These included but were not limited to:

- a) Events generate **noise and traffic impacts on surrounding residential communities** - Major or multi-day events generate adverse impacts on local communities including noise impacts from on-site activities, visitors leaving the site, anti-social behaviour from event patrons, particularly late at night. Impacts to local traffic and parking, visitors parking in surrounding streets, congestion at site gates and constraints on the public transport system during event /times. Lack of ride share pick-up/drop-off points on site contribute to issues with traffic flow and congestion in neighbouring streets.
- b) New or **improved parking infrastructure** will assist access to the site and convenience for visitors by reducing the long walk from the Flemington Racecourse car park and the narrow underpass which can make access challenging for pedestrians.
- c) Transport and access to the site should be improved to **reduce congestion and promote public transport**. The local road network struggles to accommodate crowds attending major events.
- d) The **route 57 tram service struggles with the demand** during major events including the Show, university exams and music festivals. The Melbourne Showgrounds tram stop is poorly located in relation to the pedestrian entrances. Combined with the increased volume of car traffic during these events, site entry and exit points become congested and have repercussions for local traffic flow and parking.
- e) Site **accessibility and wayfinding can be improved** to enhance the visitor experience – improving access across the large site for people with decreased mobility. Ensuring that site topography and facilities are accessible was suggested by stakeholders to improve mobility for all visitors.
- f) Improved **wayfinding through signage** or the reintroduction of the 'yellow brick road' was identified to improve site amenity and navigation through the site. As well as using popular anchor attractions such as show bags and rides to improve the flow of the site.

Observations and Big Ideas

There were many suggestions to improve transport and access for the Melbourne Showgrounds. These included but were not limited to:

- a) All stakeholder groups displayed a strong interest in greater utilisation of the rail spur. Community and stakeholder groups alike supported the **activation of the rail spur** all year round for visitors and the local community.
- b) Big transport ideas included possibility of merging the two spur stations and creating greater access between sites, the possibility of a **tram super stop on Epsom Road** and improved efficiency of the tram route to better service Melbourne Showgrounds.
- c) **Enhanced public transport** would be required to support any new major events facility or exhibition centre.
- d) Initiatives such as **shuttle services to off-site parking** or the **return of the chairlift** were identified as ways to make the site more accessible and improve comfort and convenience for visitors. The site is large and can result in a long walk during major events.
- e) We heard suggestions for **improved car parking** to address impacts on surrounding areas and to improve convenience for visitors.
- f) Opportunities to **improve access between Flemington Racecourse and Melbourne Showgrounds**, including parking, integrated bike paths and pedestrian access through the precinct.

Theme 4: Create a year-round destination

Melbourne Showgrounds has grown into Melbourne's largest and most versatile indoor/outdoor space for events, exhibitions, music festivals, exams, television production and much more.

Promoting year-round events and providing the facilities to support a diverse program of events is a consideration for this master plan and vital to the commercial sustainability of the site.

What's working well

- a) Melbourne Showgrounds hosts a **diverse range of events** - Stakeholders noted that the site hosts a range of major and smaller events each year, outside of the Show.

What needs improvement

There were many ideas to support the Showgrounds becoming a year round destination. These included but were not limited to:

- a) The site would benefit from **permanent or regular events to enable year-round activation**, including opportunities for producers to promote their products and/or production. Many participants were eager for greater activation of the site through a regular program of events which celebrated the connection between city and country and showcased Victoria's agricultural offerings.
- b) Events and programs could be supported by **more permanent uses such as produce gardens and retail spaces** that promote exhibitors or awards entrants.
- c) Access and infrastructure need to be improved for **year round use**. Stakeholders noted that not having access to Flemington Racecourse car park or the train service for smaller events makes it more difficult for visitors to travel to the site for events outside of major events.
- d) It was noted that smaller events hosted at Melbourne Showgrounds **lack the atmosphere that the Show** and major festivals are able to achieve.

Observations and Big Ideas

There were many ideas for evolving Melbourne Showgrounds into a year round destination. These included but were not limited to:

- a) Broad cross section of stakeholders discussed the opportunity to position Melbourne Showgrounds as a **permanent central hub to support industry and promote agriculture**. It was noted that Melbourne Showgrounds and RASV are uniquely placed in the Victorian context to facilitate industry connections and provide support and resources. Workshop stakeholders and survey participants alike identified opportunities to draw on this strength to promote education, provide professional resources and build community.
- b) RASV could help by facilitating agricultural industry partnerships, fostering networks of producers and building industry awareness. Many stakeholders raised the potential for RASV to promote industry connections by supporting and hosting events and **providing meeting and administrative spaces for industry**.
- c) The food and beverage industry recognised the value in supporting benchmarking, encouraging networking and **sharing industry knowledge between producers**. They encouraged the continuation of the awards programs.
- d) Show industry stakeholders spoke of the value of the greater Show community and the potential for **RASV to**

create more opportunities to bring committees and stakeholders together.

- e) Industry and community stakeholders expressed support for an **expanded facility that provides training and courses**, office and meeting spaces, marketing and promotional support, and show cases best practice in agriculture and for food & beverage producers and incorporate education/training programs.
- f) Year-round events such as a **permanent marketplace or regular food-based activations** such as a farmer's market, food truck park or drawing inspiration from Queen Victoria Market were suggested. It was noted that there is no comparable space in the north west of Melbourne that regularly hosts such events.
- g) Further opportunities to partner on the delivery of major events and to **operate as an events precinct** during large events like the Show and the Spring Racing Carnival. This could be enhanced through shared support infrastructure and increased connectivity between the sites within the precinct.

Theme 5: Celebrate our agricultural legacy

RASV works to connect and strengthen communities to celebrate agriculture and cultivate events. RASV's Food and Beverage Award programs, continue to grow with over 7,800 entries annually; from over 1,500 producers; 275 local, interstate and international expert judges.

We heard from multiple stakeholders that the master plan should facilitate the continuing protection and promotion of the **agricultural legacy of the site**. This was widely celebrated through survey responses, memories and conversations with stakeholders. However, it was also acknowledged that Melbourne Showgrounds needs to continually evolve as the agricultural sector does.

What's working well

- a) Melbourne Showgrounds has a **rich history** that is reflected in its built form and should be celebrated. Melbourne Showground's rich history was identified as a strength of the site. **Heritage buildings** and the **Pie in the Sky** were identified as valuable attributes that contribute to the character of the site.
- b) The heritage of the site is seen as an important link to its agricultural legacy and the **connection between city and country and is embedded in public memory**. Survey participants and exhibitors were keen to see the site's **heritage character maintained and enhanced**. Show stakeholders also noted the work that has gone into recording, preserving and curating the history of the site and the RASV to date.

What needs improvement

There were many ideas to support the agricultural legacy of Melbourne Showgrounds. These included but were not limited to:

- a) The history of the **Victorian agricultural sector** is not well represented on site.
- b) Survey respondents noted that the **indigenous cultural history** of the site is not represented.

Observations and Big Ideas

There were many ideas to support the agricultural legacy of Melbourne Showgrounds. These included but were not limited to:

- a) Melbourne Showgrounds Heritage committee currently houses its collection at the RASV offices and curates the online archives. However, the collection is outgrowing its current space. It was suggested that a **more dedicated facility for the display of a heritage collection** be considered to promote the rich history of the

site.

- b) Community participants suggested that the **indigenous history** of the site could be better represented. The expression of indigenous history and its connection to agriculture, including education around indigenous land management and agricultural techniques and **connection to Country** was suggested.

Theme 6: Diversify spaces and facilities

It was broadly acknowledged that Melbourne Showgrounds is a unique site offering a range of indoor and outdoor spaces. Improved facilities, greater efficiency and flexibility of use were identified as key themes. As was the opportunity to create vibrancy and attract a broader variety of uses and a richer program of events. It was considered vital that the mix of facilities and infrastructure supports the Royal Melbourne Show.

What's working well

- a) Melbourne Showgrounds has **diverse and flexible facilities** and spaces that support a range of uses and is well managed.
- b) Melbourne Showgrounds has great access to **IT and digital infrastructure**.

What needs improvement

There were many suggestions for ways the spaces and facilities of the Melbourne Showgrounds could be improved. These included but were not limited to:

- a) Suggested **upgrades to facilities** including a range of possible improvements: storage (including lockable facilities); improved public toilets; kitchens suitable for large functions and catering/ satellite kitchen; temperature control for buildings; an event organiser's office; fit for purpose judging and tasting facility; security offices; staff offices and break-out rooms; 'green rooms'; cloak rooms; improved waste management; utility pits and improved large vehicle loading bays with truck/ vehicle access into the building; and suitable bump in/ bump out areas.
- b) **Back of house improvements** to bring facilities up to a consistent standard and support flexible uses – this could include more flexible space and additional fridges, freezers and kitchen facilities with the technology and digital infrastructure to support hybrid events, and access to amenities for families including pram access and parents' rooms.
- c) Front of house facilities should provide **universal access / DDA compliant** access and have the flexibility to support the Show and other events.
- d) Not all areas of the site have **access to power** and some areas require generators. **Topography and ground condition** of the site constrict flexible of use.
- e) The **heritage character** of the site is valued by stakeholders but is also recognised as a constraint to supporting diverse events and providing universal access and comfort. An increased level of consistency in services to these facilities including climate control, water and DDA compliance would provide a **base level of infrastructure** to support a flexible program of events as well as comfort and amenity for visitors including toilets, seating and protected rest areas.
- f) There is a need for spaces with the **flexibility to accommodate non-traditional purposes** and be flexible to respond to new business, event practices and technology. There is an increased need for hybrid meeting spaces and digital technology to support virtual events and meetings.

Observations and Big Ideas

There were many suggestions for the future spaces and facilities of the Melbourne Showgrounds. These included but were not limited to:

- a) Melbourne Showgrounds could provide a **valued community facility** that supports community interaction and engagement all year round. Enhanced public access through the site was suggested to promote integration with the local areas and strengthen relationships with local communities and improved street frontages would allow the site to better integrate with the surrounding area at street level.
- b) Industry stakeholders frequently identified adjacent services and facilities that should support a **new exhibition space**. Short term visitor's accommodation and public transport were the most frequently mentioned, while other stakeholders also suggested that any new exhibition space should be situated close to the existing Victoria Pavilion.
- c) Event and precinct stakeholders saw an opportunity to maximise the use of the site and facilities by **adopting a precinct approach** particularly in relation to functionality with adjacent Flemington Racecourse.

Further information

To find out more and register for project updates via our [website](#).

Upcoming opportunities, to get involved in *Our Showgrounds, Our Future*, as we progress the draft master plan, will be announced.

A concept will be available for comment.

If you have any further questions about the project, contact us via email:
future@melbourneshowgrounds.com