

Australian Garden

vol. 38, no. 1, July 2026

HISTORY





An extensive green site within the cityscape, Victoria Park features mature trees in avenues and groves, photo Jane Lennon

In February 2026 the Queensland State Government rescinded the several Deeds of Grant in Trust held by the Brisbane City Council and signed by the Governor of Queensland for the 65 hectares of Victoria Park. This converted a [State Heritage-listed park](#), known affectionately as 'the lungs of the city' to freehold land.

Replacing a trust-based regime with one allowing broad executive discretion is a structural weakening of public interest safeguards to protect a public open space. Since its gazettal in 1875, this historically protected green parkland has survived rail lines, hospitals, war huts and roadways. Now Victoria Park faces its greatest transformation yet – an Olympic Stadium.

Victoria Park's layered history

Before Europeans arrived, Barrambin was a cultural gathering place. It was the largest and most important First Nations camp and corroboree ground in southeast Queensland. In the colonial period, it became a site of conflict between Aboriginal people and Europeans, with two significant attacks recorded in 1846 and 1849. By the 1860s, most Aboriginal people had either been removed or had left the site. Later, between the 1930s and 1950s, many Aboriginal families lived in the 'shanty towns' there.

In the 1840s, camps for displaced people, including Chinese and Scottish immigrants, were set up in York's Hollow, which went on to become

one of Brisbane's first industrial areas. When brickmaking and timber-felling ceased, it became a municipal rubbish dump. The area was gazetted as a place for recreation in 1875 and named for the ruling monarch, Queen Victoria.

During the 1920s, the Brisbane City Council Electricity Substation No. 4 (1928) was built to serve Brisbane's expanding electricity network. The Substation is highly intact. It has aesthetic importance for its skilful use of modest Classical-style architectural features and streetscape.

In 1930–31, the Victoria Park golf course was established as Brisbane's first municipal golf links. Along with the formation of the Victoria Park Golf Club and a purpose-designed clubhouse in the then popular Spanish Mission style, this illustrates the Greater Brisbane City Council's commitment to creating public recreational facilities during the interwar period. The park's sports fields (1925; re-laid 1935) are associated with the growth of sports organisations at that time. The first headquarters of the Brisbane Hockey Association were located in Victoria Park.

Gilchrist Avenue, its retaining wall/stair and its tree plantings (1930–32 and 1936), the Riding Row Entrance Piers (1936) and the Ornamental Lake (1933–36) are important as examples of work carried out under the Intermittent Relief Scheme during the Great Depression.



A



B

A Victoria Park: RAAF war-time huts, c. 1950s, which later housed war brides (1945–47) and families awaiting housing commission accommodation (1947–1960) [BCC-B120-31535], Brisbane City Archives

B Victoria Park: schoolchildren planting eucalypts for Brisbane municipal council's 100th year, 1959, (BCC-D-120277), Brisbane City Archives

During the Second World War, Camp Victoria Park hosted Australian and US soldiers/operations in buildings that after the war served as temporary accommodation for returned servicemen and their families.

The park contains examples of the work of professional horticulturists Henry Moore (Brisbane Parks Superintendent 1912–1940) and Harry Oakman (Brisbane Parks Superintendent 1946–1963), including avenues of trees, planter beds and the Gundoo Memorial Grove planted to celebrate the centenary of Queensland.

Despite large incursions into its land (for educational and other purposes), and the construction of railway lines and roads through its centre, Victoria Park remains one of the largest parks in Brisbane. It is testimony to the value the city has afforded to green recreational space from the 19th to the 21st century.

What will a stadium mean for Victoria Park?

Who determined the stadium's exact siting and on what criteria: cost efficiency or long-term civic value? Can open space lost during construction be meaningfully restored or enhanced?

An answer about the site came on 25 March, when the Queensland Government announced that the new stadium will be built near Gilchrist Avenue to connect it to existing transport infrastructure. Early works to build the stadium, to cost more than \$3 billion, commenced immediately the land was transferred to the Games Independent Infrastructure and Coordination Authority on 1 June. The size and shape of the field of play will be equivalent in size to the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Given Barrambin's significance, the Yagara Magandjin Aboriginal Corporation submitted an application under Section 10 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act to allow for cultural sites to be respected and construction to incorporate heritage. On 31 May, the Federal Environment Minister Murray Watt rejected two cultural heritage protection applications relating to the early works. Work has begun even in the face of large protest demonstrations.

Despite Premier Crisafulli breaking an election promise not to build a stadium in Victoria Park, he is proudly proclaiming it as the centrepiece of the Brisbane Olympics and has said that two-thirds of the project area would be green space and free to access. It remains unclear how this will be possible. Adding gigantic stadiums, overpasses, associated infrastructure and increased traffic within an already busy intersection between three major schools, a hospital, the Brisbane Exhibition Grounds and a university, is a risk to most of the park.

Olympic stadiums serve a moment in time, while parks serve generations. We need to ensure that Victoria Park remains a place where civic responsibilities match civic aspirations. The AGHS Queensland Branch will continue to stand up for a cultural landscape that holds deep meaning for community, for climate, for culture, for First Nations people and for future generations. Victoria Park breathes life into our dense, rapidly developing city. It is heritage-listed for significant reasons. Once it's gone, we can't get it back. This is not just a local issue. This is about how we value our green spaces in major cities, our history, our significant First Nations sites, our environment and who gets a say in shaping where we live.

Jane Lennon, Chair, Advocacy Subcommittee