The Indigenous Landscape

To the Yerongpan people, who speak the Yaggera language, Oxley Creek is ‘Benarrawa’, a rich source of food. People enjoy the Bungwall fern (Blechnum indicum) at Willawong, fish from the creek and the fruits of the mangroves. Local fauna is hunted. People camp in places such as the Rocky Water Holes, leaving evidence of their daily lives for future generations such as stone tools along the creek at Acacia Ridge, and bora rings in Camira and near the current Chelmer Railway Station.

Early Exploration

In 1823 explorer John Oxley discovers the creek, which he names ‘Canoe Creek’. In 1825 surveyor Edmund Lockyer renames it ‘Oxley’s Creek’ as he charters the Brisbane River.

The European Landscape

From 1826–1839 timber is logged along the creek by convicts and floated to the Tennyson Sawmill at the creek mouth.

Between 1828 and 1829 construction of the first penal settlement road between Brisbane and Limestone (now Ipswich) begins.

Urban growth begins in 1859 when Boyland’s Pocket is subdivided into 30-40 acre farming lots for the production of sugar, cotton, maize and potatoes.

First free settlement along Oxley Creek begins in 1850.

Settlers Simpson and Boyland lease large tracts of low-lying land (now covered by the suburbs of Graceville, Sherwood, Corinda and Oxley) and the area becomes known as Boyland’s Pocket and is used for cattle and sheep grazing.

In 1843 Brisbane’s first racecourse is built at Stable Swamp Creek.

In 1842 Brisbane is opened to free settlers.

1841

The Largest Flood event ever recorded occurs.

In 1839 Granville Stapylton conducts the first land survey around Oxley Creek.

Howes Bros. establish a bacon factory on Blunder Creek in 1894.

1893

The Great Flood destroys the Freney timber sawmill.

In 1898 Archerfield Wetlands are subdivided into agricultural lots, excluding land immediately adjacent the creek and land containing a low-lying wetland on Blunder Creek. A transition from rural activities to industrial land uses begins.
Community Growth

The first school opens in 1867 with 117 pupils.

In 1868 the old convict-era road is replaced by a new road.

In 1869 the sugar cane industry booms, however, after successive years of poor harvests due to flood and drought, dairying and meat processing facilities replace cane production.

The first railway between Brisbane and Ipswich opens in 1876, prompting increased development and greater land subdivision.

In 1970, OCCA wins International River Foundation's National Riverprize.

In 2009, OCCA wins International River Foundation's National Riverprize.

In 2010, OCCA wins International River Foundation's National Riverprize.

In 2006, the Lord Mayor's Oxley Creek Catchment Taskforce is established.

1874
The Australia Day Flood
submerges much of the Rocklea district, including the Rocklea Markets.

During the 1970s sandstone quarries, sawmills, brickworks and sand extraction operations begin in Oxley and Blunder creek catchments.

1960
A Major Flood devastates local agricultural lands and homes.

A post WWII surge in Queensland’s population results in a wave of residential development in the catchment.

1940

With the outbreak of WWII in 1939, Archerfield Aerodrome becomes a significant military base.

1970

1960

The 1920s witness the second wave of residential development in the catchment.

1980

1990

1987 was proclaimed the ‘Year of the River’ by former Lord Mayor Sallyanne Atkinson.

The Inala Wastewater Treatment Plant is decommissioned in 1997.

In 1974, Brisbane records its second-highest flood level of the last 100 years, after 1974.

1980

In 2006, the Lord Mayor’s Oxley Creek Catchment Taskforce is established.

In 2009, OCCA wins International River Foundation’s National Riverprize.

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1940

1950

Archerfield Aerodrome is established in 1929.

In 1960 Oxley Creek Catchment Association (OCCA) is formed.

In 1996, Lord Mayor Graham Quirk pledges $100m over the next 20 years to transform the Oxley Creek corridor into a world-class recreation destination.

In 2011, Sergeant Dan Stiller Memorial Reserve is opened in March 2011.

In 2016, Lord Mayor Graham Quirk pledges $100m over the next 20 years to transform the Oxley Creek corridor into a world-class recreation destination.

In 1974, Inala Wastewater Treatment Plant is decommissioned in 1997.

In 1987, the Lord Mayor’s Oxley Creek Catchment Taskforce is established.

In 2011
January Flood
Brisbane records its second-highest flood level of the last 100 years, after 1974.

In 2009, OCCA wins International River Foundation’s National Riverprize.

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1950
Brisbane is a safe, vibrant, green and prosperous city, and a great place to live, work and relax. Oxley Creek will play an important role in maintaining Brisbane’s future prosperity and the quality of life we enjoy as the city grows.

Government plans focus growth into locations where access to services and employment can be maximised, including the inner city, around shopping centres, and along major transport corridors such as railway lines and busways. This development pattern also protects our network of green spaces, valued as places for relaxation, recreation and restoration. Brisbane’s green network and waterways are also an indispensable element of the regional ecosystem, supporting biologically diverse native plants and animals.

The scale of Oxley Creek’s transformation will have regional benefits, positively contributing to the wellbeing of local residents by addressing service gaps in the current green space network. It will create a regional recreation asset while enhancing essential biodiversity values, natural waterway processes and regional habitat corridors.

A healthy, biodiverse environment is essential to Brisbane’s sustainable growth, lifestyle and city image. The Oxley Creek corridor has the potential to deliver integrated environmental rehabilitation, recreation activities, nature-based experiences and community amenities.

The industrial areas of Oxley, Rocklea, Archerfield and Acacia Ridge form part of the South West Industrial Gateway, one of the city’s three Major Industry Areas and a primary regional employment hub.

Industry is vital to Brisbane’s economy, directly supplying approximately 15% of all jobs in Brisbane and supporting other employment sectors such as retail and construction. Many industrial operations also export, driving broader economic growth. However, with demand for industrial land forecast to outstrip supply by 2041, preserving existing enterprise and industry areas is becoming critical.

Adjacent to the corridor are core components of the regional transport network such as Archerfield Airport, Brisbane’s major general aviation airport, and key freight rail and road corridors.

Tourism is another economic pillar of our city, and this industry is rapidly expanding. Our climate and natural assets are predicted to attract greater numbers of interstate and international visitors over time. Transforming the Oxley Creek corridor into a vast recreational precinct offers the opportunity to animate Brisbane with a new eco-destination to broaden Brisbane’s tourism offerings.

Brisbane’s economy is growing, with a projected

45% increase in jobs between 2011 and 2031.

50% of Brisbane’s industrial land is in the South West Industrial Gateway.

37% of Brisbane is natural habitat.

Tourists spent $6 billion visiting Brisbane in 2016-17.
Oxley Creek has always been a hard-working creek. Sustaining Indigenous life for millennia, it was also the lifeblood of colonial Brisbane, supplying sand for construction, water for farming and a means of transportation. Today, the corridor remains one of the city’s most diverse and productive areas.

Early timber logging and farming of the 1800s eventually gave way to housing and factories, which set the foundation for Brisbane’s thriving economy. Enterprise and industry still line the creek today, fringed by urban neighbourhoods, shopping centres, parks, sporting fields, protected nature reserves and large open spaces in the flood plain that help manage flooding in nearby suburbs.

Residential neighbourhoods adjoining the corridor range from older, leafy suburbs with ‘timber and tin’ character homes to semi-rural residential areas and new master-planned estates with smaller, more affordable block sizes. Emerging residential developments are underway in the suburbs of Willawong, Pallara and Heathwood.

The South West Industrial Gateway has excellent regional road and rail connections. Goods are distributed to and from the port, the city centre and all parts of Australia. These networks, together with citywide bus and train services, also make the Oxley Creek corridor accessible to regional tourism hubs and destinations such as Brisbane’s City Centre and the Brisbane Airport. Corinda and Oxley passenger railway stations are within five kilometres of the creek and the Queensland Government is considering future passenger railway stations at Algester and Acacia Ridge.

Direct access to the creek varies across the corridor. Active transport networks for walking and cycling are more concentrated in the north of the corridor, corresponding with established residential neighbourhoods and community facilities. In industrial areas and emerging residential suburbs in the corridor’s south, convenient walking and cycling networks are yet to be realised.

Given its scale and urban setting, the corridor offers an extraordinary opportunity to establish a major off-road recreation and commuter active transport network, connecting north to south as well as cross-corridor links.

Precinct-level planning and design will be required to manage interfaces between the creek and new business and industry areas, as well as vehicle access, stormwater run-off, surveillance for safety and other environmental issues.

The legacy of past corridor activities

Oxley Creek and its surrounds have endured a long history of agriculture, extractive mining, industrial uses, unregulated landfilling activities, illegal dumping and wastewater treatment operations. This has resulted in significant impacts on environmental quality and health, including:

- Creek water quality impacted by industrial pollutants, contaminated groundwater and soil erosion.
- Pollutant particles in water reduce oxygen levels and the creek’s ability to support aquatic plants and animals.
- Contaminated soils and closed landfill areas impacting groundwater quality as a result of rain or flood water leaching. These areas are also susceptible to random slump and settlement.
- Potential for landfill sites to produce unpredictable pockets of landfill gas which can affect human health.
- Exposure, by excavation or erosion, of naturally occurring acid sulphate soils which can result in the release of acids, metals and nutrients.

Future detailed investigations and testing regimes will be required to identify and remediate or contain land and waterway contamination to ensure the safety and protection of both people and the environment.

Opportunity exists to treat stormwater run-off into the creek from industrial areas, as well as the inflows from tributaries, by passing it through bio-retention basins or engineered wetlands. This process removes sediments and pollutants from the water and can also aerate the water, thereby increasing its oxygen levels.

The Oxley Wastewater Treatment Plant is the 2nd largest in Queensland.

115 businesses operate out of Archerfield Airport, employing hundreds of people.
Extending from the Brisbane River, at a point seven kilometres south-west of Brisbane’s City Centre, to Johnson Road in Larapinta, the Oxley Creek corridor engages diverse suburbs. Each neighbourhood has its own distinct character and appeal, from the quiet, older streets of Graceville to the energy of Rocklea’s markets.

Local housing age and character traces the evolution of European settlement. Farming first drew settlers to the area and by the late 1800s the northern suburbs of Graceville, Tennyson, Sherwood, Oxley and Rocklea were established. Development slowly expanded south, with Acacia Ridge and Inala booming post-World War II as servicemen and their families moved into the suburbs.

Doolandella and Algester developed through the 1970s and Forest Lake introduced affordable small-lot housing to the city in the 1990s. Emerging communities at Willawong, Pallara and Heathwood are now attracting new families to the corridor.

Many locals work in nearby industrial precincts and the area is well supported by community facilities including schools, shops, sporting fields, golf courses, clubs and heritage places, particularly in more established northern suburbs.

Community groups and associations are very active and rates of volunteering are high, demonstrating a deep connection with the location and a strong sense of community. For example, in 2009, the Oxley Creek Catchment Association won the International River Foundation’s National Riverprize in recognition of its partnership activities associated with revitalising the catchment.

Transforming the Oxley Creek corridor presents an opportunity to further strengthen community ties by uniting individuals and organisations in long-term environmental action and bringing communities together.

The future parkland will become a major recreation and leisure destination for locals, greatly expanding existing community resources and facilities, and a source of community pride and identity. Its cornerstones – environmental conservation, education and respect for cultural heritage – will set the corridor apart as a regional recreation asset of the highest quality and value.

Aboriginal culture, landscape and heritage

“Benarrawa is flowing. We dream that the people will listen to the land and to each other.”

Benarrawa Dreaming Statement*

Oxley Creek was known as ‘Benarrawa’ to the Yerongpan people, a rich natural larder, filled with lily-bulbs, fish and ducks. The site was also significant to other Traditional Owners, including the people who spoke the Yugambeh language.

A range of different Aboriginal cultural heritage sites have been identified both within and adjoining the Oxley Creek corridor. Aboriginal cultural heritage values are not manifested in residual physical cultural heritage items alone, but also through intangible cultural heritage values, such as oral histories and story-telling. Because of this it will be important over the life of the transformation project to engage with both the local and broader Indigenous community. Engagement will allow appropriate management of, representation of and story-telling about, tangible and intangible Aboriginal cultural heritage within the Oxley Creek corridor.

The Oxley Creek Catchment is a geographical area located within the Logan City Local Government Area (LGA). The map illustrates the catchment area with various boundaries and features including:

- **Local Government Area (LGA) Boundary**
- **Oxley Creek Catchment Boundary**
- **Oxley Creek Transformation Master Plan Study Area**
- **Waterways**
- **Waterbodies**
- **Community activity hubs***
- **Open Space**

**Legend:**

- *Includes land zoned for schools, community use, sport clubs and facilities, playgrounds, golf courses and heritage-listed places*
- **Includes land zoned as Open Space, Sport and Recreation, Environmental Management, Conservation as well as identified regional ecosystems.**
Oxley Creek is the Brisbane River’s longest tributary and has the largest catchment of any creek within the city. When it reaches the Brisbane River it has passed through three local government areas. The creek is also one of our most urbanised and polluted waterways. With its headwaters in the slopes of Mt Perry near Flinders Peak, Oxley Creek flows 70 kilometres through Ipswich City, Logan City and Brisbane City. Sand mining, logging, farming, industry, development and flooding have all taken their toll on its health.

While the upper catchment remains relatively undisturbed, middle and lower catchment areas have been heavily impacted by urbanisation.

Restoring Oxley Creek to a healthy urban waterway requires overcoming erosion and creek instability, poor water quality, landfill exposure and groundwater contamination, disturbed aquatic and terrestrial habitat and increasing stormwater run-off due to urbanisation.

Flood plains along the corridor act as storage basins during rain and flood events, reducing flooding in other parts of the catchment and the Brisbane River. Future development must continue to respect this important function.

Good planning and clever construction can embed greater flood resilience into the corridor. Flood-smart buildings and park infrastructure can be designed to withstand partial inundation; problematic sites can be turned into high-value locations for recreation and entertainment; constructed wetlands can help clean urban run-off; and natural drainage and filtration systems can make businesses more flood-resilient. These measures can also help the corridor stay robust and adaptable during other forms of extreme weather such as heat and drought.

Localised strategies must be developed with the entire catchment in mind. Only a comprehensive, catchment-wide approach will establish the necessary understanding to achieve transformative change. Future projects should aim to enhance and beautify the creek, improve water quality, remediate or contain contamination, reinstate riparian habitats and biodiversity and better connect the creek to the river and local communities.
Oxley Creek’s lower and middle catchment, from Johnson Road to the Brisbane River, still holds high environmental value despite its challenging history of urbanisation.

Oxley Creek is a freshwater system for much of its length. Tidal influence from the Brisbane River begins around Learoyd Road at Willawong. The creek, along with its riparian, wetland and open forest areas, once supported abundant edible plant and animal species that sustained the traditional inhabitants of the land. Vegetation has been cleared to meet the successive demands of agriculture, extractive industries and urbanisation. As habitat was removed, water quality declined, erosion carved away banks, altering the natural watercourse, and wildlife corridors fragmented. The biodiversity of both the corridor and the broader region suffered.

Yet some habitat remained. Significantly, a remnant one hectare stand of the regional ecosystem, *Eucalyptus melanophloia* woodland, remains at Acacia Ridge. This ecosystem was part of 500+ hectares originally occurring across Brisbane.

A perpetual flood regime has prevented urban development from encroaching directly onto much of the creek and its tributaries, preserving remnant vegetation communities including dry eucalypt forests, freshwater wetlands, tidal wetlands and ribbons of riparian vegetation.

Today, this assortment of lands provides internationally significant habitats that support thousands of wildlife species from yellow-bellied gliders to koalas and red-capped robins.

Much of this vegetation is now protected and listed on government databases as ‘of concern’ and ‘endangered’ regional ecosystems.

Collectively, it functions as a major wildlife corridor linking the Brisbane River to the 40-kilometre Flinders Karawatha corridor, an important environmental asset within the region.

Achieving the goal of a healthy, self-sustaining urban waterway requires a long-term and comprehensive approach to reinstating corridor biodiversity.

Environmental rehabilitation must address and balance a complex layering of ecological, geomorphological, hydrological and urbanisation factors. It should also build on the efforts of local governments, environmental groups and community volunteers already involved in stabilising banks, revegetating land and removing invasive weeds.