



Merri-bek
City Council



Ballerrt Mooroop



Acknowledgement of Country

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. We pay respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities, who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

“The Aboriginal community has not forgotten how important the area is and the struggles for keeping the KODE School open and functioning”.

“It is important to establish locally available and accessible place for the local Aboriginal community to gather and hold events, deliver services and a place meet and establish local service hub to cater to local needs. The population is growing, and it is difficult for current services to meet the needs and demands of those in the outer regions when located in the inner suburbs”.

“Can you imagine sitting under the Spirit Tree and yarning with Wurundjeri Elders over a cuppa enjoying the fresh air. We can walk around the wetland area and learn about the local plant, fish, and bird life from Wurundjeri Elders – totally incredible if this gets supported”.

- Local Aboriginal community members

“This is an important opportunity to increase a sense of belonging, connection to culture and increase self-determination through listening to our Elders and bringing this vision into reality. Self-determination is about choice and being able to participate in decisions that affect our lives - hear what we are saying and support us to do this.”

- Raquel Birch, Ballerdt Mooroop First Peoples Projects Coordinator

About Ballerdt Mooroop

Located at 208A Hilton Street in Glenroy, Ballerdt Mooroop (Strong Spirit in Woi-wurrung language) has cultural and educational importance to all First Nations people on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country.

The site features native vegetation, River Red Gums and other native flora that supports local bird species and nurtures a diverse ecological system. It is also home to the Spirit Tree, also known as Uncle Tom's Tree.

Ballerdt Mooroop is a testament to resilience and community empowerment for Aboriginal communities' – in their fight to keep the Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) school open and ensure the Spirit Tree and Ceremonial ground is preserved for generations to come.

The KODE school was opened in 1995 as a “pathways school”, with an aim to help those aged 12 to 16 back into secondary colleges, further education, traineeships, apprenticeships and employment. The school taught different methods of education, including a focus on Aboriginal culture and traditions.



The Significance of Ballerri Mooroop

The significance of Ballerri Mooroop is deeply rooted in its cultural and educational importance for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Cultural Pride and Community Gathering

The site instills a sense of pride and unity within the Wurundjeri and broader Aboriginal communities and has potential to serve as a central hub for sharing stories, education, and cultural practices.

Empowerment and Protection of Cultural Heritage

The site represents the Aboriginal community push to protect their cultural heritage, including the Spirit Tree and Ceremonial ground.

Support for Cultural and Educational Needs

Purpose-built facilities at the site, supported by the Wurundjeri and local Aboriginal community, could cater to educational and cultural needs of the community. These spaces could offer a range of services including cultural programs, and events to strengthen connections to the land and community as well as increase educational, social emotional wellbeing and health outcomes.

Aspirations for Self-Determination and Cultural Safe Spaces

The site is expected to serve as a cornerstone for the Wurundjeri Councils self-determination aspirations, offering a location that enhances the community's connection to culture and provides a culturally safe environment. This includes the self-determination of First Peoples' to practice cultural traditions, pass on knowledge, and access services in a culturally safe and accessible location.

Ballerrt Mooroop Champions



Aunty Margaret Gardiner

Margaret Gloria Gardiner, a respected Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elder, was a dedicated advocate for her connection to Country and Ancestors. In 2011, she played a vital role in the campaign to preserve the Ballerrt Mooroop site.

Even after the school's closure in 2012, she continued her efforts to retain the site for the benefit of the Hume and Merri-bek First Nations communities. Until her passing into the dreamtime in August 2022, Margaret led the campaign for the establishment of the Ballerrt Mooroop community hub in Glenroy. She was vocal in addressing concerns about cultural protocols and Aboriginal sovereignty.



Uncle Andrew Gardiner

Uncle Andrew Gardiner has picked up the advocacy for Ballerrt Mooroop on behalf of his sister and the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation. Uncle Andrew is a reserved seat holder representing Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation on the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria and has been working closely with Merri-bek City Council to advise and advocate for the land transfer from the State Government.



Uncle Tom Slater

The gum tree at the ceremonial group is called 'Uncle Tom's Tree' because he often sat beneath it, yarning with children who found themselves in trouble. Uncle Tom was a Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri man described by the staff and students as "a true Elder, much-loved Uncle who cared, who listened, who pushed us to work hard, who always told us: you must have an education and be proud who you are".

Uncle Tom served as a board member of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service for 10 years. He passed away in 2006, at the school site.



Gnerick Gnerick Gary Murray

Gary Murray is a First Nations Elder of the Dhudhuroa, Yorta Yorta, Barapa Barapa, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wamba Wemba, Wergaia, Wiradjeri, and Waywurru Peoples. His family settled in Merri-bek in 1954. Gary graduated from Glenroy Primary School and the old Glenroy High School at the Ballerrt Mooroop site. A Fawkner resident since 2008, he was inspired by his grandfather Sir Doug Nicholls and father Stewart Murray to educate himself in lore/law and continue the family legacy. As a member for the metro region on the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, Gary is passionate about preserving Ballerrt Mooroop for the Aboriginal community for generations to come.



Auntie Barbara Williams Weston

Auntie Barbara Williams Weston, an Elder with Boonwurrung, Bunurong, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wurundjeri, and Yorta Yorta connections, has a vast history in Aboriginal education. She worked as a tutor and studied at the Gunung-Willam-Balluk Learning Centre at Kangan TAFE, and mentored students at Ballerit Mooroop College. Her connection to the Ballerit Mooroop site began in 2004 when her daughter, Asinate, attended the Koorie Open Door Education School.

Encouraged by her daughter, Auntie Barb joined Dotty Bamblett and Mariella Teuira in the campaign to save the school. They fought against its closure and, with allies, lived in protest on the site, advocating for it to remain a community hub. She remains connected to the site and often visits the Spirit Tree to ground herself.



Dotty Bamblett

Dotty Bamblett is a dedicated Aboriginal advocate connected to the Wiradjuri, Yorta Yorta, Gunditjmarra, and Dja Dja Wurrung peoples. Recognised for her contributions to Aboriginal welfare, she received the Robin Clark Aboriginal Carer of the Year Award in 2012. Dotty founded the Victorian Seven Sisters, an Indigenous State Netball Program empowering young Aboriginal girls through sport. She served as President of the Ballerit Mooroop College Council and chaired the Ballerit Mooroop Working Group, fighting against the college's closure and land sale from 2010 to 2016. A former student of Ballerit Mooroop College, Dotty advocates for preserving the site as a First Nations community hub. Her work emphasises self-determination and community empowerment, inspiring future generations of Aboriginal women to effect positive change.

Cultural and Natural Features

Totem and shield benches

Ceremonial ground with firepit totem and benches in the shape of a shield were designed and built by former students of Ballerit Mooroop College.

Designed and created by Glenn Romanis.



Spirit Tree

The spotted gum tree at the ceremonial group is called "Uncle Tom's Tree" because Uncle Tom used to sit under the tree and yarning with children who found themselves in trouble.

Be-al

Be-al or River Red gum in the centre of the site overlooking the future wetland and is likely indication of hidden creek.



Wildlife

Other established native gums and bushes supporting birdlife including different species of honeyeater and parrots.

History of Ballerrt Mooroop

1954-1992

The site served as Glenroy High School.

1993-1995

It became the Box Forest College Campus.



1995-2006

The site was known as the Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) school, established with Wurundjeri Elder Margaret Gardiner opening the school with the first Wominjeka (welcome).

2007-2008

Victorian College of Koorie Education (VCOKE) was established.

2009

The school was renamed Ballerrt Mooroop College Koorie Pathways School.

2012

The school was closed. A public campaign was triggered by the Ballerrt Mooroop Working Group and a sit-in on site to protest the forced closure.

2023

Landscaping works were completed, and the site opened to the public at the Ballerrt Mooroop Day.

2024

Merri-bek City Council appointed First Peoples' Project Coordinator was appointed to advocate and support delivery of the Ballerrt Mooroop community project.

2022

Merri-bek Council launched campaign to advocate to the State Government to transfer the Ballerrt Mooroop site to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

2021

Feasibility study into the future of the site identified that Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders and Aboriginal community members strongly believed that the Glenroy Ballerrt Mooroop site would provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a sense of pride.

2017

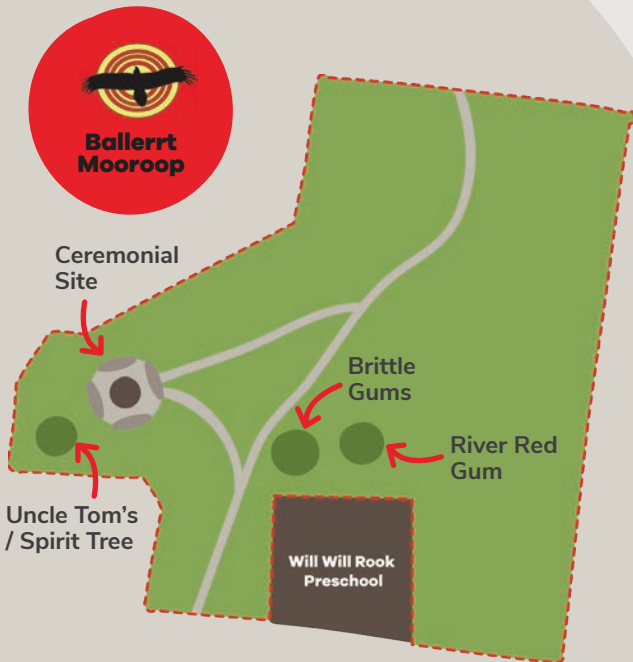
The public campaign succeeded in keeping the site public. The Minister for Education leased to Moreland Council and subleased it to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation temporarily until future use is decided.

2013

Glenroy Specialist School was built and positioned on the old Glenroy High School sports oval section.

Maps

Ballerrt Mooroop



Community and Cultural Activities

Ballerrt Mooroop Day – Annual celebration during Reconciliation Week.

The first Ballerrt Mooroop Day was celebrated in 2023 a big success, with over 200 people, including First Nations community members, past students, and local MPs, attending the event. Welcome to Country, Smoking Ceremony, traditional dances, and speeches highlighted the site's significance to First Nations people. There were also fun activities like boomerang throwing, Indigenous games, and community bush plantings.

In 2024, Merri-bek City Council hosted Ballerrt Mooroop Day on National Sorry Day. Over 400 enthusiastic people from different walks of life came together at the Ballerrt Mooroop Ceremonial Site in Glenroy. It was a beautiful day of reflection, connection, unity, healing, and fun.

The day began with a Smoking Ceremony and Welcome to Country, followed by a cultural dance workshop, a community gathering and great activities for the whole family.

Ballerrt Mooroop First Nations-led Plan for Country

From 2023 to 2025, a project involving Wurundjeri Elder, Uncle Bill Nicholson Jnr, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation's Education Department, and staff from the University of Melbourne's Landscape Architecture Program will enhance the Ballerrt Mooroop parklands.

This initiative focuses on engaging local First Nations communities throughout. It begins with a detailed site analysis, emphasising cultural heritage, stakeholder participation, and trust-building. On-site activities like cultural walks, team coordination, cultural heritage assessments, and urban ecology studies are part of the process.

Educational Programs

The site has hosted and will be the home to range of educations programs:

- Workshops on bushfood gardening at home with Wiradjuri woman Joanne Russell Hosted by My Smart Garden
- Twice weekly bush kinder sessions from the Will Will Rook Kindergarten
- Regular field trips for Victorian University social work students undertaking subject called Working ethically in Aboriginal community
- Intensive Design With Country - Resilience Studio University of Melbourne's Landscape Architecture Program in 2024.

“Ballerrt Mooroop [is] an important site to bring the community together. From a reconciliation perspective, Ballerrt Mooroop stands strong within Victoria as a place that supports the coming together of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members in the spirit of cultural respect, education and collaboration,”

- Uncle Charles Pakana, Victorian Aboriginal News Editor and Journalist



Future Directions and Developments

A 2021 feasibility study into the future of the site identified that Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders and Aboriginal community members strongly believed that the Glenroy Ballertr Mooroop site would provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a sense of pride.

The site could be a place to share family stories, education, and cultural traditions, values, and customs to help build a strong, vibrant, and healthy Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community and broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the area.

In 2022 Merri-bek City Council resolved to advocate to the State Government, to transfer the title of the Ballertr Mooroop site to the Traditional Owners of the land the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

The aim of the campaign is to secure the future of the Ballertr Mooroop site with a view to establishing community, education, cultural, open space and health facilities for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and the broader Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in the cities of Merri-bek and Hume.

In 2024, Merri-bek City Council approved funding for a business case to be developed for Ballertr Mooroop.

Supporting Ballertr Mooroop

To actively support Ballertr Mooroop site and its preservation, consider these straightforward actions:

- **Spread the Word:** Share information about the Ballertr Mooroop site with others. Use your social networks or just have conversations to increase awareness.
- **Participate in Events:** Attend the events held at the site. Your presence helps demonstrate community interest and support.
- **Volunteer Your Time:** Offer to help out with site maintenance or event organization. Every volunteer hour contributes to the site's upkeep and community engagement.
- **Contact Local MPs:** Write or call your local government representatives to express support for the site. Your advocacy can influence decisions that affect the site's future.
- **Engage with Educational Programs:** Attend or promote the educational activities offered at the site. This helps in keeping the local culture and history alive.
- **Support Local Aboriginal Enterprises:** Purchasing products or services from the Aboriginal community provides direct economic support and strengthens the community.
- **Stay Informed:** Follow the latest developments about the site. Regular updates can be found through newsletters or the Merri-bek City Council's online platforms.

Your involvement and support play a crucial role in maintaining the Ballertr Mooroop site as a vibrant cultural and educational hub.

Conclusion

The Ballerdt Mooroop site in Glenroy is very important for its history and culture. It has been a school and a community centre, always playing a big role in Aboriginal education and culture. Respected Elders including Aunty Margaret Gardiner and Uncle Tom Slater fought hard to protect this site and to keep its history alive.

Today, the location is not just about remembering the past, but also about building for the future. It's a place for cultural events, education, and community activities. Plans for its future are focused on making it a great space for Aboriginal culture and learning.

In short, Ballerdt Mooroop is more than just a place. It's a key part of the Aboriginal community's history and future. Keeping it going is important for both remembering the past and building a better future.



References and Acknowledgements

Thanks to the leadership of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders the late Auntie Margaret Gardiner, Uncle Andrew Gardiner, Uncle Bill Nicholson and Mandy Nicholson and the Djirri Djirri Dancers.

Thanks to the tireless advocacy of Gary Murray and the Ballerdt Mooroop Working Group members including Kim Kruger, Dotty Bamblett, Barbara Weston-Williams along with supporters including Mariella Teuira and Sue Bolton.

Contacts and Further Information

Find out more or sign up to our e-newsletter on:

www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au

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