

4.1 CITY OF MONASH URBAN BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

Director: Ossie Martinz

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Notes submissions received in response to the Draft Urban Biodiversity Strategy 2018-2028*
- 2. Adopts the Urban Biodiversity Strategy as appended to this report.*
- 3. Delegates authority to the Director Infrastructure to make editorial and other minor changes to the Strategy that may be required from time to time.*

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to consider the results of the community consultation on the draft Urban Biodiversity Strategy (the Strategy) and to recommend that Council adopt the final strategy (as at Attachment 1).

INTRODUCTION

The Urban Biodiversity Strategy is the first overarching 10 year strategic implementation plan to guide the protection, management and enhancement of Monash Council's biodiversity assets.

This work delivers against Priority 2: Urban Ecology of Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2016-26 and focusses on achieving long term biodiversity outcomes on Council owned and managed lands for the benefit of the community and to preserve our local environmental assets.

BACKGROUND

The City of Monash manages over 260 hectares of bushland for its core biodiversity values which are incorporated largely into 42 reserves across the municipality. Within the 42 Council managed reserves, approximately 17% of the area is remnant vegetation (native), a further 41% consists of revegetation that is representative (in part) of its pre-European condition and the remainder is open space. The bushland and reserves accounts for less than 3.2% of total land area in Monash.

The Urban Biodiversity Strategy is a very important document as it provides a framework to guide protection of these valuable assets and is closely linked to the vision of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2016-26, which is to create 'An innovative and environmentally sustainable garden city: resilient, diverse and thriving.'

This strategy sets out biodiversity management directions for the next 10 years and is supported by a three year implementation plan. The key objectives outlined in this strategy and are to:

1. Increasing community understanding, active engagement and appreciation of biodiversity
2. Enhance biodiversity through revegetation and protection of remnant vegetation
3. Collaborate with other public land managers to create broad-scale biodiversity gain
4. Proactively reduce biodiversity threats
5. Identify ecological baseline/indicators to monitor and assess environmental conditions
6. Strengthen Biodiversity Policy and Legislation

The Urban Biodiversity Strategy is essential to enhance and protect our significant bushland reserves and community engagement is critical to achieving this.

The development of the Urban Biodiversity Strategy provided the opportunity for Sustainable Monash and Horticulture teams to collaborate on community engagement and bushland protection activities, under the Green Shoots program. Green Shoots program supports both team's priorities and forms the structure of our community campaign. Green Shoots brings together our work with schools, community and early learning under the Gardens for Wildlife program, Skink Link, and our work with Friends Groups.

DISCUSSION

This *Urban Biodiversity Strategy* is informed and supported by three significant current internal documents completed by a biodiversity expert (prepared by Practical Ecology).

These are:

- The Biodiversity Background Report – which identified a range of significant biodiversity values within Monash at a local and region scale.
- The Monash Bushland Reserves Management Monitoring Framework – which provided a suite of suitable tools to effectively monitoring changes in local biodiversity, and
- The Monash Bushland Reserves Assessment and Monitoring Report – which provided detailed baseline ecological data using the framework developed in the previous report, assessing 16 high priority reserves within Monash.

Although a largely urbanised environment, the background research for this strategy confirmed that Monash is home to a broad range of significant bushland reserves with high biodiversity value that offers natural places to enjoy and explore while providing essential ecosystems functions.

This is credited to over 20 years of dedicated work by Council's Bushland & Wetlands team, supported by the Friends of Groups, which initiated programs to improve and enhance the biodiversity quality and habitat connectivity in our urban environment.

This work now provides us with a robust monitoring protocol and guidance in ongoing engagement with community as well as maintenance of these bushlands which are home to vulnerable indigenous plant and animal species. Actions include theme based education projects like the Skink Link project, to provide the community with the opportunity to actively engage, understand and get involved in the maintenance and improvement of their local environment.

Council's Sustainability and Horticulture teams also provided significant input into the development of these documents.

CONSULTATION

Following the draft strategy being endorsed for community consultation at the Council meeting on the 26 June 2018, the draft Urban Biodiversity Strategy was available for public review over six-weeks, and was promoted in the Bulletin, social media and on the website. An online survey was also prepared to capture the community feedback.

The strategy was made available for comment from early September till the 17 October 2018

The Environmental Advisory Committee have provided significant contributions to the finalisation of the strategy throughout 2018, prior to and during the community consultation phase.

A community consultation plan was prepared to allow interested community members opportunity to provide feedback on the draft strategy, specifically:

1. Identify opportunities and gaps not captured in the draft
2. Provide clarity on the roles and responsibilities of council regarding local biodiversity
3. Share value and importance of biodiversity to the urban environment of Monash.

Two workshops were held in September, in Clayton and Glen Waverley, to provide the community an opportunity to provide face to face feedback.

Representative from Melbourne Water, Living links, Parks Victoria and Monash University were invited to provide input into the strategy.

During the consultation, 9 survey submissions were received online and 7 attended the face to face consultation sessions. The community representatives included members from all three Friends groups in the municipality and Parks Victoria. The online submissions were also from individuals with a high level of interest and knowledge in biodiversity.

Overall the submissions were very supportive of the objectives of the Strategy and provided good input to the further development of the actions that Council could consider to support the delivery of the Strategy objectives.

Contributions included:

- 1) Look to align Council's related strategies into an overarching Urban Forest framework – this includes the Street tree Strategy, Monash Canopy Vegetation and Landscape Strategy, Open Space Strategy and possibly the Domestic Animal Management Strategy (protecting native animals and birds from cats and dogs)
- 2) Highlight the importance of education and engagement for the community and developers to build appreciation of bushland and green space. Leverage existing programs by other authorities such as the Melbourne Water Frog Census.
- 3) Provide a list of local plant and animal species and their incidence, and guidance on planting in private backyards (build on information in the Gardens for Wildlife booklet) and promote water-saving gardens.
- 4) Consider fencing vulnerable areas, recognising conservation status, increasing bushland on reserves or even purchasing land for conservation
- 5) To address concern over the loss of trees on private property and impact on biodiversity corridors for bird and animals, suggestions to address included the consideration of tree bonds/local laws to protect trees; linking to ESD policy, creating ownership of street trees and consideration of a significant tree register (shows importance of coordinating related strategies)
- 6) Increase control for pest animals including cats and environmental weeds. Prevent predation of native fauna and competition of native plants.
- 7) Builders should be required to plant appropriate biodiverse flora as a condition of building permits, for example, house block which have 'gardens' which are denuded of significant vegetation.

In response to the submissions, minor changes have been made in the strategy, mainly in respect to the implementation plan to clarify how we will address our objectives.

FINANCIAL/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

When adopted it will provide a strategic long term vision to enhance and protect our local environment for the benefit of the community.

The draft Strategy includes an implementation which identifies a number of actions to support improvement in biodiversity. Feedback from the community consultation will assist in prioritising these actions in the draft strategy.

Many of the actions may be incorporated, at least initially, into current Sustainability and Horticultural programs, but in the long term may require support of more specialised roles to

support work with the community, complete ongoing monitoring of biodiversity, and strategic planning to improve planning controls to protect biodiversity.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Enhancing the biodiversity and increasing awareness to our community will provide a positive social impact. The strategy and implementation plan provide a valuable opportunities to engage the community and grow their understanding of the value and benefit of a rich indigenous local environment.

POLICY IMPACTS

This strategy aligns with the Victorian Government recently released *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037 in April 2017*, a new long-term plan to protect our environment. Community engagement is a strong priority in both the Monash Urban Biodiversity Strategy and Biodiversity 2037.

The Urban Biodiversity Strategy support the following objective of the Council Plan 2017-21:

A Liveable & Sustainable City - We value our natural environment and want to preserve and enhance the leafy and green character of our city. Monash's desirability as a place to live, learn, work and play needs to be protected.

Urban Ecology is also key priority of Council's *Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2016-2026 (ESS)*, and is instrumental to the strategic vision of Monash becoming '*An innovative and environmentally sustainable garden city: resilient, diverse and thriving.*'

The relevant objectives and actions under the ESS are:

2.1. A strategic approach to landscape planning is established which recognises biodiversity, habitat connectivity and builds ecosystem resilience.

2.1.2 Enhancing biodiversity values and habitat connectivity across the municipality

2.2. Long term biodiversity outcomes are achieved on Council owned and manager conservation reserves.

2.2.1. Continue to manage Council's conservation reserves in accordance with best practice conservation and land management principles.

2.3. Increase community understanding of and participation in urban ecology and local biodiversity stewardship is achieved.

The Urban Biodiversity Strategy complements the Open Space Strategy and Canopy Vegetation and Landscape strategy, and together they provide a suite of actions to improve Monash's Garden Character. Together they support and could be presented together as a Monash Urban Forest Framework.

The Urban Biodiversity Strategy also supports many actions and goals of the Horticulture Team’s Bushland Crew, and aligns with the work of Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority which partner with Council on the protection of the Dandenong Creek and Yarra River Catchments which flow through Monash.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The implications of this report have been assessed and are not considered likely to breach or infringe upon, the human rights contained in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

On the contrary, encouraging the community to connect and support the rich biodiversity of Monash will have positive health benefits.

CONCLUSION

That Council:

- 1. Notes submissions received in response to the Draft Urban Biodiversity Strategy 2018-2028;*
- 2. Adopts the Urban Biodiversity Strategy as appended to this report.*
- 3. Delegates authority to the Director Infrastructure to make editorial and other minor changes to the Strategy that may be required from time to time.*

Attachment 1: Final Urban Biodiversity Strategy