

1.1 MONASH URBAN LANDSCAPE AND CANOPY VEGETATION STRATEGY (SMC: File No. F17-4987)

Responsible Director: Peter Panagakos

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. *Notes the content and recommendations of the Draft Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy;*
2. *Notes the content of the Discussions Paper – Implementing the Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy;*
3. *Releases the draft Strategy and Discussion Paper for community consultation in accordance with the consultation program set out in this report;*
4. *Notes that the potential introduction of revised or new local controls over the removal of canopy trees as recommended in the Strategy is only one of several recommended actions contained in the Strategy to promote the garden character of Monash with the Strategy providing a range of important policy directions and guidance for the enhancement of the garden character of Monash including revised planting and species lists, educational programs and design guidelines for redevelopment and that each of these are of significant value to the future character of Monash.*
5. *Notes that a further report will be presented to Council upon the completion of the community consultation program reporting on the outcomes of the consultation and for consideration of any proposed way forward.*

INTRODUCTION

At the Council meeting of 29 August 2017 Council deferred consideration and release for community consultation of the Draft Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy. In deferring community consultation on the Strategy, Council required the preparation of a discussion paper that summarised the draft Strategy and examined potential implementation options.

The purpose of this report is to consider the Draft Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy (the 'Strategy') and the separate Discussion Paper on implementation options, and to seek endorsement of the documents for community consultation.

BACKGROUND

The garden city character and urban landscape of Monash is a key element of the community's sense of place and the ability to maintain an attractive, liveable and resilient city.

The protection and enhancement of garden city character is consistently rated a high issue of concern by the community of Monash, particularly in areas under going redevelopment.

The strategy, which covers both public and private land, aims to clearly identify the tree canopy and landscape types and quality across the municipality. It also sets out a range of proposed directions for landscape and canopy vegetation into the future. The draft Strategy is included as **Attachment 1** to this report.

Strategy Development

These landscape and canopy outcomes are designed to contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the garden character of Monash.

Key outcomes of the Strategy are to:

- Establish and articulate a clear understanding of the current landscape character of the City of Monash;
- Determine those elements of the landscape character that are valued by the community;
- In consultation with the community, develop and articulate a preferred landscape character for each of the different landscape character areas across the City of Monash; and
- Identify and describe a range of mechanisms to maintain and enhance the valued and/or preferred landscape character of Monash into the future.

The development of the draft strategy included the identification of landscape area, review of canopy cover, an issues and opportunities paper and workshops with Council officers. A detailed summary of the preparation of the Strategy is provided in **Attachment 2**.

ISSUES AND DISCUSSION

The key issues identified by the Strategy that impact on the landscape of Monash are:

- Increasing dominance of built form of new development in established residential areas.
- Limited canopy vegetation and greening in existing urban commercial/industrial precincts.
- Large landscaped setbacks in the garden industrial precincts focus is on visual amenity rather than health and wellbeing outcomes.

- The need to create a distinctive native vegetation landscape in the Monash Employment Cluster
- Activity centres will need greening and canopy trees for health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Loss of large mature canopy trees through incremental development.
- Need to increase tree canopy cover, shading to improve the character of the streetscapes.
- Need to increase the presence of large canopy trees in public open space.
- Impact of climate change, including severe weather events, on the health of existing and proposed trees.

The Strategy proposes to address these issues through a combination of approaches that include community education and information, new policy and guidelines and potential changes to current planning permit requirements for the removal of large canopy trees in specific areas of Monash. It is important to note the implementation of the Strategy is not solely predicated on the introduction or alteration of tree removal controls.

As this consultation is on the Strategy and the directions contained with the Strategy, there are no changes proposed to the planning scheme or local laws at this stage.

Overview of the Strategy - Vision

The vision set out in the Strategy has been developed from the objectives of Monash 2021 and Monash Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2016-2026.

“Creek corridors that are teeming with birdlife and native fauna amongst the bushland and wetlands flow through the leafy treed suburbs.

The tree lined streets and the parks are vibrant and alive with people walking, cycling, socialising and enjoying the ambience of the green Garden City Character with fresh air and plenty of shade.

In the Monash National Employment and Innovation Cluster the landscaped setbacks with tall trees are bustling with people walking and cycling to and from their workplace or relaxing and socialising during lunch in the dappled shade and after work in one of the adjoining cafes that spill out onto the green landscaped setbacks.”

Objectives

The Strategy contains eight (8) key objectives designed to make the Vision a reality:

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- Protect and enhance the green Garden City Character within the contemporary context of climate change and forecast urban growth and change.
 - Increase urban greening to create a more resilient landscape that contributes to community health and wellbeing now and in the future.
 - Increase canopy tree cover across public and private land from 22% to 30% by 2040 to create a more liveable, sustainable and resilient city.
 - Strengthen the biodiversity values along the waterway corridors by increasing the presence of indigenous vegetation on both public and private land.
 - Maximise the retention of existing healthy mature large canopy trees on public and private land to support liveability and cultural heritage values.
 - Increase the presence of large canopy trees and greening in high density precincts including activity centres and the Monash National Employment and Innovation Cluster.
 - Council to provide a leadership role with best practice tree planting and management on public land.
 - Develop a cohesive vision for the landscape character across the public and private land and update the relevant regulatory controls and planning scheme to give effect to the vision.

Assessment of Landscape & Canopy Cover

As part of the development of the Strategy an analysis of the landscape and canopy tree cover was undertaken. The key findings of this analysis are:

- Existing tree canopy cover has decreased over the past 23 years, from 26% in 1992 to 22% in 2015.
- There has been a notable decrease in tree coverage on private land, with the exception of areas such as Mulgrave, where land that was formerly used as paddocks has been converted to housing.
- There has been an overall increase in tree canopy cover in public open space areas, especially along waterway corridors where Council has undertaken extensive planting and revegetation.
- In most locations, the extent of roof cover has increased significantly. This has resulted in the landscape setting being reduced both in scale (extent of properties) and size (height of vegetation), meaning the built form is becoming an increasingly defining element of the character of the area, rather than complemented by the landscape.
- Tree losses are similar in areas inside and outside the Vegetation Protection Overlay, which suggests the Overlay has not been effective in its aim, as stated within the Municipal Strategic Statement, of *'identifying areas where canopy trees are of particular significance and provid(ing controls regarding removal of this vegetation'* (Clause 21.03-5).

The following tables show the change in the makeup of the landscape and canopy over time and provide a bench mark against adjoining municipalities.

Comparison of tree canopy cover between 1992 and 2015

Features	Monash 1992	Monash 2015	Difference 1992/2015
Trees	26%	22%	-4%
Grass, garden bed & unsealed	33%	25%	-8%
Water	1%	1%	Same
Roofs	20%	25%	+5%
Concrete	9%	15%	+6%
Asphalt	11%	12%	+1%

Canopy cover benchmarks

Local Government area	Tree %	Shrub %	Grass %	Hard %
Boroondara	28.1	8.0	15.5	48.4
Stonnington	25	6.8	11.0	57.2
Knox	24.2	6.2	33.1	36.5
Whitehorse	22.9	7.5	21.9	47.8
Glen Eira	20.0	6.5	15.0	58.5
Monash	19.4	6.3	25.0	49.3
Kingston	14.2	4.6	35.6	45.6
Greater Dandenong	8.2	2.6	49.8	39.4

Landscape Character Types

The analysis of the existing landscape of Monash resulted in the identification of *9 Landscape Character Types*. These landscape types form the basis for the implementation of the strategy.

Issues and Strategy response

As part of the development of the strategy the review looked at the key influences and issues facing the landscape and canopy of Monash. The Strategy identifies 6 key issues/influences and proposes a range of strategic responses to those issues.

The 6 issues are:

- Canopy vegetation cover on private land and influence on landscape character;
- Canopy vegetation cover on public land;
- Redevelopment areas;

- Resilience to climate change;
- Biodiversity values; and
- Cultural landscape heritage values.

Strategy Guidelines

A series of seven (7) draft guidelines have been developed as part of the Strategy to: *“promote the Garden City concept in the City of Monash, to retain and enhance the landscape qualities of the municipality, to provide for an appropriate balance between built form and planted areas, and to support a substantive canopy vegetation cover.”*

The draft Guidelines cover the following issues:

- Guideline 1: Achieve an appropriate balance between built form and planted areas;
- Guideline 2: Urban greening in activity centres, commercial/industrial precincts and the Monash National Employment Cluster;
- Guideline 3: Preferred landscape character types;
- Guideline 4: Maximise the retention of existing canopy trees;
- Guideline 5: Plant new canopy trees;
- Guideline 6: Requirements for landscape plans; and
- Guideline 7: Permit conditions.

The Guidelines provide an overall framework for improving and maintaining the resilience and sustainability of the landscape of Monash.

Implementation recommendations

The draft strategy proposes a comprehensive range of implementation recommendations to give effect to the Strategy.

- *Implement the Strategy in the Monash Planning Scheme*
This includes proposed changes to the Municipal Strategic Statement, local policy and the revision and extension of a Canopy Tree planning provisions (currently the Vegetation Protection Overlay).
- *Planning for the Monash National Employment Cluster commercial/industrial precincts, activity centres and strategic sites*
This includes the development of revised landscaping policy for the Cluster and guidelines for the consideration of landscape in future structure plans.
- *Potential new local law to protect significant trees and scattered canopy trees*
This is proposed to provide protection for scattered canopy trees across Monash in areas where there is not contiguous tree canopy cover that could be protected by a planning overlay.

- *Recommendations to support planning permit assessments and the potential local law*

This section includes the development of tree planting standards, guidelines on tree removal, review the management of street trees and the preparation of landscaping guidelines.

- *Community education and engagement*

This recommendation includes the preparation of information for new residents, education material about the benefits of a green landscape and working with community groups to promote garden character.

Discussion Paper

As noted at the beginning of this report Council required the preparation of a Discussion paper to:

- a. summarise the general vision of the strategy; and*
- b. analyse potential implementation options including any proposed measures or controls that may be utilised or considered to implement the strategy .*

The Discussion Paper has been prepared out sets out a range of implementation options for the Strategy. A copy of the Discussion paper is provided as **Attachment 2**.

The paper explores and outlines the ways in which Council can implement the Strategy – building upon the recommendations in Section 7 of the Strategy, including all or any of the following potential actions:

- Improving planning policy to increase canopy cover
- Planning Overlays and a new Community Law
- Providing guidance for the community and decision-makers
- A significant tree study
- Community education and engagement.

A copy of the Discussion Paper is provided at **Attachment 3**.

In addition to the Discussion paper a summary brochure will be prepared for distribution during the consultation.

CONSULTATION

Internal consultation

The development of the draft strategy has been informed by two workshops held with Council officers across relevant areas of Council to inform the preparation of the issues and opportunities paper and the draft strategy.

External consultation

Subject to Council endorsement, community consultation on the draft strategy will be undertaken over 4 weeks in June and July 2018. The proposed consultation approach includes the following steps:

- Drop in sessions at Clayton, Glen Waverley, Oakleigh, Mount Waverley and Mulgrave;
- Notice in Monash leader;
- Article in the Monash Bulletin;
- Draft Strategy on Council's website;
- Frequently Asked Questions (about the benefits and issues with trees) on Council's website;
- Brochure outlining the vision, key findings, and broad options for implementation of the Strategy;
- Hard copies of the draft Strategy and FAQs at Libraries and customer service outlets; and
- Direct invitation to comment to Friends Groups, frequent developers, State Government bodies

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The development of the Canopy Vegetation and Landscape strategy is consistent with a range of strategic policy directions of Monash and the State Government's Plan Melbourne.

Plan Melbourne – 2017-2050

Outcome 6: Melbourne is a sustainable and resilient city

Direction 6.4 Make Melbourne cooler and greener

Policy 6.4.1

Support a cooler Melbourne by greening urban areas, buildings, transport corridors and open spaces to create an urban forest.

At a local level the policy direction and support includes:

Council Plan

The Draft Council Plan 2017-21 contains the following key objectives:

- *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.
- *Inviting Open & Urban Spaces*
we will continue to improve our public infrastructure, meeting places and open spaces, providing inclusive, safe and inviting places for community use.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The draft Strategy recommends potential actions for its implementation, which will be one of the aspects where community input will be sought.

The feedback from the community consultation will be the subject of further reporting and consideration with the draft Strategy.

If adopted, the expansion of planning controls or the introduction of a new local law for tree protections are likely to have operational resource implications. These would be considered in more detail after the formal consultation on the strategy, in light of community feedback on the Strategy and based on the likely extent of application of the control.

If individual actions are adopted as part of the adopted Strategy, they will be subject to further Council budgeting decisions, as well as seeking opportunities for alternative funding sources.

The major direct financial implication arising from the draft Strategy arises from the potential expansion of local provisions requiring Council permission (either through a planning permit or Community law permit) for tree removal. The extent of any increase in resourcing demand will depend on the structure and exemptions of any additional permit requirements.

The quantum of the financial implications is related to the extent of the tree protection areas and the mechanisms for administering any permit system. Decisions on the implementation options would be the subject of future Council consideration and consultation with the community.

CONCLUSION

The loss of garden character and the overall “greenness” of Monash consistently rates as a high level of concern for the community.

There is also now significant research and policy direction promoting retention or planning of vegetation in urban areas for human health and wellbeing. This includes Plan Melbourne and the recent requirement for a “garden area” in residential development.

The work undertaken to date provides a solid basis for the development of a strategy to address current issues relating to the loss of canopy coverage, the dominance of buildings and the gradual erosion of the ‘garden character’ within the City of Monash.

The input of the community, through the consultation process, will provide valuable insight into assessing community support for the directions of the Strategy and the potential implementation actions.

The results of the community consultation will be reported to a future meeting of Council for consideration prior to formally considering the Strategy.

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Draft Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy, 2018

Attachment 2: Summary of Strategy Preparation

Attachment 3: Implementing the Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy – a Discussion Paper