

1.2 MONASH URBAN LANDSCAPE AND CANOPY VEGETATION STRATEGY (SMC: File F17-4987)

Responsible Director: Peter Panagakos

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. *Notes the Consultation Report, September 2018, that outlines the results of the consultation undertaken for the Draft Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy;*
2. *Having regard to the proposed changes outlined in this report in response to the issues raised during the community consultation process, authorises the Director to make those changes to the draft Strategy;*
3. *Adopt the updated Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy;*
4. *Notes that a further report will be presented to Council outlining in detail an implementation plan for the Strategy that includes possible and proposed planning scheme options for consideration by Council;*
5. *Advise all submitters in writing of Council's decision, thanking them for their contribution;*
6. *Notes that a further report will be presented to Council outlining potential changes to permit requirements for tree removal.*

INTRODUCTION

At the Council meeting of 29 May 2018 Council considered the draft Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy (the Strategy) and Discussion Paper on implementation and resolved to release the draft Strategy and Discussion Paper for community consultation.

The purpose of this report is to consider the feedback received from the consultation on the Strategy and outline the process to finalise the Strategy for adoption and future implementation.

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. This is confirmed through the Monash 2021 and Beyond Survey undertaken in early 2017, wherein:

- 93.4% of respondents said that trees and gardens were important or very important to their area; and

- 91.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Council should do more to ensure that gardens and trees are a strong part of their neighbourhood both now and into the future.

The Strategy covers both public and private land, and 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.

Council considered the draft Strategy at its meeting on 29 May 2018, along with a Discussion Paper on implementation, and resolved to release the draft Strategy and revised Discussion Paper for community consultation.

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 a number of potential changes to the Monash Planning Scheme which include:
 - Changes to the Municipal Strategic Statement,
 - Changes to local policy for Neighbourhood Character and Tree Conservation Policy
 - Changes to planning overlays and permit requirements (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 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.

It should be noted that adoption of the Strategy does not mean that the recommendations of the Strategy come into force. Any changes to the Monash Planning Scheme such as the introduction of revised planting guidelines or changes to permit requirements for tree removal would be prepared considered separately by Council.

Should Council wish to proceed with those changes they would be undertaken through a separate process of consultation as an amendment to the Monash Planning Scheme.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

Consultation commenced on the draft Strategy following the May Council meeting and included the following actions:

- Preparation of a brochure about the draft Strategy (see **Attachment 1**);
- Letters / emails sent to stakeholders and interested persons;
- Information provided on Council’s website, all libraries and service centres;
- Information in the June Monash Bulletin
- 5 drop in sessions held at the Civic Centre, Oakleigh, Mount Waverley, Mulgrave and Clayton in late July / early August
- Encouraging feedback through an online survey or written submissions before 15 August 2018.

In total, the consultation extended for 11 weeks. **Attachment 2** is a comprehensive Consultation Report, and Section 2 of the report outlines the consultation process.

ISSUES AND DISCUSSION

Community Consultation on the Strategy

A total of 32 written submissions and 325 survey responses were received. Sections 3 and 4 of the Consultation Report (**Attachment 2**) provide a summary of the survey responses and written submissions respectively.

Key observations

- There is a very high level of agreement with the concept of garden city character (92% strongly agree and 7% agree)
- Respondents value street trees, public parks, trees in front and back gardens and birdlife in their area.
- There is a high level of agreement with the vision and objectives of the Strategy (80% strongly agree and 15% agree)
- A majority consider the canopy target of 30% by 2040 to be “about right”, however, 44% consider the target to be too low.
- In relation to implementation, 93% of survey respondents agreed that more than 1:1 replacement of trees should be undertaken (including 72% that strongly agreed), and 85% agreed that a permit should be required to remove a canopy tree anywhere in Monash (including 67% that strongly agreed).
- Even amongst those who disagreed with vegetation controls in general, they provided comments that supported the purpose and aims of the Strategy.
- The key issues raised in comments focussed on:
 - The impact of development on trees and the clearing of sites
 - The general rate of vegetation loss
 - The value and benefits of trees
 - There needing to be more protection for and encouraging of greening
 - The Strategy must be implemented
 - There should be flexibility in the controls

Officer responses

The officer responses are provided for the written submissions in Section 4 of **Attachment 2** and in response to the key issues from all survey responses and submissions in Section 5. A summary of the responses is as follows:

- There is general support for the aims of the Strategy – even if these are tempered by practical concerns about the planning application process or living with large trees.
- The Strategy provides a way forward and acknowledges that it is a shared responsibility to improve canopy cover – in public areas and on private land.
- It is considered that some increase in density will have an impact on canopy cover, although apartment buildings can be required to have deep soil zones (as specified in the Better Apartments design standards) where canopy trees can be planted.
- Council will continue to work with Parks Victoria in ensuring the reserves along Dandenong Creek are sufficiently vegetated.
- Some of the matters raised in submissions are more directly relevant to the Biodiversity Strategy, which is currently undergoing a consultation process. It is acknowledged that there is some crossover between the draft Strategies and consideration will be given to making any changes necessary to ensure that there is alignment between the Strategies.
- The Strategy will be updated to ensure community safety measures are considered as part of the planting and maintenance of vegetation, and it discusses the practical impact of trees on accessibility (particularly in the public realm). This can be achieved through the development of some additional guidelines.
- The Strategy outlines the range of implementation mechanisms to be considered, and these can be expanded upon with future initiatives (particularly in relation to guidelines and community education). The Strategy encourages the planting of appropriate tree species and provides guidelines accordingly.
- Many of the issues raised are in relation to the implementation of the Strategy and will be considered in the preparation of options.

Proposed changes to the Strategy

The following changes are proposed to be made to the Strategy prior to adoption, which respond to the submissions received:

- Add content around community safety measures to be considered as part of the planting and maintenance of vegetation
- Add some discussion about the practical impact of trees on accessibility (particularly in the public realm)

- Add some additional benefits of trees in relation to biodiversity and as habitats for birds and other fauna.
- Changes necessary to ensure that there is alignment between the Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy.

Implementation recommendations

A number of comments were received during the consultation that identified issues related to the implementation of the Strategy. The following table summarises some of the issues raised by the community and outlines options for how these can be addressed.

Issues raised	Options that could be considered
Insufficient space for trees	Site coverage is a consideration and/or permit trigger The standard garden area requirement introduced by the State Gov't assists in this area
Development impacting on trees	Potential changes to planning overlays can trigger planning consideration of buildings and works.
Flexibility for residents	Potential range of permit exemptions and decision guidelines such as for trees close to dwellings or appropriateness of trees in a backyard.
Species / planting appropriateness	Precinct based approach supported by tree species guidelines Consideration of species of trees and appropriateness to an urban area.
Recognition of the value for vegetation	Undertake community education in the first wave of implementation
Timeliness in decision-making	Consider additional VicSmart categories
Addressing areas with vegetation deficit	Potentially wider application of landscape / vegetation controls.

Potential changes to tree removal planning controls

As noted earlier in this report, adoption of the Strategy sets out a clear policy direction for the landscape of Monash and a range of potential actions to give effect to that policy. It does not introduce changes to the planning scheme or additional obligations on residents.

The bulk of the Strategy assists in current operational matters such as providing more appropriate tree planting guidelines for development applications.

Any changes to the permit requirements for tree removal would be developed as a follow on from the Strategy and considered separately by Council as a potential

amendment to the Monash Planning Scheme. Such a revised planning control would be designed to address the current short coming of the existing Vegetation Protection Overlay and the development issues that local residents express concerns about including loss of trees, insufficient space for gardens and dominance of multi storey buildings in the landscape.

A revised planning overlay could be designed to provide:

- exemptions for trees within 3 metres of a dwelling, overhanging vegetation; and
- decision guidelines that factor in the appropriateness tree species to a suburban block

These would be prepared and considered separately by Council. The current VPO requirements and examples of a potential revised permit requirements, exemptions and decision guidelines is shown in **Attachment 3**.

Note: It should also be noted that the Victoria Planning Provisions contain a standard exemption for tree removal *where it presents an immediate risk of personal injury or damage to property*.

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 Governments 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.

The draft Strategy builds on this policy framework and provide targets, such as the objective of 30% canopy cover by 2040, as well as a range of tools to achieve this

objective. These include landscape guidelines, community education and potential planning provisions.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The draft Strategy recommends a range of potential actions for its implementation, which will be done over time within existing resources. Some of these actions will be subject to further council budgeting decisions, as well as seeking opportunities for alternative funding sources.

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. This includes Plan Melbourne and the recent requirement for a “garden area” in residential development incorporated into residential zones in Victoria.

The consultation on the draft Strategy has been completed, and has received a high level of support in the community.

The adoption of the Strategy will provide a clear framework for dealing with the greening of Monash including the appropriateness of tree species, planting guidelines and education programs. Any changes to the permit requirement for tree removal in Monash would need to be considered separately by Council after the adoption of the Strategy.

Attachments:

- Attachment 1: Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Consultation Brochure
- Attachment 2: Consultation Report, September 2018
- Attachment 3: Current and potential tree removal permit requirements