

4.1 CITY OF MONASH URBAN BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

Responsible Director: Ossie Martinz

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Notes the content of the Draft Urban Biodiversity Strategy and the recommendations which will guide the protection and enhancement of Monash Bushland.*
- 2. Releases the Draft Urban Biodiversity Strategy for community consultation in accordance with the consultation program set out in this report.*
- 3. Notes that a further report will be presented to Council upon the completion of the community consultation to report on the outcomes and to endorse the strategy.*

INTRODUCTION

This report is to provide the Draft Urban Biodiversity Strategy (the Strategy) for consideration and to seek approval to have the draft strategy released to receive feedback from the community through consultation.

BACKGROUND

The Urban Biodiversity Strategy provide a baseline of current biodiversity status for Monash, review the past documentation and activities , and develop of the first overarching 10 year Strategic implementation plan to guide the 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 preserve our local environmental assets.

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 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 small but significant bushland reserves.

DISCUSSION

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

The Environmental Advisory Committee also provided valuable feedback on the documents and their presentation. The strategy is now ready to seek feedback from the broader community.

CONSULTATION

The Environmental Advisory Committee was provided the opportunity to comment on the strategy at the June 2018 meeting – these comments have been incorporated in to the attached document.

A community consultation plan has been 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.

The draft Urban Biodiversity Strategy will be made available for public review over six-weeks. It will be promoted through the Bulletin, social media and on the website. This timing will align with the Monash Bulletin timeline to support promotion. An online survey will be developed with 5-6 questions to allow for open-ended feedback.

Two workshops will be held in Oakleigh and Glen Waverley to present the importance of biodiversity in Monash by the consultant, to help the community understand the reason for improving the biodiversity in Monash and what we are trying to achieve through the strategy and monitoring.

One on one meetings will also be held with key stakeholders including Monash University, Melbourne Water and the Environmental Advisory Committee (either as a whole or as part of a working group) amongst others, during this time.

The final document will then be provided to council for approval.

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 opportunity to engage the community and help them understand the value 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.

The 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 also 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. The strategy also support many actions and goals of the Horticulture Team's Bushland Crew.

It will also support the priorities activities of the Horticultural team deliverables, 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.

CONCLUSION

That Council:

1. Notes the content Draft Urban Biodiversity Strategy and the recommendations which will guide the protection an enhancement of Monash Bushland;
2. Releases the Draft Monash Urban Biodiversity Strategy for community consultation in accordance with the consultation program set out in this report; and
3. Notes that a further report will be presented to Council upon the completion of the community consultation to report on the outcomes and endorse the strategy.

Attachment 1: Draft Urban Biodiversity Strategy