



11.2 URBAN FOREST STRATEGY STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

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1. PURPOSE

1.1 To present the *Urban Forest Strategy: Strategic Directions* to Council for endorsement and adoption.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 We are updating the Urban Forest Strategy (UFS) 2011.

2.2 This is because we have implemented the large majority of the actions in the existing strategy and, since adoption, there has been a lot of change in the City of Port Phillip and in contemporary greening practices.

2.3 The new UFS will build on the achievements of the existing strategy and incorporate more advanced urban greening practices. It will set a 20-year vision, a direction to work towards, and a set of shared principles, to guide the decisions and actions we take to achieve the vision.

2.4 We are undertaking this work in three stages:

- Stage 1: Current State (*complete*)
- Stage 2: Strategic Directions (*in progress*)
- Stage 3: Policy Development.

2.5 Significant community engagement on the Strategic Directions (including the vision and principles) has been undertaken with feedback being largely very positive.

2.6 The data and engagement have led to the development of a 2040 vision and a set of five shared principles.

2.7 The 2040 vision and shared principles will be used to inform the development of the targets and actions for the new UFS.

2.8 The Policy Development (including the targets and actions) stage is now underway.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Endorses the Urban Forest Strategy: Strategic Directions (attachment 1).
- 3.2 Notes the Strategy will also inform the development of an associated policy, which will include relevant targets, actions and implementation plans.
- 3.3 Authorises the Chief Executive Officer, or their delegate, to make minor amendments to the documents to correct drafting errors that do not materially alter the intent of the strategy.



4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

Background

- 4.1 The City of Port Phillip was one of the first Councils to develop its existing *Greening Port Phillip: An Urban Forest Approach Strategy 2010(GPP)*.
- 4.2 Since that time, urban forestry and urban greening have been recognised globally as a means to manage Urban Heat Island (UHI), water quality, improve health outcomes and as an important contributor for biodiversity, ecosystems and habitat.
- 4.3 Council is now preparing a new Urban Forest Strategy (UFS).
- 4.4 The new UFS will deliver an integrated, long-term framework to guide the planning, provision, protection, integration and management of the urban forest across Port Phillip. The new UFS will have a 20-year timeframe to 2040 with regular review and evaluation periods.
- 4.5 The UFS is being developed in three stages, including:
 1. Assessment of current State -evidence base
 2. Strategic Direction -setting the vision and guiding principles
 3. Policy Development – setting targets, action, implementation, and evaluation plans.
- 4.6 To date, the first two stages for the UFS development have been completed, as follows:

Stage 1: Current State

This stage developed the following documents which were publicly released following the Ordinary Meeting of Council on 5 July 2023 and are available on Council's Have Your Say webpage:

- Port Phillip Urban Forest Strategy 2040 Background and Benchmarking Report (St Jack and Co, 2023)
- City of Port Phillip Tree Ledger Report 2012-2022 (Player Piano, 2023)
- Protecting Vegetation in the Private Realm Report (Hansen Partnership, 2022)
- City of Port Phillip Biodiversity Study and Action Plan Background Research Discussion Paper (Arcadis, 2020)
- Completion of Urban Forest Strategy Stage 1 Engagement Findings Report (Activate Consulting 2023).

Stage 2: Strategic Directions

- Development of draft Strategic Directions through community engagement, a Mayor's Round Table held in May 2023 with key stakeholders (active individuals and representatives of local groups), a workshop with Councillors in April 2023.
- Broad community engagement on the Strategic Directions in July/August 2023.
- Workshop with Councillors in October 2023.

Urban Forest Strategy: Strategic Directions (Strategic Directions)

- 4.7 The *Strategic Directions* document includes a 2040 Vision and a set of five principles (**Attachment 1**).



- 4.8 These were developed from a series of workshops with Councillors, key community stakeholders and Council officers, and tested through a broad community engagement process.
- 4.9 The vision and principles have been considered and developed in the context of:
- the evidence base
 - their fit with leading practice
 - a balance between giving direction and providing scope for emerging practices or issues to be incorporated.

4.10 The Vision for the UFS is:

Our 2040 vision

In the City of Port Phillip, urban greening is healthy and abundant, biodiversity is valued and supported, and nature connects community.

4.11 The principles will inform the development of the UFS and will continue to be tested through the development of the policy. They are as follows:

Our shared principles

Collectively with Council, community and industry partners:

1. We work together to value, protect, grow and care for healthy and sustainable greening in streets, parks, gardens and private land.
2. We retain first, respecting established character, and adapt by adding more resilient plant species where they are most needed to reduce heat and flood vulnerabilities.
3. We prioritise biodiversity, supporting healthy ecosystems and creating habitat.
4. We invest in thriving integrated urban greening in streetscapes, buildings, parks and gardens.
5. We value the urban forest as a long-term asset that is critical to the health and wellbeing of our community and to our City's character and function, through quality design, construction and maintenance.

Stage 3: Policy Development (Targets, Action, Implementation and Evaluation Plan).

- 4.12 The vision and shared principles will inform the development of the targets and actions as part of the next stage of the UFS development.
- 4.13 The next stage of the process will determine what, when and how we will achieve the vision and principles, and how we will know it is working.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 From 10 July to 6 August 2023, we asked our community for feedback on a draft Vision and set of principles to guide our new UFS, and for ideas about the best ways to green Port Phillip.
- 5.2 Over 520 people visited the UFS Have Your Say page, with 475 people providing feedback, including:
- 315 shared ideas at the Elwood Farmers Market, South Melbourne Market, and Veg Out Market in St Kilda



- 119 detailed survey responses
 - 47 submitted ideas in our online forum
 - 3 email submissions.
- 5.3 Based on the available demographic information, overall the consultation successfully engaged a broad cross-section of community members. Participants represented all suburbs, genders, connections to Port Phillip, most age groupings, and some identified with diverse personal characteristics.
- 5.4 Most participants (96.6%) live within Port Phillip, many in the suburbs of St Kilda, Elwood, Balaclava, and St Kilda East. Low participation was recorded for Melbourne, Southbank, and Windsor. There were more Women/Female participants (55.2%) than Men/Males (39.7%).
- 5.5 In addition, the communication activities were effective in reaching and informing around 520 people with 948 visits by 523 visitors to the Have Your Say Port Phillip. There were also 247 downloads of project documents.
- 5.6 The engagement results showed strong support for the draft Vision and five draft Principles. Feedback from 126 survey participants and place-based pop-up participants shows strong support for the draft Vision (88.1%), draft Principle 1 (90.4%), draft Principle 2 (83.9%), draft Principle 3 (95.1%), draft Principle 4 (90.3%), and draft Principle 5 (93.6%).
- 5.7 Overall, the feedback for the draft Strategic Directions was very positive, and no major changes to the document were suggested or made. The most significant changes were to:
- Add an explanation of who 'we' means at the start of the principles ('Collectively with Council, community and industry partners')
 - Add baselines for the proposed target metrics under a new section called 'We will track progress', with the actual targets to be determined and included in Stage 2
 - Under the 'Biodiverse' principle, refocus from biodiversity corridors to habitat more broadly
 - Described 'everyone' in the explanation for Principle 1
 - Strengthened the green/blue connection including integrated water management in the explanation for Principle 5
 - Included concise information about canopy distribution and urban forest diversity.
- 5.8 There was strong interest in the strategy, and many ideas were put forward about actions, targets and implementation. While these comments were out of scope for the Strategic Directions (which is higher level), they are being used to inform the Targets, Action, Implementation and Evaluation Plan (the next stage).
- 5.9 The full engagement report, Port Phillip UFS Consultation Findings Report Stage 1B is **Attachment 2**. A summary report is included (**Attachment 3**), and a report responding to the community engagement feedback and how it has been used is supplied as **Attachment 4**.

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No significant legal or risk implications have been identified. The UFS will include measurable outcomes and timeframes for Council to monitor the progress of the delivery of each action in the strategy.



7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 There is no new financial impact in the adoption of the Strategic Directions and Principles.
- 7.2 The next stage of the development of the UFS will include Targets and an Action Plan to guide Council's investment in the urban forest. This will include the development of targets and outline the associated costs for meeting them.
- 7.3 Action Plan will be developed with options to maximise outcomes of current budget vs accelerating and amplifying outcomes. Actions will be allocated over short, medium and long-term timeframes and associated costs will be identified.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 Habitat loss and fragmentation is a main factor in the decline and disappearance of many species in Port Phillip and throughout Australia. Protecting and enhancing the biodiversity throughout Port Phillip benefits local plants and wildlife and encourages our urban forest to become more balanced, resilient and vibrant. The UFS will ensure that Council can protect and enhance our urban forest in the face of these challenges.
- 8.2 In Port Phillip, our urban forest is made up of all the trees and plants on public and private land and is vital to maintaining comfortable urban environments for humans and non-humans alike. The UFS will ensure that Port Phillip has an urban forest that provides shade and cooling benefits, helping to mitigate the UHI; supports biodiversity and wildlife with a diverse range of vegetation that helps support local wildlife and maintain our local ecosystems; and cleans our air and waterways.
- 8.3 The shared principles will ensure that the UFS has positive environmental impacts for Port Phillip, by protecting established trees, strengthening our City's climate resilience, strengthening food security, encouraging a variety of plant species and reclaiming space for greening.
- 8.4 The new UFS will build upon the positive environmental impacts that GPP has achieved, including an increase in tree canopy on public land, a decrease in loss of tree canopy on private land and the expansion of the concept of the 'urban forest' to include all vegetation on public and private land.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 Throughout recent community engagements, our community has emphasised the importance of urban greening and biodiversity for connection to place and community, for amenity and provision of ecosystem services to mitigate against urban heat islands and flooding, and the value of biodiversity, plants, birds, animals and insects as important in and of itself.
- 9.2 The urban forest and biodiversity contributes to a sense of place and amenity for Port Phillip residents, and contributes to a connection with Country for many. Strengthening the urban forest and biodiversity improves greener public places and has been demonstrated to have positive health and wellbeing benefits, contributing to the character and liveability of our City.
- 9.3 Community awareness and advocacy about greening has increased since the adoption of GPP, and community-led greening has risen since COVID lockdowns. The critical role our community plays in greening our City is recognised through the commitment in principle 1 to work together to achieve the shared vision for the urban forest in Port Phillip.



10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

- 10.1 The Strategic Objective: Sustainable Port Phillip in the *Council Plan 2017 – 27* includes the following actions:
- The City is actively mitigating and adapting to climate change and invests in designing, constructing and managing our public spaces to optimise water sustainably and reduce flooding (blue/green infrastructure).
 - We will provide urban forests to increase tree canopy, vegetation, greening and biodiversity and reduce urban heat, in line with Council's Greening Port Phillip and Act and Adapt strategies, prioritised within available budgets each year
- 10.2 The *Places for People: Public Space Strategy 2022 – 2032* includes a short-term priority action to update GPP and the Street Tree Planting Program 2017-22 to reprioritise key actions based on the Public Space Strategy and other Council commitments.
- 10.3 *Move Connect Live: Integrated Transport Strategy (2018-28)* and *Act and Adapt Sustainable Environment Strategy (2018-28)* include greening actions.
- 10.4 Further opportunities for policy links are progressing with the Housing Strategy, Foreshore Management Plan and Coastal Adaption Strategy and South Melbourne Structure Plan.

11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

- 11.1.1 The UFS Strategic Directions will be made publicly available on the Have Your Say page.
- 11.1.2 Council officers will continue to develop the UFS, including targets and the action and implementation plan.
- 11.1.3 The draft UFS will be publicly released for community engagement in early 2024.
- 11.1.4 The final draft UFS will be presented to Council in mid-2024 for endorsement and adoption.

11.2 COMMUNICATION

- 11.2.1 Council officers will continue to update the Have Your Say page and will notify the community prior to engagement commencing on the draft UFS Stage 2 in early 2024.

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

- 12.1 No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any material or general interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

1. **Urban Forest Strategy: Strategic Directions**[↓](#)
2. **Port Phillip UFS Consultation Findings Report Stage 1B**[↓](#)
3. **Port Phillip Urban Forest Strategy Engagement Summary of Findings**[↓](#)
4. **Urban Forest Strategy Use of Engagement Feedback in Strategic Directions**[↓](#)