

City Forest and Habitat Strategy

Annual Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Report 2018/19

*Prepared for Wyndham City Council
August 2019 by Clear Horizon Consulting*

wyndhamcity



Authors

This document has been prepared by Clear Horizon Consulting. It is based on monitoring information supplied by Wyndham City Council and through an annual review workshop, facilitated by Clear Horizon Consulting.

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Document review and authorisation

Version	Date distributed	Issued to	Comments
V1	8/8/19	Annette Salkeld, Wyndham City Council	Draft report shared with comments for review
V2	15/8/19	Annette Salkeld, Wyndham City Council	Final report addressing feedback provided to Annette

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1 Evaluating progress towards the Strategy

1.1 Summary

This report outlines the findings of the first annual review of the implementation of Wyndham’s City Forest and Habitat Strategy (the Strategy), adopted by Council in 2018.

The Strategy is largely on track to achieving its intended outcomes. In particular, the Strategy is supporting increased canopy cover directly through significant tree planting, and indirectly by ensuring a greater focus across more areas of Council on increasing canopy cover. The Strategy has also increased existing biodiversity values across Wyndham through multi-departmental operational and strategic initiatives, including the addition of the Wyndella Reserve conservation area. In terms of engagement, the focus to date has been on planning and preparation for the delivery of new community engagement activities under the Strategy. However, there has been some expanded engagement activity specific to the Strategy which has seen increased community participation in Strategy activities. Specifically, Council has made important progress with increasing engagement with Indigenous communities to deliver the Strategy.

Implementation of the Strategy thus far has also seen several positive unintended outcomes including the facilitation of tree-related advocacy within Council, a stronger than expected partnership with The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and the establishment of the Tree Amenity Fund.

Council’s approach to delivering the Strategy appears to be working relatively well. Many improvements have been made to how Council is working across departments to deliver the Strategy. While these may have occurred anyway in the fullness of time, the Strategy has allowed these improvements to occur sooner than expected. Having an adopted Strategy has also enabled more effective external partnerships with a number of other government agencies. Strategy implementation has, however, also highlighted some disconnect between Council policy and operational practices and identified this as an area for improvement.

Based on progress to date, a continued focus on internal (cross-department) collaboration and the delivery of existing community engagement activities was recommended by key strategy implementers. More deliberate forward planning of resourcing requirements, particularly for delivery of on-ground works components, was also considered important for the ongoing success of the Strategy, as a well as a focus on improved compliance, and an expansion of community engagement activities.

As staff have had time to start implementing the Strategy, and now have a clearer view of the relative importance and feasibility of the (currently very many) Strategy actions, a stocktake of existing actions was considered timely to remove any obvious redundancy or duplication, as well as unrealistic or less than useful targets. This is an appropriate and meaningful action at this point in the strategy’s implementation.

1.2 Background and introduction

Wyndham’s City Forest and Habitat Strategy 2018-2040 (the Strategy), adopted by Council in 2018, sets out a range of targets and actions related to improving Wyndham’s canopy cover, biodiversity and habitat, and community engagement. The Strategy is being implemented by a number of teams across Council.

As part of the implementation of the recently developed Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan for the Strategy, Council teams met to review and reflect on Strategy progress over the 2018-2019 financial year,

using existing monitoring data, and their own knowledge of what is and isn’t working well. This was facilitated and reported on by independent external MEL specialists.

This document provides a summary of the conclusions drawn from that reflection exercise, along with more detailed descriptions of progress against the individual key evaluation question (KEQ) areas from the MEL framework (Sections 1.3-1.5).

The final section (1.6) outlines agreed areas for future focus.

1.3 The extent to which the Strategy is achieving its intended outcomes



1a. To what extent has the Strategy increased canopy cover in Wyndham and created an urban forest?

There has been significant work towards increasing the potential tree canopy in Wyndham through a significantly increased tree planting program. As part of the Strategy, the internal monitoring data shows that 7,500 street trees, 10,000 tube stock and 12,000 developer trees have been planted. A recent study by the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) offers further evidence that Wyndham has seen a 2% increase in tree canopy density .

The Strategy has influenced a greater focus from more areas of council on achieving increased canopy outcomes. Regular cross-departmental Council meetings on tree planting are now being held. Council now has an adopted position on levels of service associated with tree planting.

1b. In what ways has Council improved habitat quality (biodiversity values and quantity) and connectivity?

Council has improved existing biodiversity values across Wyndham through multi-departmental operational and strategic initiatives. This includes increasing the area managed for conservation with the addition of the Wyndella Reserve, ongoing conservation planting seasons with over 31,000 tube stock planted, and 1.7ha of land burnt for conservation since 2017. In urban areas, Council has planted 35 new habitat plantings in parks and pruned 12 trees for habitat. Council is also continuing to support biodiversity vales through native plantings and weed control on private land as part of the Land Protection Grant Scheme and Habitat Heroes Program.



1c. To what extent did the Strategy engage the Wyndham community in understanding and valuing trees and natural habitat?

Council's community engagement programs around the Strategy expanded from previous years and had increased participation numbers. Notably, training, financial support and ongoing advice saw the emergence of two new community environment groups in Wyndham; in addition, one new school was added to the existing Habitat Heroes program. Council saw greater social media engagement around Strategy activities including increased 'likes' on the Green Living Facebook page and over 300 'likes' on Council's post about National Tree Day.

Council also saw increased engagement with Indigenous communities around the Strategy. Two new cultural heritage permits for operational land management works on Council land have been agreed to with Traditional Owner groups, and Council officers have held numerous meetings with traditional owners to discuss managing Country.

This year, Council focused on planning and preparations for delivering engagement activities. Staff agreed that many engagement activities under the Strategy were better planned and developed in 2018/19 with a further suite of engagement activities set for implementation in the coming year.



1.4 The broader impact of the Strategy, including on the natural environment and community

2a. What unexpected outcomes, positive and negative, resulted from the delivery of the Strategy?

Council staff felt that the Strategy has given staff more credibility in advocating for trees internally. Staff noted that internal processes for tree protection were further developed and being implemented more efficiently because of the credibility the Strategy afforded to these decisions. They also observed that the Strategy had contributed towards better relationships within Council, and that more staff had come together to advocate for trees.

Council has established the Tree Amenity Fund, a small grants program to fund internal projects related to tree amenity. The fund was created in response to the significant removal of large trees in 2018/19. The Fund will raise the profile of the role of trees within Council and encourage innovative methods to integrate trees into urban design.

Council's partnership with DELWP enabled further activities under the Strategy than expected. DELWP has invested more funding than expected in bolstering the work of the Strategy, including weed control works in the future Western Grasslands Reserve, as a result of current progress.

Council staff were concerned about the potentially limited consideration of the ongoing cost of maintaining trees planted as part of the Strategy. Staff noted that tree health needs to be managed in an ongoing way (for example, to support survival through periods of drought) and that additional maintenance costs had not been properly considered in the resourcing of the Strategy.



1.6 Areas for focus going forward

As part of the review, staff reflected on areas of the Strategy to Keep (where things were going well and the focus was on maintaining the momentum), Create (areas where new activities or practices would strengthen delivery) and Drop (areas where it was not as productive to focus resources).

Council will continue to:

- Focus on internal collaboration - keeping up the momentum on collaboration and building on already strengthened partnerships; and
- Deliver established community engagement programs (increased participation and engagement indicates that these are doing well).

Council will start to:

- Forward plan to forecast appropriate resources to manage outcomes of the Strategy including suppliers and staffing (for example, letting nurseries know well in advance that large volumes of tube stock will be required);
- Market the Strategy to suppliers/partners to drive their interest in delivering targets;
- Focus more on compliance for breaches and damages, and use the Strategy to support this work;
- Implement broader community engagement activities (including with diverse cultures);
- Increase focus on habitat/biodiversity education in addition to trees; and
- Undertake a stocktake of existing actions for their ongoing relevance to achieving Strategy outcomes.

Council will stop:

- Focusing on unachievable targets and obsolete actions (to be identified through stocktake described above) and rather put effort towards realistic and meaningful targets.



1.5 How well the Council's approach to delivering the Strategy is working

3a. How well did Council work together (across departments) to deliver the Strategy?

Many improvements have been made to internal relationships and collaboration which have facilitated the delivery of the strategy. Staff noted several examples of Council working better across departments to deliver the Strategy, including working together to conserve a grey box eucalypt at Manor Lakes, 20 small habitat plantings in parks (also known as 'Bits of Bush In The Suburbs, or 'BOBITS'), improving communication and results around tree removals, and the inclusion of tree objectives in several planning processes. Staff also noted that the Environment team and Open Space teams were working closely together to deliver on the strategy. Staff also reflected that these improvements to internal relationships have happened much earlier than anticipated.

However, staff also reflected that there was some disconnect between Council policy and on ground works. On-ground staff expressed concern about the resourcing requirements of the Strategy, and workshop participants discussed the importance of resolving this issue by better planning for the longer-term maintenance works and costs required under the Strategy.

3b. How well did Council work with partners to deliver the Strategy?

Council has been able to work with partners more effectively due to the support of having an adopted strategy. The strategy has helped to streamline the communications of targets and objectives. Staff also felt that communication with outside parties has been easier with a Council-adopted Strategy, because staff now have a clearer organisation-wide mandate rather than priorities being potentially perceived as individual 'wish lists'. This is illustrated by the success of outcomes across a range of areas:

- The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning;
- The Strategy has helped to influence the outcomes of the Living Melbourne Urban Forest Strategy;
- DELWP/Parks Victoria/private landowners working to manage biodiversity on large scale with financial strategic support; and
- Corporate knowledge and systems, rather than just a wish list of individuals.

The background of the entire page is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this background is a faint, light-colored pattern of tree branches and foliage, which appears to be a stylized or high-key photograph of a large tree. The branches are thick and gnarled, with many smaller, thinner branches extending from them. The foliage is represented by a dense, textured pattern of small, dark shapes, giving the impression of leaves or needles. The overall effect is a natural, organic feel that complements the city's name.

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