

5.4.1 Green Wedge Management Plan (2011-2021) Reporting

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| Responsible Officer | Director Planning & Development |
| Author | Strategic Planner |
| In Attendance | Taras Rego, Strategic Planner Graduate |
| External in Attendance | Nil |

Attachments

1. Green Wedge areas in City of Whittlesea [5.4.1.1 - 1 page]
2. 2021 Green Wedge Management Plan Progress Table [5.4.1.2 - 5 pages]

Purpose

This report presents the 2021 reporting on the implementation of Whittlesea's *Green Wedge Management Plan 2011-2021*.

The *Green Wedge Management Plan 2011-2021* was adopted by Council in July 2011. It sets out 84 actions prioritised over ten years to achieve the strategic objectives and community's vision for the sustainable management, enhancement and protection of the Green Wedge and non-urban areas of the municipality. This represents the 10th and final progress report on the current GWMP Action Plan.

Brief Overview

This report summarises the initiatives undertaken by the City of Whittlesea to implement the *Green Wedge Management Plan 2011-2021* (GWMP) which was adopted by Council in July 2011. Regular reporting against the GWMP Action Plan is a requirement of the adopted GWMP's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. This represents the 10th and final progress report on the current GWMP Action Plan.

The GWMP comprised 84 actions that relate to the themes of Land, Biodiversity, Water and People. The Action Plan includes 30 short-term actions, 23 medium-term actions, 1 long-term action and 30 ongoing actions. Various departments and teams across Council have contributed to the implementation of the actions to achieve the GWMP's strategic objectives and the community's vision for the Green Wedge and non-urban areas of the municipality.

The report outlines progress against the 84 actions of the plan, highlighting the key achievements and next steps for the management of the Green Wedge. In summary, the 2021 reporting shows a great achievement with all 84 actions commenced. Of the 54 short, medium, long-term actions, 49 have been completed while the remaining 5 actions are all

underway but are yet to be completed. All 30 ongoing actions are operational and continue to be supported across Council as part of day-to-day business operations.

Recommendation

That Council:

1. Note the outcomes and final 10-year progress update against the *Green Wedge Management Plan 2011-2021* Action Plan.
2. Note that a new *Green Wedge Management Plan* is currently under development to replace the old plan.
3. Write to the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Environment to provide an update on the outcomes and progress in implementing the *Green Wedge Management Plan 2011-2021*, and the status of the new plan.
4. Provide a copy of the update on the *Green Wedge Management Plan 2011-2021* to the local State Members of Parliament.

Key Information

Background

Melbourne 2030, the previous State Government metropolitan strategy, identified 12 Green Wedge areas in 17 local government areas across Melbourne, and put in place policies to protect these valued non-urban areas. This included the establishment of an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). The term Green Wedge refers to the non-urban areas of metropolitan Melbourne that lie outside the UGB.

Green Wedge land is of key importance to the liveability, economic strength, and environmental health of Melbourne. They fulfil a range of roles including agricultural production, conservation and biodiversity, natural ecosystem services and provide opportunities for diverse tourism and recreation. In the City of Whittlesea, Green Wedge areas represent approximately 61% of the municipality (refer to Attachment 1).

Whittlesea's GWMP was adopted by Council in July 2011 in line with State Government requirements. It was the first plan of its type prepared by Council. It identifies the vision, objectives and actions for Council to protect and monitor the sustainable use and development of the Green Wedge.

The GWMP Action Plan comprises 84 actions relating to the themes of Land, Biodiversity, Water and People. In summary, the Action Plan includes:

- 30 short-term actions to commence by Year 3 (2013/2014);
- 23 medium-term actions to commence by Year 7 (2017/2018);
- 1 long-term action to commence after Year 7 (2018); and
- 30 ongoing actions to be monitored to 2021.

Monitoring and reporting requirements of the GWMP include:

- annual (internal) progress updates – this report represents the 2021 and final reporting;

- two key milestone reports - the Year 3 Progress Report completed in 2013 and the Year 7 Progress Report completed in 2018;
- a Five-Year Review – this was a State Government requirement, completed and adopted by Council in June 2016.

In 2021, the current GWMP is in its 10th and final year of the ten-year plan. This represents the final progress report on the current GWMP Action Plan.

Planning Context

Whittlesea's GWMP was initially developed to meet the requirements of the metropolitan strategy, *Melbourne 2030*.

The importance of managing Melbourne's Green Wedge areas continues to be reinforced in state planning policy, with the State Government currently undertaking a *Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedge and Agricultural Land* (GWAL) review project to strengthen the protection of the Green Wedges and peri urban areas. Council endorsed a submission to the GWAL review at the Council meeting on 2 February 2021.

The State Government has indicated that an announcement will soon be made regarding the GWAL consultation outcomes and next steps for the protection of the Green Wedge.

Community Consultation and Engagement

Extensive community engagement was undertaken in the preparation and development of the GWMP before it was adopted in 2011. Further targeted engagement has also been undertaken on some of the individual actions implemented over the past 10 years.

Further communications will be undertaken to highlight the achievements in implementing the GWMP 2011-2021 to the broader community.

Community engagement is also being undertaken to inform development of the new GWMP. Stage 1 engagement on the Discussion Paper occurred in May/July 2021 and Stage 2 engagement on the Draft GWMP will occur mid 2022.

Alignment to Community Plan, Policies or Strategies

Alignment to Whittlesea 2040 and Community Plan 2021-2025:

Strong local economy

Our City is a smart choice for innovation, business growth and industry as well as supporting local businesses to be successful, enabling opportunities for local work and education

Sustainable environment

We prioritise our environment and take action to reduce waste, preserve local biodiversity, protect waterways and green space and address climate change

Implementation of the Green Wedge Management Plan 2011-2021 meets the objectives of Whittlesea 2040 and the Council Plan. Specifically, the GWMP actions have sought to

preserve biodiversity, protect waterways, support, and encourage agricultural innovation and agribusiness opportunities.

Considerations

GWMP 2021 Reporting

Reporting on the GWMP actions provides a means to monitor and evaluate Council's progress in implementing the GWMP to achieve its vision and objectives. Each responsible Council department has provided an update on the status of their GWMP actions, demonstrating that implementing the GWMP is a whole of Council effort.

The 2021 reporting shows a great achievement in implementing most of the GWMP actions to support Council in its management of the Green Wedge. All 84 actions, including 54 short, medium, long-term actions and 30 ongoing actions have commenced. Of the 54 short, medium, long-term actions, 49 have been completed (91%) while the remaining 5 actions are all underway but are yet to be completed (9%).

Table 1: Progress Against GWMP Actions

| | Completed | | In progress | |
|---|-----------|------|-------------|------|
| | 2020 | 2021 | 2020 | 2021 |
| Short-Term (commence by 2013/14) | 70% | 90% | 30% | 10% |
| Medium-Term (commence by 2017/18) | 57% | 91% | 43% | 9% |
| Long-Term (commence after 2018) | 100% | 100% | | |
| Ongoing | | | 100% | 100% |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed: Actions that have been completed. • In progress: Actions that have commenced or are on-going. | | | | |

Table 1 shows the overall progress made in implementing the actions, with a further 14 actions completed in 2021.

Short-term actions – 90% complete

- Of the 30 short-term actions, 27 are complete (90%) and 3 are still 'in progress' (10%).
- Comparatively, in 2020, 21 actions were complete; with a further 6 short-term actions completed this year.
- The 3 remaining short-term actions still underway are actions B02, L22 and W05, which are discussed later in the report.

Medium-term actions – 91% complete

- Of the 23 medium-term actions, 21 are complete (91%) and 2 are still ‘in progress’ (9%).
- Comparatively, in 2020, 13 actions were marked complete; with a further 8 medium-term actions completed this year.
- The 2 remaining medium-term actions still underway are actions B09 and L26, which are discussed later in the report.

Long-term actions – 100% complete

- The 1 long-term action of the GWMP was completed in 2020.

Ongoing actions

- All 30 ongoing actions are operational and continue to be supported across Council as part of day-to-day business operations. Many of these actions are now considered business as usual.

It is worth noting that there were two actions which were marked as ‘complete’ that were not undertaken due to changing circumstances which meant they were no longer relevant or appropriate. This is to be expected over the life of a 10-year plan. In each circumstance the action was investigated prior to a decision being made to not progress further and to mark the action as complete. These actions are discussed below.

Action L24 sought to *“Investigate partnership arrangements with key groups for the sponsorship of two new annual events: Best Environmentally Sustainable Rural Design for the promotion architectural excellence in a rural setting; and Best Rural Management for the promotion of best whole farm design and management.”*

- This action was investigated by Council officers in 2020 and raised with the Agribusiness Community Reference Group on 31 March 2021, where it was agreed that at this stage there is little value in offering these awards. Instead, it was agreed that Council officers would investigate other opportunities that would provide better value for Council and residents and that such initiatives should be focused on education and increasing awareness more broadly, rather than just providing awards to those that are already aware of the objectives of the awards. Council officers have identified some potential opportunities for partnering with other groups / farmers to

run events or activities to raise awareness and educate the broader community about agriculture in the municipality. These options will be further explored in 2022.

Action L25 sought to *“Further develop community appreciation of the rural landscape through the creation of a ‘Celebrate the Landscape’ event aimed at showcasing and promoting ‘ownership’ of a range of green wedge values.”*

- This action was investigated however, Council no longer runs activities of this type. These activities have been superseded by Council’s direct support for the Landcare Network. Landcare runs local events that promote the role of biodiversity in the productive landscape. These initiatives, combined with other Council programmes such as Rural News, the South Morang Farmers Market, and the Agribusiness Programme means that the intent of the action has been achieved. This action was marked complete in 2019.

Attachment 2 provides a complete summary of the status of all the actions at the end of the 2021 reporting period, the 10th and final progress report on the current GWMP.

Notable GWMP Achievements in 2021

In this the final year of the ten-year GWMP, excellent progress was made with 13 actions completed, including 6 short-term and 7 medium-term actions.

Some of the key achievements in 2021 include:

- The Whittlesea Community Farm and Food Collective has been set up as a pilot program pending planning permit approval (lodged 27/10/21). The Collective received \$2.4m in funding for the development of the community farm (\$1.5m from the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning, \$300k each from Yarra Valley Water, City of Whittlesea and Melbourne Polytechnic). The community farm originally intended to demonstrate innovative sustainable farming practices, increase food security through provision of food and provide an opportunity for residents to learn about local, sustainable food production. Detailed feasibility assessments have now led to an expansion of activity to also include demonstration of sustainable land management and cultural land conservation practices (Actions L07 and L28).
- To better support farming in the Whittlesea Green Wedge, Council made a submission to the State Government’s *Planning for Melbourne’s Green Wedges and Agricultural Land review* project on 3 Feb 2021. The submission supported proposals to strengthen the legislative and policy framework for Green Wedges to better support farming, including agribusiness and the ‘right to farm’ where zoning

supports agricultural uses as a primary purpose. The State Government is anticipated to release their consultation findings and next steps shortly (Action L11).

- The City of Whittlesea has successfully advocated to State Government for commitment to a business case on the potential development of the Melbourne Food and Innovation Export Hub (MFIH) (formerly identified as Epping Food Hub), which has been identified as an economic development opportunity arising from the relocation of the Melbourne Wholesale Fruit and Vegetable Market to Epping. MFIH would provide a strategic nexus for collaboration and innovation across the Victorian food industry ecosystem. The MFIH hub could support the use of agricultural land in the municipality and potentially improve the operations of food industry businesses throughout the food supply chain, increasing efficiencies and providing a meaningful contribution to Victoria's economic growth. The City of Whittlesea will continue to advocate for its development and has been engaged by State Government as part of completion of the business case (Action L08).
- Council has continued to support the viability and development of Whittlesea Township businesses that service the Green Wedge through the availability of mentoring, campaigns such as Dinner on Us, Shop Local, Choose Your Own Adventure, Christmas on Church, Winter Weekends event and other actions under the Tourism Strategy 2014-2019. Council also continues to provide support to and sponsor the Whittlesea Agricultural Show and helped the Friends of Toorourrong develop and implement the inaugural Table of Plenty event (Action P08).
- To promote the value and significance of ecosystems on Council owned land, Council has developed a four year works plan for the roll out of site based, wayfinding and interpretive signage for all of Council's 60 conservation reserves. The Tier 1 conservation reserves with the highest biodiversity values and opportunities for engagement are proposed to have interpretive materials and an online 'Story Maps' platform. Delivery of this initiative is under consideration as part of Council's New Works Program for 2022/2023 (Action B14).
- To better understand community perceptions of local parks and user needs a consultant was engaged to undertake 400 user satisfaction surveys across 31 Neighbourhood Parks. This research highlighted community views of Council's maintenance being below regional and Melbourne average standards, with community concerns and perceptions of safety in public open space high for night-time use of parks. This has informed the Service Review for the Parks and City Forest area, and improvements to maintenance standards. It has also informed funding priorities for further maintenance, signage and lighting (Action P18).

- Council formed a partnership with the Wurundjeri and Taungurung Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAP) to undertake an *Aboriginal Heritage Study*. Scoping of the AHS was complete in 2021 with Stage 1 to commence in February 2022. The AHS is a cultural values and cultural landscapes study that will inform a broad range of work within Council on the identification and protection of tangible and intangible Aboriginal Cultural Heritage at a local government level. It will contribute to a greater awareness, understanding and appreciation of the relationship between cultural heritage, Traditional Owner knowledge and Aboriginal community health and wellbeing. This is a complex multi-year project (Action P24).

Notable Achievements over the 10-year life of the GWMP

Over the course of 10 years, there have been many key achievements of the GWMP. The most notable achievements are outlined below.

- Appointment of an Agribusiness Officer in February 2014 initially for a 3-year fixed term. This position, which has been critical in leading the delivery of many GWMP actions, provides sound business advice and support to farmers on the management of agricultural enterprises, promotion of networking events while demonstrating Council leadership and best practice. This position has since been made permanent (Action L02).
- Appointment of an Environmental Protection Officer in 2012. This position is responsible for ensuring compliance with Whittlesea's Pest Plant local law and planning permit conditions relating to vegetation and land management, which supports the strategic objectives of the GWMP and various actions (Action L15).
- Development of rural education programs such as the Landcare series which continue to be supported by Council to encourage diversification of sustainable farming methods (Action L12).
- Completion of a report in 2018 on the status of extractive industry operations and the Extractive Industry Interest Areas (EIIA) identified in the City of Whittlesea. This report has informed Council requesting that the Department of Jobs, Precincts & Regions (DJPR) review the EIIA as it relates to the City of Whittlesea. In December 2021, DJPR released its *Strategic Extractive Resources Roadmap* (Roadmap). The Roadmap sets their strategic direction and forward work program including a review of the EIIA in Victoria. (Actions L31 and L33).
- Development of new local policy content in relation to habitat corridors, waterways and native vegetation retention which was included as part of Whittlesea Planning Scheme Amendment C197 (gazetted in May 2017). As part of this Amendment, new

policy content from the GWMP was also included in the Whittlesea Planning Scheme (Action B07).

- Appointment of a Heritage Coordinator in January 2015 with the key objective of providing holistic management of heritage across Council. This appointment has also advanced the development of the *Cultural Heritage Strategy 2015-2018* which was adopted by Council in October 2015. A new *Cultural Heritage Strategy 2019-2025* has since been adopted in November 2020. The strategy highlights the principles that will manage, identify and protect heritage places across the municipality including Council owned places within the Green Wedge areas (Actions P25, P27).
- The adoption of the City of Whittlesea *Biodiversity Strategy 2019-2029* in June 2019 represented a significant milestone for Council which has supported the commencement and/or completion of a number GWMP actions over (Actions B01, B02 and B09).
- The South Morang Farmers and Makers Market commenced in July 2019, with a focus on providing an opportunity for local producers to connect with the community and sell their produce locally. As a result of the COVID pandemic in 2020 and 2021 the Farmers Market was unable to be run; however, it is intended to recommence in 2022 with the first one scheduled for 19 March 2022 (Action L10).
- Council formed a partnership with Deakin University to undertake a Land Capability Assessment (LCA) in 2019 and completed the report in 2020. The LCA report analysed the land capability across the green wedge and the potential for new and existing agricultural production across a range of crop/horticultural/pasture options. This research has provided updated land capability information and will support both new/innovative and traditional rural enterprises by providing a high-level overview of potential options for crops/horticulture/pasture (Action L09).
- In a further partnership with Deakin University, research was undertaken into *Climate Resilient Agriculture* to explore the difference between regenerative agriculture practices and conventional farming practices, to assist farmers in adapting to a changing climate. The *Climate Resilient Agriculture* project is ongoing; however, the literature review completed evaluates the benefits of regenerative agriculture as an alternative land treatment in peri-urban landscapes. These benefits include a greater, long-term resilience to climate change when utilising regenerative agriculture practices vs. traditional farming practices (Actions L27 and L28).
- Following the research into *Climate Resilient Agriculture*, a series of case studies on farmers applying regenerative agriculture practices were developed and

disseminated to the wider community to support and promote the value and opportunities for regenerative agriculture in the municipality (Action L04).

- Council continues to develop community knowledge of rural land stewardship and the Green Wedge by regularly supporting and distributing information to rural landholders through the Rural News newsletter and the Whittlesea Landcare group. Landcare membership continues to grow, and a regular electronic newsletter is distributed. Council also provides support for two other rural based groups: Eden Park Blackberry Action Group and Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group, as part of business-as-usual activities (Actions B04, L18 and P01).
- Council works collaboratively with Traditional Owners to build awareness of the unique Aboriginal Cultural Heritage of the area. Council also maintains strong links with the Wurundjeri Land Council and Aboriginal Victoria. There is ongoing consultation with Aboriginal-led organisations and community regarding sites of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and sensitivities and consideration given to Traditional and RAP legislative obligations (Action P24).
- An examination of current Green Wedge, settlement and bushfire planning policies affecting the rural communities of Eden Park, Humevale, Kinglake West and Yan Yean concluded that further residential development of these rural communities should be avoided. This is further reinforced by the *Eden Park Bushfire Erosion Mitigation Plan* which outlines environmental constraints of the erosive soils. The application of existing planning controls is appropriate (including the Eden Park Restructure Overlay) and should continue to be used to manage the anomalous nature of the use of these lots (Action P11).
- The Northern Regional Trail Network Strategy was adopted in 2016 which provides a vision and plan for future off-road recreational trail networks across Melbourne's north. It was developed in conjunction with the seven northern municipalities to ensure a fully integrated network. To implement the strategy, Council is advocating for funding for regional trails such as the Whittlesea Rail Trail from Mernda Station to connect to Whittlesea township; working with Parks Victoria, Nillumbik Council and other agencies to assist in the implementation of the Plenty River Trail from the M80 Ring Road to Bridge Inn Road by June 2023 to ensure connectivity to the Trail; and the preparation, adoption, and implementation of the Quarry Hills Parkland Master Plan (Action P17).

Actions not Complete

Of the 54 short, medium and long-term actions, 49 actions have been completed to date (91%). The remaining 5 actions (9%) have all been commenced to some degree but are yet to be complete, including 3 short-term actions and 2 medium-term actions. These actions are actively being worked on by Council however due to several factors were unable to be completed by 2021.

For example, several actions are linked to the development and implementation of the *Biodiversity Strategy* and the *Whittlesea Water for All Strategy*. These strategies were only adopted by Council in 2019 and 2020 respectively, which delayed commencement of the affected actions. These strategies provide the strategic direction for work in this space, identifying a pathway forward and timeline for gathering the evidence base and strategic justification for implementing the remaining GWMP actions. Since their adoption, many of the remaining GWMP actions have been commenced and are actively underway, which is discussed further below.

Table 2: Incomplete GWMP Actions

| Action Number & Description | Priority | Status |
|--|----------|--|
| B02 Investigate the relationship between significant ecosystems and type of land ownership (parkland, reserve, private land), and assess best methods of protection for areas of high conservation significance | Short | This action has commenced and will be further implemented as part of Council's <i>Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan</i> . Under Objective 1 Biodiversity Asset Mapping (BAM) is being undertaken to collect baseline data. This is due for completion by June 2022. Once the BAM is complete, the next step will be to look at the best method of protection and undertake work to support a planning scheme amendment. This will be completed as part of Objective 2 to undertake an amendment to apply appropriate zones/overlays. |
| B09 Strengthen planning provisions targeted at the identification, protection and enhancement of biodiversity and environmental values of the Whittlesea Green Wedge | Medium | As above, this action has commenced and will be further implemented as part of Council's <i>Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan</i> . |
| L22 Amend planning provisions to address environmental hazards within the City of Whittlesea in relation to the: Application of a Salinity Management Overlay (SMO) to areas of dryland salinity; Application of the Erosion | Short | Part 1 & 2 of this action has been identified in Council's <i>Whittlesea Water For All Strategy</i> and will require the gathering of further evidence base/strategic justification to support a planning scheme amendment to apply the SMO and EMO. |

| | | |
|---|---------------|--|
| <p>Management Overlay (EMO) to areas of stream, gully and sheet erosion; Reassess the boundaries of the existing Wildfire Management Overlay in response to the implementation of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission</p> | | <p>Erosion has emerged as a broader regional issue though the Regional Catchment Strategy. To this end Council officers have flagged with the Port Phillip Catchment Management Authority, the need for this to be addressed via a 'joint sodic soils project' between Whittlesea, Hume and Mitchell.</p> |
| <p>L26 Amend planning provisions targeted at protection of significant landscapes and significant vistas via the Significant Landscape Overlay for all visually sensitive areas within the Whittlesea Green Wedge; Develop local policies to guide development adjacent to visually sensitive hilltops and policy for road setbacks for visually significant roadside corridors; Implement changes to ensure the design, siting and form of new dwellings and other buildings within Green Wedge are sensitively integrated within rural and natural environments</p> | <p>Medium</p> | <p>Part of this action (local policy for visually sensitive hilltops and roadside corridors) has already been implemented via Amendment C197 MSS update, which was gazetted in May 2017. Part of the action for design and siting guidelines for new dwellings in Green Wedge areas will potentially be addressed as part of the State Governments GWAL project which is to be released shortly.</p> <p>The remaining part of this action to apply the Significant Landscape Overlay to significant landscapes will be informed and implemented as part of the <i>Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan</i>.</p> |
| <p>W05 Strengthen planning provisions targeted at the protection and improvement of the environmental health of waterways to: Add new Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO) schedules to protect major waterbodies; Revise the extent of the mapping associated with the existing ESO schedule 3 to include unprotected waterways; Investigate the rezoning of the municipality's two water storage catchments from Public Use Zone to Public Conservation and Resource Zone</p> | <p>Short</p> | <p>Part 1 & 2 of this action have been identified in and will be actioned via the implementation of Council's <i>Whittlesea Water For All Strategy</i> and the <i>Upper Merri Creek Integrated Water Management Plan</i> (Northern Growth Corridor). They will require the gathering of further evidence base/strategic justification to support a planning scheme amendment to apply an ESO.</p> <p>Part 3 of this action was completed in 2019 following an investigation into the potential rezoning of the two water storage catchments from Public Use Zone 1 to Public Conservation and Resource Zone. The investigation recommended not proceeding with a rezoning on the basis that the reservoirs are not likely to be decommissioned but are still needed in their current capacity.</p> |

These incomplete actions will continue to be progressed as part of the implementation of the *Biodiversity Strategy* and *Whittlesea Water For All Strategy*. These actions will also be considered in the context of the new GWMP.

Ongoing Actions

As indicated, the current GWMP was the first plan of its type prepared by Council for the non-urban Green Wedge areas of the municipality. This was reflected by the identification of 30 ongoing actions which targeted various ways in which Council and the community could support the sustainable use and development of the Green Wedge.

All the ongoing actions are operational and continue to be supported across Council as part of day-to-day business operations, with many considered business-as-usual. For example, some of these business-as-usual activities include:

- Increase networking links with the local indigenous community to ensure understanding and respect for sites of Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity within the municipality.
- Distribute information on community organisations and services to encourage networking and increase community capacity, particularly within the rural community.
- Advocate on behalf of the community to the Victorian Government for funding to support those services and facilities deemed most necessary in the rural areas and in particular Whittlesea Township.
- Provide business support and advice to keep farmers on the land. This includes continued networking, promotion and business development opportunities for owners and managers of our agricultural enterprises.
- Advocate on behalf of the farming community and maintain input into agricultural research and strategies that seek to support farming ventures, including highlighting the true cost of maintaining a rural property.
- Maintain data exchange agreements between Council and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.
- Advocate for, and contribute to, discussions regarding the creation of a 1,200 hectare Grassy Eucalypt Woodland Reserve within Whittlesea's Green Wedge.
- Work with State Government and all relevant agencies to use forward strategic planning to reduce conflict and balance the ecological needs of the kangaroo population with the social, environmental and ecological needs of local residents, particularly the working agricultural community.
- Build upon the role of existing local committees and community groups such as the Merri Creek Management Committee, Darebin Creek Management Committee, Landcare and the Victorian Farmers' Federation as they champion the cause of the Whittlesea Green Wedge.
- Build upon existing community involvement in waterway health through promotion and support for programs such as WaterWatch and riparian revegetation activities.

- Development of rural education programs such as the Landcare series which continue to be supported by Council to encourage diversification of sustainable farming methods
- Develop community knowledge of rural land stewardship and the Green Wedge by regularly supporting and distributing information to rural landholders through the Rural News newsletter and the Whittlesea Landcare group. Council also provides support for two other rural based groups: Eden Park Blackberry Action Group and Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications

Link to Strategic Risk

Not linked to the risks within the Strategic Risk Register

Implementation Strategy

Communication

Council's website will be updated to reflect the progress made in implementing the GWMP. Further, the community will be further informed of the progress made as part of the Stage 2 community engagement on the new Draft GWMP which will occur by 30 June 2022.

Critical Dates

This report represents the 2021 reporting on the GWMP Action Plan, in line with the GWMP's Monitoring and Implementation Plan.

Community engagement on the new Draft GWMP which is currently being developed, will occur by 30 June 2022. This is discussed below.

Next Steps

The incomplete actions will continue to be progressed as part of the implementation of the *Biodiversity Strategy* and *Whittlesea Water For All Strategy*, as discussed above. These actions will also be considered in the context of the new GWMP.

Development of the new *GWMP 2022 – 2032* is currently underway. Stage 1 community engagement on the Discussion Paper occurred in May/July 2021 which has informed a Draft GWMP. The Stage 2 community engagement on the Draft GWMP will occur by 30 June 2022.

While development of the new GWMP is still underway, we are continuing with the implementation of all ongoing actions, and continuing to progress the incomplete actions referred to above.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Under Section 130 of the *Local Government Act 2020* and Rule 47 of the Governance Rules 2021, officers providing advice to Council are required to disclose any conflict of interest they have in a matter and explain the nature of the conflict.

The Responsible Officer reviewing this report, having made enquiries with relevant members of staff, reports that no disclosable interests have been raised in relation to this report.

Conclusion

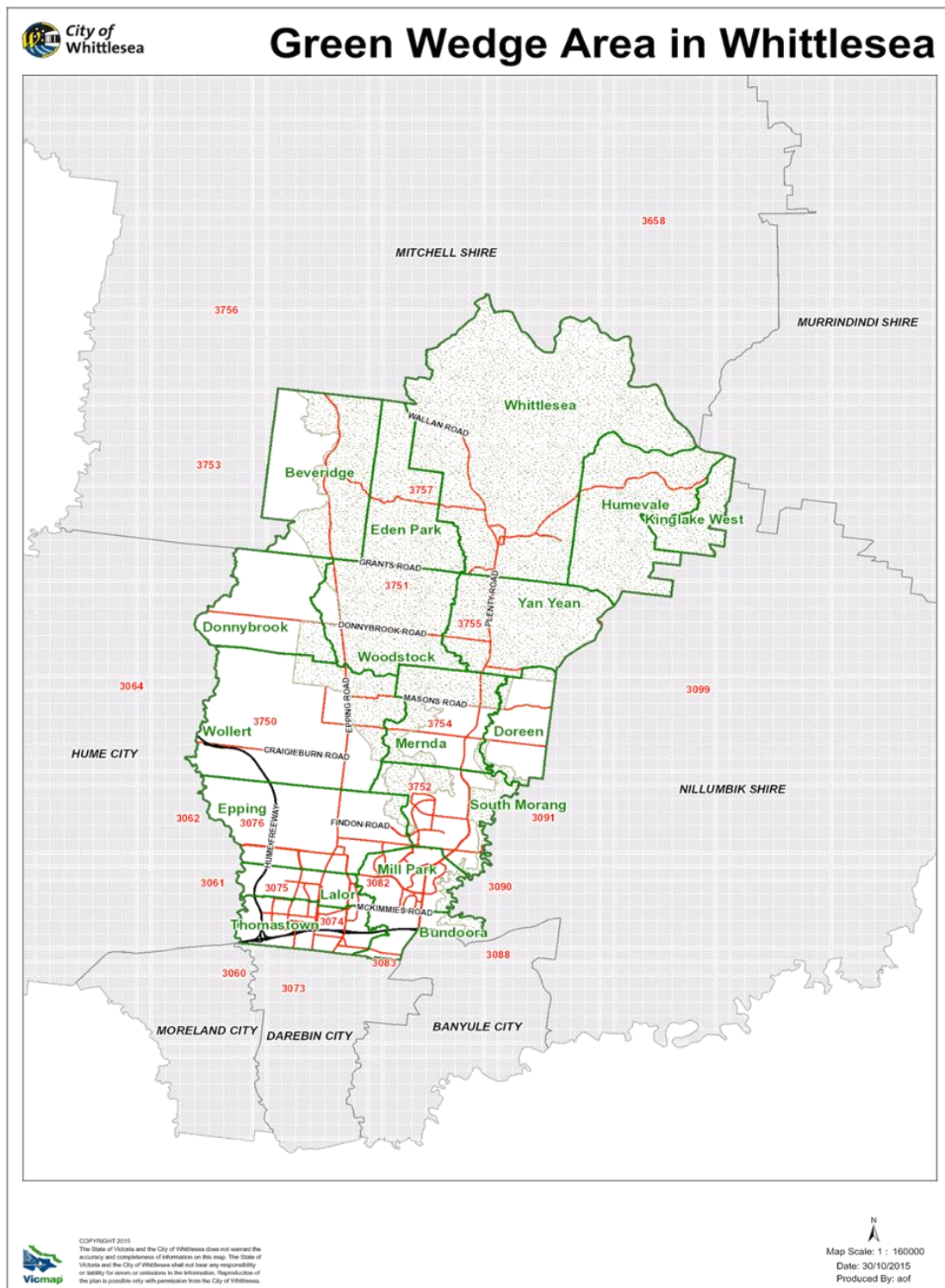
The *Green Wedge Management Plan 2011-2021* was adopted by Council in July 2011. It sets out 84 actions prioritised over ten years to achieve the strategic objectives and community's vision for the sustainable management, enhancement and protection of the Green Wedge and non-urban areas of the municipality.

This represents the 10th and final year reporting against the Action Plan. It demonstrates a great achievement with all 84 actions commenced, including 54 short, medium, long-term actions and 30 ongoing actions. Only 5 actions are underway but are yet to be completed. These incomplete actions will continue to be progressed as part of the implementation of the *Biodiversity Strategy* and *Water For All Strategy* and will also be considered in the context of the new GWMP.

The successful implementation of the *Green Wedge Management Plan* reflects the collaborative and committed approach across various Council Departments in implementing the Plan.

A new *Green Wedge Management Plan* is in the process of being developed in consultation with the community. Further consultation on the Draft *Green Wedge Management Plan 2022 – 2032* will occur in mid-2022.

Attachment 1: Green Wedge area in Whittlesea



| ACTION | | Progress Update 2021 | | | LEGEND | |
|--------|---|----------------------|---|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| No | Description (as adopted at 2016 review) | Priority | Department | Status | | |
| B01 | Determine the most cost and time effective means of collating and managing flora and fauna data for Council. Ensure that data exchange agreements are maintained between the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Council. | O | Sustainable Environment | Ongoing | | Completed |
| B02 | Investigate the relationship between significant ecosystems and type of land ownership (e.g. parkland, reserve or private landholding). Assess best methods of protection for areas of high conservation significance. | S | Strategic Futures / Sustainable Environment | In progress | | In Progress |
| B03 | Continue to advocate for, and contribute to, discussions regarding the creation of a 1,200 hectare Grassy Eucalypt Woodland Reserve within Whittlesea's Green Wedge. | O | Strategic Futures / Sustainable Environment | Ongoing | Complete | Completed in 2021 |
| B04 | Distribute educational material to landholders primarily through Council publications and local media regarding the following biodiversity topics: Ecological burns - develop community understanding of the necessity of fire to maintain ecosystem health; Significant ecosystems - highlight the variety and uniqueness of ecological communities, flora and fauna throughout the rural areas. Clearly define Commonwealth and State legislation that prohibits the removal or destruction of significant habitats; Fencing and grazing management - increase knowledge of the environmental and economic benefits of fencing remnant trees, creating shelter belts and leaving ungrazed areas for habitat purposes on rural properties; Pest plants - develop landholder knowledge of what constitutes pest plants. Offer a range of options and methods for removal; Pest Animals - Develop landholder knowledge regarding the management of pest animals. | S | Sustainable Environment | Complete | | |
| B05 | In partnership with fire agencies and relevant State Government departments, continue to distribute educational material on ecological burns via local media and direct mail outs to landholders. | O | Parks and Urban Design | Ongoing | | |
| B06 | Continue to contribute to discussions with key stakeholders including the State Government and local wildlife groups about habitat corridors, particularly in an urban-rural interface context. This should also be considered at the framework planning stage for future urban land. | O | Strategic Futures / Sustainable Environment | Ongoing | | |
| B07 | Develop a local planning policy that provides guidance on the benefits of planning for habitat corridors particularly within areas being developed for urban purposes. | S | Strategic Futures | Complete | | |
| B08 | Continue to work with State Government and all relevant agencies to use forward strategic planning to reduce conflict and balance the ecological needs of the kangaroo population with the social, environmental and ecological needs of local residents, particularly the working agricultural community. | O | Strategic Futures / Sustainable Environment | Ongoing | | |
| B09 | Strengthen planning provisions targeted at the identification, protection and enhancement of biodiversity and environmental values of the Whittlesea Green Wedge as follows: Protect all vegetation communities of national, state, regional and local significance with appropriate planning provisions; Support strengthening planning controls for areas of remnant native vegetation and fauna habitat, in particular, support the inclusion of sites of biodiversity significance, strategic habitat links and buffer areas through the application of the Environmental Significance Overlay; and Consider applying the Road Closure Overlay to disused rural roads to provide habitat linkages between rural landholdings. | M | Strategic Futures/Sustainable Environment | In progress | | |
| B10 | Develop local planning policy to provide guidance and direction on native vegetation retention and net gain offsets. | S | Sustainable Environment | Complete | | |
| B11 | Identify preferred strategic locations for native vegetation offsets within the municipality taking into account ecological significance, land ownership, adjoining land uses, potential for creating habitat corridors and property size. | S | Parks and Urban Design | Complete | | |

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| B12 | Increase opportunities for community interaction with significant ecosystems such as revegetation activities and value-added activities such as 'breakfast with the birds' or 'frogs on wheels' and seed collection/plant propagation. | O | Sustainable Environment | Ongoing |
| B13 | Foster coordination between Local and State Government with regard to the development and implementation of state wide management plans and priorities for pest plant and animal control on public private land. Advocate for increased funding to implement strategic priorities relevant to the Whittlesea area. | O | Sustainable Environment | Ongoing |
| B14 | Expand existing programs that promote the value and significance of ecosystems on Council-owned land through education and interpretive signage. | M | Parks and Urban Design | Complete |
| L01 | Continue to provide business support and advice to keep farmers on the land. This includes continued networking, promotion and business development opportunities for owners and managers of our agricultural enterprises. | O | Economic Development | Ongoing |
| L02 | Employ an Agribusiness Officer, who would demonstrate Council leadership and best practice through the provision of sound business advice (subject to funding). | S | Strategic Futures / Sustainable Environment | Complete |
| L03 | Advocate on behalf of the farming community and maintain input into agricultural research and strategies that seek to support farming ventures, including highlighting the true cost of maintaining a rural property. | O | Economic Development | Ongoing |
| L04 | Explore options for financial support and partnerships to develop a publicity campaign aimed at demonstrating the value of farming communities to the social, economic and environmental health of the municipality and Melbourne as a whole. | S | Economic Development | Complete |
| L05 | Investigate further options to alter Council's farm rate to better support agribusiness on the urban fringe. | O | Economic Development | Ongoing |
| L06 | Continue to advocate through the Interface Councils Working Group for reforms to the way rural land is rated within interface areas. | O | Economic Development | Ongoing |
| L07 | Set up a pilot programme to support the production of local food and consideration of food links through innovative sustainable land use practices, to increase food security within the municipality. | S | Economic Development | Complete |
| L08 | Investigate any economic development linkages between the relocation of the Melbourne Wholesale Fruit and Vegetable Market to Epping and the usage of agricultural land in the municipality. | S | Economic Development | Complete |
| L09 | Update land capability information in support of both new/innovative and traditional rural enterprises. | S | Economic Development | Complete |
| L10 | Establish a local marketing program to promote successful alternative agribusiness operating in the rural areas of the municipality such as olive groves, organic farming, farmhouse cheese, berry farming and Chinese herbs for the complementary herbal medicine market. | S | Economic Development | Complete |
| L11 | Monitor the State Government initiatives in better supporting farming and review local planning provisions to support agribusiness and the right to farm in rural area, as required. | S | Strategic Futures | Complete |
| L12 | Further develop existing rural education programs to encourage the diversification of sustainable farming methods. | M | Strategic Futures | Complete |
| L13 | Work in partnership with government departments and agencies to promote and facilitate the uptake of environmental market mechanisms, such as ecoMarkets, to rural residents. | O | Sustainable Environment | Ongoing |
| L14 | Review current sustainable land management programs to better support small rural properties, promote land stewardship practices including the management of pest plants and support property owners required to prepare a Land Management Plan in accordance with the Whittlesea Planning Scheme. | S | Sustainable Environment | Complete |
| L15 | Commit to permanent funding for an Environmental Protection Officer to ensure ongoing compliance with: The Whittlesea Planning Scheme; Whittlesea's Pest plant Local Law; Planning permit conditions; Land management plan directives | S | Sustainable Environment | Complete |
| L16 | Develop guidelines on the Land Management Plan process as it relates to planning assessment processes. | S | Sustainable Environment | Complete |

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| L17 | Further develop a monitoring system that flags Land Management Plans associated with planning permits issued for rural properties. Showcase success stories and follow-up non-complying properties with the offer of assistance and expertise as required. | S | Sustainable Environment | Complete |
| L18 | Further develop community knowledge and perception of rural land stewardship through encouragement and support for neighbourhood teams that share knowledge between new and existing landholders. | M | Sustainable Environment | Complete |
| L19 | Continue to offer a holistic service that facilitates a coordinated response across Council departments to land use planning applications for the rural areas. | O | Building and Planning | Ongoing |
| L20 | Develop further mechanisms to discourage and regulate soil dumping, filling of land and native vegetation removal through education, policy development and enforcement and compliance processes. | S | Sustainable Environment | Complete |
| L21 | Develop a quarterly rural newsletter that focuses on good rural land stewardship practices and showcases success stories. | S | Sustainable Environment | Complete |
| L22 | Amend planning provisions to address environmental hazards within the City of Whittlesea as follows: (22.1) Application of a new overlay, the Salinity Management Overlay, to areas of dryland salinity (22.2) Application of a new overlay, the Erosion Management Overlay, to areas of stream, gully and sheet erosion; and (22.3) Reassess the boundaries of the existing Wildfire Management Overlay in response to the Government's implementation of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. | S | Strategic Futures / Sustainable Environment | In progress |
| L23 | Further develop community appreciation of the rural landscape through a variety of landscape exploration events. | O | Sustainable Environment | Ongoing |
| L24 | Investigate partnership arrangements with key groups for the sponsorship of two new annual events: -Best Environmental Sustainable Rural Design for the promotion architectural excellence in a rural setting; and -Best Rural Management for the promotion of best whole farm design and management. | M | Economic Development | Complete |
| L25 | Further develop community appreciation of the rural landscape through the creation of a 'Celebrate the Landscape' event aimed at showcasing and promoting 'ownership' of a range of green wedge values. | M | Sustainable Environment | Complete |
| L26 | Amend planning provisions targeted at protection of significant landscapes and significant vistas as follows: Ensure the Significant Landscape Overlay is correctly applied to all visually sensitive areas within the Whittlesea Green Wedge; Develop local policies as part of the Planning Scheme review process to guide development adjacent to visually sensitive hilltops; As part of the Planning Scheme review process develop a road setback policy for visually significant roadside corridors and include in the Local Planning Policy Framework; and Implement changes to the LPPF to insure that the design, siting and form of new dwellings and other buildings within green wedge areas are appropriately and sensitively integrated within rural and natural environments. | M | Strategic Futures / Sustainable Environment | In progress |
| L27 | Investigate innovative land use options which support sustainable land use and management, particularly at the urban rural interface. | O | Economic Development / Sustainable Environment | Ongoing |
| L28 | Based on research undertaken on interface land uses, pilot and evaluate alternate land treatments at the peri-urban interface. | M | Economic Development | Complete |
| L29 | Undertake a review of the Whittlesea Township Local Structure Plan with an emphasis on defining the township boundary and interface issues between urban and rural areas. | S | Strategic Futures / Sustainable Environment | Complete |
| L30 | Protect significant habitat areas adjoining any Urban Growth Boundary by encouraging and facilitating conservation trusts/covenants, market-based instruments such as ecoMarkets, carbon and/or native vegetation offsets through focussing on programs that provide income for 'farming nature'. | M | Sustainable Environment | Complete |
| L31 | Review and report on the status of all current extractive industry operations | M | Strategic Futures | Complete |
| L32 | Strengthen communication between interactive industry operators and Council, Government Departments and local stakeholders in order to create an environment that allows the open discussion of issues and opportunities such as land management, buffers and threat mitigation. | O | Strategic Futures | Ongoing |

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| L33 | Advocate to the State Government to review the Extractive Industry Interest Area (EIIA) as it relates to the City Of Whittlesea having regard to recent Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) changes and defined Green Wedge values including native vegetation. | O | Sustainable Environment / Strategic Futures | Ongoing |
| L34 | Assess the practicalities of leaving disused quarries unfilled at the expiry of their licence in order to create a wetland environment. | M | Parks and Urban Design | Complete |
| P01 | Build upon the role of existing local committees and community groups to champion the cause of the Whittlesea Green Wedge. Establish an education program targeted at local committees and community groups. | S | Sustainable Environment | Complete |
| P02 | Build upon the role of existing local committees and community groups such as MCMC, DCMC, Land Care and the Victorian Farmers' Federation as they champion the cause of the Whittlesea Green Wedge. | O | Sustainable Environment | Ongoing |
| P03 | Create networking opportunities that raise awareness of the issues faced by both rural and urban residents, to promote the value of farmers and farming practices. | S | Economic Development | Complete |
| P04 | Continue to distribute information on community organisations and services to encourage networking and increase community capacity, particularly within the rural community. | O | Community Services | Ongoing |
| P05 | Develop 'Rural Information Packs' that can be distributed to potential property purchasers that includes pre-purchase information such as planning checklists, siting and design guidelines, environmental values and land management tips. | S | Strategic Futures | Complete |
| P06 | Disseminate information to the community on a timely basis regarding Local and State Government plans for the Whittlesea Green Wedge, and create opportunities for community input. | O | Strategic Futures | Ongoing |
| P07 | Provide diverse housing opportunities, including aged care housing, in areas of existing residential land in the Whittlesea Township, where services and facilities are located. | O | Strategic Futures / Building and Planning | Ongoing |
| P08 | Ensure Whittlesea Township can continue to accommodate local enterprises, businesses and other facilities which support the Whittlesea Green Wedge. | M | Economic Development | Complete |
| P09 | Continue to advocate on behalf of the community to the Victorian Government for funding to support those services and facilities deemed most necessary in the rural areas and in particular Whittlesea Township. | O | Community Services | Ongoing |
| P10 | Develop guidelines for the design and construction of infrastructure that is appropriate for rural areas, such as street lighting and road construction. | M | City Design and Transport | Complete |
| P11 | Utilise planning provisions to increase the liveability of the Whittlesea Green Wedge as follows: Investigate the best zoning for rural communities such as Eden Park to better reflect current land patterns; and Rezone any isolated parcels of Green Wedge land to reflect the zoning of surrounding land. | M | Strategic Futures | Complete |
| P12 | Update Council's Tourism Strategy to highlight tourism and recreation opportunities in the green wedge. | S | Strategic Futures | Complete |
| P13 | Develop a 'Welcome to Whittlesea Pack' that highlights tourism opportunities such as boutique agribusinesses, emerging and established tourist destinations. | M | Strategic Futures | Complete |
| P14 | Research opportunities for geotourism or 'whole of place' tourism. Focusing on local character rather than generic aspects, this form of tourism incorporates historic structures, living and traditional cultures, landscape, cuisine and arts, as well as local flora and fauna. | M | Economic Development | Complete |
| P15 | In partnership with land owners/managers, (P15.1) investigate partnership opportunities that extend our network of multiuse trails, (P15.2) including opportunities for heritage interpretation. Linking People and Places – Government Strategy for Trail Networks in the Metropolitan Area and The Victorian Trail Strategy will inform the potential location of multi-use trails. Attention should be paid to the disused Mernda-Whittlesea rail track as it provides linkages between rural and urban areas. | M | City Design and Transport | Complete |
| P16 | Continue to develop Council's Whittlesea Recreational Strategy in consultation with the community and implement proposed actions. | O | Leisure and Community Facilities | Ongoing |
| P17 | Develop a trail network strategy for the Green Wedge area to cater for walkers, bike and horse riders, linking to key destinations including the Whittlesea Township. | M | City Design and Transport | Complete |

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| P18 | Research community perceptions of local parks and user needs in order to prioritise funding opportunities for facilities, including signage. | M | Parks and Urban Design | Complete |
| P19 | Advocate on behalf of the community to Parks Victoria regarding increased funding for state managed parks and the potential for creation of new parklands (such as Quarry Hills and around the Merri Creek). | O | Parks and Urban Design | Ongoing |
| P20 | Investigate the provision of alternative transportation options for attendees of showcase events, such as the Whittlesea Agricultural Show and the Whittlesea Country Music Festival. | M | City Design and Transport | Complete |
| P21 | Explore options to promote Council's full range of cultural heritage opportunities at festivals and events. | O | Arts Culture & Events | Ongoing |
| P22 | Enhance community perception of heritage places and cultures through continued promotion of Council's Cultural Heritage Program. | O | Aboriginal & Cultural Diversity | Ongoing |
| P23 | Explore options for developing interpretive signage at significance heritage places and areas of cultural significance within the municipality. | M | Community Cultural Development | Complete |
| P24 | Increase networking links with the local indigenous community to ensure understanding and respect for sites of Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity within the municipality. | O | Aboriginal & Cultural Diversity | Ongoing |
| P25 | (25.1) Explore opportunities to employ a Heritage Officer in order to (25.2) develop a Heritage Strategy for the holistic management of heritage across Council. | S | Strategic Futures | Complete |
| P26 | Following the heritage study undertaken during 2009/10, implement findings and apply a Heritage Overlay to all significant places not protected. Any proposed amendment to the Whittlesea Planning Scheme will provide additional opportunity for public submission. | S | Strategic Futures | Complete |
| P27 | Demonstrate Council leadership and best practice by investigating the feasibility of developing a Management Plan for all heritage places on Council-owned land. | M | Strategic Futures | Complete |
| P28 | Advocate on behalf of heritage management to the Victorian Government regarding treatment of cultural heritage on Crown land. Support Heritage Victoria in its role of caring for our public heritage places. | O | Strategic Futures | Ongoing |
| W01 | Ensure local provisions are consistent with State legislation through the Planning Scheme Review project. | S | Strategic Futures | Complete |
| W02 | Reinforce consistency between State and Local Government legislation. | S | Strategic Futures | Complete |
| W03 | Research current signage at waterways and investigate funding opportunities to install identification signage for all waterways, particularly at the intersection of major roadways and paths. At a minimum, catchment signage should also be installed alongside the Plenty River, Merri Creek and Darebin Creek in prominent positions. | S | Parks and Urban Design | Complete |
| W04 | Build upon existing community involvement in waterway health through promotion and support for programs such as WaterWatch and riparian revegetation activities. | O | Sustainable Environment | Ongoing |
| W05 | Strengthen planning provisions targeted at the protection and improvement of the environmental health of waterways as follows: Add new schedules to the Environmental Significance Overlay to protect all major waterbodies; Revise the extent of the mapping associated with the existing Environmental Significance Overlay schedule 3 to include unprotected waterways; and Investigate the rezoning of the municipality's two water storage catchments from Public Use Zone to Public Conservation and Resource Zone. | S | Strategic Futures | In progress |
| W06 | Conduct a feasibility study on a 'Top of the Catchment' event that focuses on the municipality's waterways and catchments. | L | Sustainable Environment | Complete |
| W07 | Continue to encourage good water sensitive urban design from new developments abutting reserves and waterways in order to protect aquatic and biodiversity values. | O | Building and Planning / Strategic Futures | Ongoing |
| W08 | Investigate opportunities to contribute to catchment projects and support partnerships that research the effects of surface and sub-surface water use, particularly due to increased numbers and declining water quality and quantity of local farm dams and bores. | M | Sustainable Environment | Complete |