

ITEM 3. DRAFT URBAN ECOLOGY STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN – ADOPTION**FILE NO: S119213****SUMMARY**

This report outlines the general content of the draft Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan (the Plan), the community response to its public exhibition during August and September 2013, and recommends that Council adopt the Plan.

The City commissioned the Plan in 2010 in response to a commitment to protect native plants and animals in the Sustainable Sydney 2030 Strategy and to meet strong demand from the local community.

The objectives of the Plan are to:

- protect, expand and improve the condition of naturally occurring, locally indigenous vegetation, including possible remnants;
- increase the extent of bush restoration sites across the City's Local Government Area (LGA), and maintain them in good condition;
- re-establish representative patches of the likely original vegetation communities;
- protect and enhance sites that provide habitat for priority fauna species;
- increase the distribution and abundance of priority fauna species; and
- improve habitat connectivity across the LGA, particularly between priority sites, and between habitat areas in adjoining LGAs.

The Plan was exhibited for public comment from 16 August to 20 September 2013. Following the exhibition period, 17 submissions were received, which commented on 48 different issues. Where considered appropriate, changes have been made to the Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council adopt the draft Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan (the Plan) with amendments, as shown in Attachment A to the subject report;
- (B) the Plan be internally reviewed every 12 months, with a comprehensive review in ten years to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with the City's policies and strategic direction;
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to approve minor amendments, which do not change fundamental principles of the Plan; and
- (D) Council note the funding implications of the Plan as set out in the subject report.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Resolution of Council – 29 July 2013

Attachment B: Submission and responses table

Attachment C: Amended Draft Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan (with additions shown in underline and *italics*)

(Note – This Attachment will be circulated separately from the Agenda Paper and to Councillors and relevant senior staff only. A copy will be available for viewing on the City’s website and at the One Stop Shop and Neighbourhood Service Centres.)

BACKGROUND

1. In 2008, the City of Sydney launched its Sustainable Sydney 2030 Strategy and committed Sydney to becoming a “green, global and connected city”. Central to this vision was the commitment to be internationally recognised as an environmental leader.
2. The ‘green’ component of the Sustainable Sydney 2030 Strategy included a commitment by the City to protect native flora and fauna. This commitment, combined with strong demand from the local community, led the City to commission the Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan (the Plan) in 2010.
3. The purpose of the Plan was to identify and prioritise actions that would be undertaken to conserve and enhance biodiversity across the City’s Local Government Area (LGA).
4. On 14 May 2012, Council adopted the Greening Sydney Plan, which focuses on delivering the physical ‘green’ aspects of Sustainable Sydney 2030. The Greening Sydney Plan recognises that improved urban ecosystems can have both environmental and social benefits, and identifies urban ecology as a strategic focus area.
5. On 29 July 2013 Council endorsed the public exhibition of the draft Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan for a period of six weeks (refer to Attachment A).

Draft Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan

6. The vision for the draft Plan is to restore and conserve resilient urban ecosystems that support a diverse range of locally indigenous flora and fauna to create a liveable city for all of its inhabitants.
7. The draft Plan’s objectives are to:
 - (a) protect, expand and improve the condition of naturally occurring locally indigenous vegetation, including possible remnants;
 - (b) increase the extent of bush restoration sites across the LGA and maintain them in good condition;
 - (c) re-establish representative patches of the likely original vegetation communities;
 - (d) protect and enhance sites that provide habitat for priority fauna species;
 - (e) increase the distribution and abundance of priority fauna species across the LGA; and
 - (f) improve habitat connectivity across the LGA, particularly between priority sites and between habitat areas in adjoining LGAs.

8. Two broad types of actions are outlined in the draft Plan:
 - (a) General actions – actions that require implementation across the City of Sydney organisation and/or the LGA as a whole. These have been grouped into five categories:
 - (i) park and streetscape maintenance – actions focused on expanding bush restoration and other habitat enhancement works. These actions ensure that best practice bush regeneration and biodiversity management practices are implemented;
 - (ii) planning controls – actions focused on ensuring an appropriate level of ecological assessment is undertaken during the development assessment process. The potential to incorporate habitat features in site landscaping for new developments will also be maximised;
 - (iii) staff and contractor engagement – actions focused on improving staff and contractor awareness of biodiversity and their requirements in relation to the draft Plan;
 - (iv) community engagement – actions focused on improving community awareness of biodiversity and increasing participation in bush restoration and other habitat enhancement works; and
 - (v) partnerships – actions focused on collaborations with other land managers within the LGA, and with government departments, non-government organisations and research institutions to maximise the effectiveness of the draft Plan.
 - (b) Specific actions – site-specific actions that relate to six priority sites in the LGA that have relatively high biodiversity value. The draft Plan also includes species-specific actions that relate to priority fauna species. The priority fauna include threatened species identified in the LGA, as well as other species that have become uncommon in the city and urban areas generally.
9. The following eight targets specified in the draft Plan will be used to measure progress:
 - (a) the area of naturally occurring vegetation will be maintained or increased from the 2012 baseline of 2.3 hectares by 2023;
 - (b) naturally occurring vegetation will be in good condition by 2023;
 - (c) the area of bush restoration sites will be increased by 100 per cent from the 2012 baseline of 4.8 hectares by 2023;
 - (d) bush restoration sites will be characterised by well-established, structurally complex vegetation, with minimal weeds by 2023;
 - (e) representative patches of at least two of the likely original vegetation communities of the LGA will be established by 2023;
 - (f) indigenous fauna species diversity will be maintained or increased from the 2012 baseline of 87 species by 2023;

- (g) priority fauna species will be recorded from a greater number of locations and in higher numbers compared to the 2012 baseline by 2023; and
- (h) there will be a progressive annual increase in the number of habitat features for priority species established along potential habitat linkages by 2023.

Consultation Feedback

10. The draft Plan was placed on public exhibition for public comment from 16 August to 20 September 2013.
11. In total, 17 submissions were received from individuals and community organisations, including Pyrmont Ultimo Landcare and The Glebe Society Inc.
12. The City has considered the feedback from the public exhibition. A summary and assessment of the submissions is contained in Attachment B.
13. Comments included:
 - (a) general support;
 - (b) support for partnerships with land managers and volunteers;
 - (c) support for extension of habitat corridors and potential linkages;
 - (d) request for native plant nursery establishment;
 - (e) need for improved weed management and habitat plantings;
 - (f) inclusion of aquatic and invertebrate diversity;
 - (g) a review of priority fauna species;
 - (h) requests for dog management at bush restoration sites and parks; and
 - (i) support for planning reforms and guidelines for new developments.
14. The draft Plan has been amended, where appropriate, in response to the feedback received. The minor changes that have been made indicate that the Plan has met the expectations of the community.

Proposed Amendments

15. From the 17 submissions received:
 - (a) seven amendments to the draft Plan are proposed;
 - (b) 37 comments did not require changes as they are either beyond the scope of the draft Plan or were already detailed and/or supported within the draft Plan;
 - (c) four requested amendments are not supported; and
 - (d) a number of minor text changes were also included.

16. The amended draft Plan, with additions underlined and in *italics* is at Attachment C.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

17. Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This draft Plan is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 2 - A Leading Environmental Performer – implementation of the draft Plan will lead to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in the LGA. This is vital in demonstrating the City's commitment to and leadership in environmental performance, particularly since biodiversity decline is an environmental issue of global importance.
 - (b) Direction 6 - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies – recognises the diverse lifestyles, interests and needs of our communities. Implementation of the draft Plan will contribute to the quality of life of residents by improving visual and recreational amenity. This will be achieved through increased greening that will provide increased opportunities to interact and connect with nature. The draft Plan also includes numerous community engagement actions, which will respond to and expand upon the strong local community interest in biodiversity.
 - (c) Direction 9 - Sustainable Development, Renewal and Design – responds to sustainability and environmental imperatives facing our cities. Actions under this direction aim to better capture the potential of streets, parks and squares in public life and improve design excellence in our buildings. Implementation of the draft Plan will lead to indigenous vegetation and other habitat improvements being incorporated into the upgrade of City parks and new developments, thereby improving their environmental sustainability.
18. The draft Plan is also aligned with the:
- (a) City of Sydney Corporate Plan 2012/15, which lists the development and implementation of an Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan as a major project; and
 - (b) Greening Sydney Plan, which recognises that improved urban ecosystems can have both environmental and social benefits, and identifies urban ecology as a strategic focus area.

Organisational Impact

19. The draft Plan identifies that staff and contractors with specialist bush restoration and biodiversity management skills are required. This requirement has been included in the new park maintenance contract specifications, and specialist contractors are already maintaining some sites. Recruitment of one staff member is planned to fill an existing vacancy, and training is being undertaken by other staff in the Parks Maintenance team.

20. Collectively, the various City divisions and business units will need to continue working in a collaborative manner, and with the community and other land managers, to ensure the specified targets are achieved.

Social / Cultural / Community

21. There is strong community interest in biodiversity in the city. Within the LGA, there are currently five active community groups with a specific biodiversity focus, namely:
- (a) Pymont Ultimo Landcare;
 - (b) the Glebe Bushcare Group;
 - (c) the recently established Friends of Orphan School Creek;
 - (d) the Glebe Society's Blue Wren Group; and
 - (e) Sydney Park Swans.
22. The draft Plan was commissioned in part to meet the expectations of the community, and includes numerous community engagement actions to respond to and expand upon this strong community interest.
23. There is also increasing community expectation that indigenous vegetation and other habitat features are incorporated into City parks and into new developments. The draft Plan includes actions that have been formulated to meet these expectations.

Environmental

24. Like most urban areas, biodiversity within the city has been dramatically reduced from its original state.
25. Implementation of the draft Plan will lead to the restoration of locally indigenous vegetation. It will also assist animal species that have become uncommon or that have disappeared from the LGA to become more abundant and widespread, thereby contributing to a reversal of past biodiversity decline.

Economic

26. There is growing recognition globally that ecosystem services have significant economic value, although many currently do not have market prices and their value can only be estimated by indirect methods.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

27. Council spends approximately \$1.3 million per year on urban ecology activities (e.g. bush regeneration staff, ecologist, volunteer support, wetland maintenance).

28. Implementation of the draft Plan will require an estimated allocation of \$600,000 of capital expenditure over ten years, and additional recurrent (or operating) funding of approximately \$115,000 per year. These funds will be requested as part of the development of the 2014/15 operating and capital works budgets and future years forward estimates.
29. The additional funding will provide an online fauna database, interpretive signage, school programs, along with the creation of new habitat in parks and open spaces.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

30. Legislation that informs the draft Plan and the management of this resource includes:
 - (a) Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999;
 - (b) Local Government Act 1993;
 - (c) Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979;
 - (d) Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995;
 - (e) Fisheries Management Act 1994;
 - (f) National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974;
 - (g) Noxious Weeds Act 1993;
 - (h) Crowns Land Act 1989;
 - (i) Heritage Act 1977; and
 - (j) Work Health and Safety Act 2011.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

31. Copies of the draft Plan were placed on public exhibition at the City's One Stop Shop and all Neighbourhood Service Centres, and exhibited on the City's and Sydney Have Your Say website from 16 August to 20 September 2013.
32. The draft Plan was advertised in the local press (Central Courier, Wentworth Courier, Inner West Courier – Inner City and City News on 28 August 2013) as required under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1993.
33. Emails were sent to all community groups, government and non-government agencies, other land managers, and research institutions, within and outside the LGA requesting their review and comment.
34. Three community drop-in sessions were organised at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney Park and Eveleigh Markets during the public exhibition period.

35. Stakeholder meetings were organised with community groups in Glebe, Forest Lodge and Pyrmont. City staff attended a community meeting in Pyrmont Community Centre on 2 September 2013 to present the draft Plan.
36. The public exhibition demonstrated that there was considerable support for the draft Plan, with many submissions providing positive feedback. It was noted in some of the submissions that the draft Plan goes a long way to addressing issues raised at community consultations.

GARRY HARDING

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