

9.3. Report from Section 41 Climate Emergency and Environment Committee - Recommendations on the Township Greening Strategy and Action Plan

C24591

Moved Cr Lou Nicholson seconded Cr Peter Oliver

That Council note the resolution (CEEC 2447) of the Section 41 Climate Emergency and Environment Committee (the Committee) as follows:

That the Committee recommend to Council:

- 1. The implementation and finalisation of the draft Township Greening Strategy (the Strategy) be undertaken in partnership, valuing, and employing local knowledge and expertise;**
- 2. That the Strategy encompass a three-element focus: street scape plantings (which includes verge plantings), biodiversity plantings in our township reserves, and community plantings supported by Council (e.g. Adopt a Tree or Adopt a Park, revegetation);**
- 3. That the Strategy be implemented in the first instance through pilot programs in townships with greatest canopy need beginning with Milang;**

4. That Council's volunteer coordination activities be resourced adequately and appropriately to ensure that volunteer groups are engaged within a coherent and consistent manner;
5. That Council engage with local volunteer groups for the coordinated implementation of the Township Greening Strategy including community planting and maintenance; and
6. That Council reallocate funds from the further development of a consultant derived strategic plan, to uses consistent with the approach recommended above.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Moved Cr Lou Nicholson seconded Cr Peter Oliver

1. That, in the absence of funds to support implementation of an Alexandrina-wide Town Greening Action Plan, Council reduce the remit of the Action Plan to prioritising areas with the lowest levels of tree canopy coverage, such as Milang, Woodchester, and Port Elliot, to the value of \$40,000 (half of the 2024/25 \$80,000 budget); and
2. That Council engage with the Climate Emergency and Environment Committee (CEEC) to finalise the Action Plan and ensure volunteer groups are included in the coordinated implementation of the Action Plan; and
3. That the remaining \$40,000 of the 2024/25 budget be committed to implementing the Action Plan.

Cr Milli Livingston, with consent of the mover and seconder, sought and was granted leave of the meeting to vary the motion as follows:

C24592

That Council: (as varied)

1. in the absence of funds to support implementation of an Alexandrina-wide Town Greening Action Plan, council reduce the remit Stage 1 of the Action Plan to prioritising areas with the lowest levels of tree canopy coverage, such as Milang, Woodchester, and Port Elliot, in accordance with the Climate Emergency and Environment Committee (CEEC) recommended a three element focus approach to the value of \$40,000 (half of the 2024/25 \$80,000 budget); and
2. engage with CEEC to finalise the Action Plan and ensure volunteer groups are included in the coordinated implementation of Stage 1 of the Action Plan; including community planting and maintenance; and
3. That the remaining \$40,000 of the 2024/25 budget be committed to implementing the Action Plan.
4. include funding for Stage 2 of the Action Plan in the 2025/26 budget process.

CARRIED

9.3. Report from Section 41 Climate Emergency and Environment Committee - Recommendations on the Township Greening Strategy and Action Plan

Responsible Officer: Stacey Bateson (General Manager Community)

Report Author: Monika Rhodes (Principal Officer Environmental Strategy)

Recommendation

Recommendation/s of the Section 41 Climate Emergency and Environment Committee

That Council note the resolution (CEEC 2447) of the Section 41 Climate Emergency and Environment Committee (the Committee) as follows:

That the Committee recommend to Council:

1. The implementation and finalisation of the draft Township Greening Strategy (the Strategy) be undertaken in partnership, valuing, and employing local knowledge and expertise;
2. That the Strategy encompass a three-element focus: street scape plantings (which includes verge plantings), biodiversity plantings in our township reserves, and community plantings supported by Council (e.g. Adopt a Tree or Adopt a Park, revegetation);
3. That the Strategy be implemented in the first instance through pilot programs in townships with greatest canopy need beginning with Milang;
4. That Council's volunteer coordination activities be resourced adequately and appropriately to ensure that volunteer groups are engaged with in a coherent and consistent manner;
5. That Council engage with local volunteer groups for the coordinated implementation of the Township Greening Strategy including community planting and maintenance; and
6. That Council reallocate funds from the further development of a consultant derived strategic plan, to uses consistent with the approach recommended above.

Recommendation/s of Administration

That Council:

1. receive and note the Township Greening Strategy and Action Plan Report.
2. endorse the delivery of the draft Township Greening Strategy and Action Plan in accordance with the adopted Annual Business Plan, and Budget 2024/25 (C24337)
3. Note that a further report will be brought back to Council once the draft Township Greening Strategy and Action Plan are ready for public consultation.

Prior Resolutions

Prior Council Resolutions

Meeting Date	Agenda Item Number	Report Title	Resolution Number
22 February 2021	2.2	Community Strategic Plan 2020-2040	ACM20893
3 April 2023	8.20	Draft Tree Canopy Benchmark Study and Thermal Imaging Report	C23122

Meeting Date	Agenda Item Number	Report Title	Resolution Number
3 April 2023	8.21	Tree Management Policy and Procedure	C23123
18 December 2023	8.7	Outcome of Community consultation on draft Environmental Action Plan 2030 and draft Climate Emergency Action Plan	C23509
17 June 2024	8.3	Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget 2024/25 Public Consultation Outcomes	C24254
24 June 2024	4.1	Annual Business Plan and Budget Adoption and Rate Declaration 2024/25 Financial Year – Delivery of the Township Greening Strategy and Action Plan	C24337

Prior Committee Resolutions

Meeting Date	Agenda Item Number	Report Title	Resolution Number
3 April 2023	8.19	Climate Emergency Advisory Committee Recommendation to Council	C23121
18 March 2024	9.12	Report from Section 41 Climate Emergency and Environment Committee - Budget Allocations for an Enhanced Township Greening Programme	C24110 / C24111

Community Strategic Plan Impact

LIVEABLE	Distinctive townships, places, spaces, and transport networks that support active lifestyles vibrant cultures and productive enterprise
GREEN	Climate ready, a place where nature is valued, and resources are managed sustainably and creatively to support a new economy
ENABLED	Recognised as a trusted leader, known for our forward-thinking approach, can-do attitude, and operational excellence

Report Objective

The purpose of this report is to receive recommendations from the Section 41 Climate Emergency and Environment Committee (the Committee) for agenda item 9.1- Minutes of the Section 41 Climate and Emergency Committee, from its meeting held on 30 September 2024, and to consider further information and recommendations from Administration.

The public agenda and minutes from this Committee meeting can be located on Council's website at <https://www.alexandrina.sa.gov.au/council/council/committees/climate-emergency-advisory-committee>; and the confidential agenda and minutes from this Committee meeting were uploaded onto the Council Member Portal.

Executive Summary

Increasing Alexandrina Council's tree canopy cover is consistently identified as a key priority by our township communities.

Following the [Tree Benchmark Report](#) that was endorsed in 2023, Administration appointed Edge Consulting to prepare a draft *Township Greening Strategy* which included a 'Roadmap' (refer Attachments 1 and 2). It is noted that these are working documents and subject to change prior to being presented as drafts for community engagement endorsement.

The *Roadmap*, which is part of the *Strategy*, was workshopped with key members of the Section 41 Climate Emergency and Environment Committee (the Committee) and identifies a number of specific actions that need to be undertaken to achieve the Objectives of the *Strategy* (i.e. to increase township greening).

The Committee is passionate about delivering tree canopy cover, and in February 2024 the Committee provided Council with a well-researched business case with recommendations as part of Council's 2024/2025 Budget deliberations (C24110 / C24111). Recognising that developing a tree strategy is a complex process, the Committee's proposal from February 2024 provided recommendations to Council, including:

1. proposing a once-off \$210,000 budget for the '*development of a Township Greening Strategy and Implementation Plan*', and
2. '*a further budget allocation of not less than \$600,000 be made to support plantings and maintenance of these additional trees commencing in the 2024/25 budget year and ongoing*' (C24110 / C24111).

Council ultimately resolved to assign \$80,000 in the 2024/25 Budget (C24337): '*That the delivery of the Action Plan resulting from the Township Greening Strategy be a priority project in the consideration of the revised A2040 Strategic Plan*'.

Hence, Administration is in the process of procuring a consultant to deliver Council's resolution to develop an 'Action Plan' resulting from the *Township Greening Strategy*. This also aligns with Actions 3.1 and 3.2 of the draft *Strategy's Roadmap* (refer Attachment 2) using the allocated \$80,000 budget. An Action Plan containing items outlined in Actions 3.1 and 3.2, will identify how we can achieve our canopy targets. This Action Plan will in turn be used to finalise the draft *Strategy* ahead of Council's endorsement for community consultation.

This work requires specialist expertise and is considered crucial in understanding what we need to plant, where to plant and when (prioritising), as well as providing the basis for obtaining future grants for township greening.

Context

One of the key visions identified by the community in [Alexandrina's Community Strategic Plan \(A2040\)](#) under Liveable Alexandrina is: '*KPI 1.1 Increase township greening and tree planting for canopy cover. All village innovation plans (VIPs) to include performance targets for urban greening and tree canopy enhancements*' (ACM20893).

To be able to set performance targets, Council needed to first understand the baseline, i.e. the current tree canopy cover of Alexandrina's main townships.

In March 2023, Council adopted the Tree Canopy Benchmark Study and Thermal Imaging Report (the '[Tree Canopy Study](#)') that investigated the tree canopy baseline for 11 townships; the thermal imaging to demonstrate the urban 'heat island' effect across these townships ('heat maps'); and the canopy cover by landholder (Council land, private land; and Crown land).

The [Tree Canopy Benchmark Report](#) (C23122) showed that tree canopy cover correlated with a decrease of heat where sufficient tree canopy cover existed in the townships. Another major finding was that the majority of trees are found on private land (78%) compared to Council managed land (21%); and Crown land (1%). This means to offset 1% loss of canopy cover on private land, an increase of 3.3% of canopy cover on public land would be required.

Following the Tree Canopy Benchmark Report, Council resolved a budget of \$25,000 towards 'Tree Canopy' Cover (refer page 35 Annual Business Plan and Budget 2023/24). This budget was used to prepare a draft high level *Township Greening Strategy* (Attachment 1) and associated *Roadmap* (Attachment 2).

The draft *Township Greening Strategy* identifies objectives related to achieving increased canopy targets for our townships; and the draft *Roadmap* identifies a number of specific actions that need to be undertaken to achieve the Objectives of the Strategy (i.e. to increase township greening).

Given the limited budget available in the 2023/24 financial year, the draft Township Greening Strategy was prepared without a full understanding of how to achieve canopy targets for each township, and so is a high-level document that requires further refinement following expert input.

\$80,000 was allocated in the Annual Business Plan and Budget 2024/25 for 'A Township Greening Strategy and Action Plan' to: *'implement key strategic directions outlined in Council's Climate Emergency Declaration and Environmental Action Plan. With a focus on increasing vegetation canopy coverage and biodiversity in townships, the proposal seeks to create cooler, greener spaces, enhance habitat value, and promote community well-being'* (refer page 92 [Annual Business Plan and Budget 2024/25](#) and C24337).

General Analysis

The draft high-level ***Township Greening Strategy (Attachment 1)*** and ***draft Roadmap (Attachment 2)*** were prepared with input from key staff across the business units (including Council's Technical Officer Parks and Gardens) and from key members of the Committee (invitations went out to all Committee members). This included two (2) workshops held in April and May 2024.

It is noted that these are working documents and subject to change prior to being presented as drafts for community engagement endorsement.

The draft *Township Greening Strategy* outlines Council's need for, and approach to, sustaining and enhancing the benefits of urban greening across our townships. It identifies five (5) Objectives and will provide key strategic principles to guide Council and the community over the next decade/s. It does not include evidence-based advice on how to achieve our canopy targets for townships as this requires specialised input.

The draft *Township Greening Strategy* includes an associated draft ***Township Greening Roadmap (as Appendix A to the Strategy)*** that outlines key actions required under the five (5) Objectives to meet the Strategy. These actions have an associated priority and estimated budget per action (***Attachment 2***). The draft *Roadmap* is still to be fully reviewed and finessed before it can be designed by Council's Communications Team for inclusion into the draft Township Greening Strategy as Appendix A.

To realistically increase the tree canopy cover of our townships, Council requires an understanding of what are achievable performance targets per township and how we can achieve them (i.e. what to plant where, when and how), as well as what resources are required to achieve our targets. Information that needs to be captured to determine where, when and how, will include an understanding of the availability and capacity of Council owned land to accommodate tree planting, any relevant infrastructure constraints, data on where existing trees are located and the number, species, age and health of existing trees as well as the identification of tree species (and supporting understorey) that would be expected to provide the necessary level of canopy cover (location based requirement) and that are likely to survive/thrive in future climates.

Undertaking this body of work is what is proposed in Actions 3.1 and 3.2 of the draft *Roadmap* (i.e. the development of an Action Plan for each township) and is considered a priority by Administration in informing realistic township-based targets. This work requires expertise and capacity not currently available on staff.

Following consideration of the draft *Township Greening Strategy* and draft *Roadmap* at their meeting on 30 September 2024, the Committee has resolved to recommend an alternative approach to Council relating to the use of the budgeted amount of \$80,000.

Specifically, the Committee recommended that the 'funds' (i.e. the budget of \$80,000) be used for a planting and pilot program based on input from local volunteers, instead of using the funds to pay for a consultant to progress Actions 3.1 and 3.2. The Committee further recommended that Milang be the first pilot, and that resourcing and a well co-ordinated planting program be provided for volunteers.

The Committee's recent discussion at their meeting on 30 September 2024 indicated a general belief from some members that the expertise to deliver on draft Actions 3.1 and 3.2 is available within the various community and volunteer groups, and that the budget allocation for the development of an Action Plan instead be used to fund tree planting itself.

In August 2024, following Council's resolution and budget allocation C24337, Administration had progressed with the procurement process for appointing a suitably qualified consultancy to deliver the actions considered the highest priority in our journey towards a greener Alexandrina, being Action 3.1 and 3.2 of the draft *Roadmap*. This is also in line with the Committee's first recommendation from February 2024 to develop a '*Township Greening Strategy and Implementation Plan*' (C24110 / C24111).

The Request for Quote to deliver draft Action 3.1 and 3.2 was scheduled to go out for open tender in September 2024 with works to be started by the preferred consultancy in October 2024. However, due to the Committee's new recommendation to Council, Administration has put this tender on hold awaiting Council decision.

It is relevant to clarify that tree planting is an ongoing budgeted activity and currently, Council is planting 500 trees on average per year. However, to realistically and significantly increase the tree canopy cover with future suitable species, Council requires a better understanding on where / what / when / how to plant, and what resources (annual operating budget, FTEs, capital equipment requirements) and tree / vegetation species are required to achieve the target set in the draft *Township Greening Strategy*.

In addition, specialist input is required to model and advise if the state-set [draft Greater Adelaide Regional Plan](#) (GARP) Tree Canopy Target of 30% by 2055 (and a two-percent increase by 2030), is achievable, and if so, how can Council achieve these targets.

Importantly, the draft *Township Greening Strategy* and draft *Roadmap*, and more specifically the outcomes of Actions 3.1 and 3.2 of the draft *Roadmap*, are vital in applying for grant funding to assist with meeting these key milestones by 2055.

There is a real concern from Council's Administration that, without an evidence-based Action Plan (i.e. proposed Actions 3.1 and 3.2), Council and/or community will:

- not achieve township greening targets;
- not understand the costs and resources associated with these targets;
- plant inappropriate species or species unable to increase canopy levels (one key outcome from Charles Sturt's modelling work; see below); and / or
- plant in a way that is not consistent with Council's infrastructure intent (for example where infrastructure may need replacing, or on council land / reserves that are reserved for other activities).

There is also significant concern that the absence of an evidence-based target/s and approach on how to achieve a greener Alexandrina and a lack of understanding where plantings could be undertaken through suitably qualified expertise, will result in an ad-hoc and undefendable planting regimes and significant resourcing demands on Council staff to coordinate community driven planting programs.

Administration supports and values the input of the community in achieving a greener Alexandrina, and in fact considers it necessary to partner with the various groups to be able to reach targets. For example, Administration is currently progressing with Cittaslow an 'Adopt a park' initiative in Goolwa.

The involvement of the community, community groups, private landowners, and First Nations partners, are identified throughout in the draft Strategy and Roadmap, but especially under Objective 3: Grow our urban canopy cover; Objective 4: Innovate and advocate for increased township greening; and **Objective 5: Engaging and educating within Council, our communities, and with First Nations partnerships**. Given the majority of land sits in private ownership (78% across our townships), their involvement is crucial.

In summary, Administration recommends to Council that the existing draft *Township Greening Strategy* and Actions 3.1 and 3.2 as identified in the draft *Roadmap* be progressed (as per Council resolution C24337) to inform, guide and successfully achieve Alexandrina's greening program across our townships.

A detailed response to each of the Committee's recommendations is contained in **Attachment 3**.

Comparative Analysis

Charles Sturt

Charles Sturt engaged a specialist in the field to map if their business as usual (BAU) approach to planting trees will enable them to reach their canopy target; to receive information on the tree prioritisation; and prepare a planting program. The modelling undertaken by the specialists as part of this process showed that Charles Sturt's BAU was not only inadequate in terms of tree numbers planted, but importantly they needed to plant different tree species in specified areas to be able to reach their tree canopy target.

This enabled Charles Sturt Administration to identify where they needed to increase their resources in terms of budget, capital equipment requirements, an annual operating project, and FTEs. A report went to Council on 23 October 2023, where Council endorsed Charles Sturt's '[Growing Green: Canopy Improvement Strategy 2021-2025](#)'; supported budget bids to allow for the implementation of the Strategy (including recurrent budgets); and acknowledged the provision of additional resources as key requirement to implement the strategy and reach their targets, including capital (fleet) equipment; funding for a Tree Planting Program; and more.

Most importantly, this work enabled Charles Sturt to develop a public website that outlines their 'action plan', called '[Street Planting Program](#)', based on the data and information received from the original modelling report and plan, as well as Council's ongoing tree planting work, completions, progress and future planting. The Officer responsible for this work stated that one of the most important outcomes was that it **helped to significantly reduce debate in the community on where to plant, where and why, because Charles Sturt's Street Planting Program provides a clear 'action plan'** based on best evidence and knowledge. It is publicly available, and the community can access this information, including completed work, at any time.

Charles Sturt example is the same approach that Alexandrina Administration recommends.

Port Pirie

Another example, where the development of an evidence-based greening approach was used, is Port Pirie. The [Port Pirie Greening Program](#) is funded by the Government of South Australia as part of a four-year \$5.7 million partnership to help green Port Pirie.

The successful grant was only possible because Port Pirie had developed a clear strategy with an action plan (the 'Port Pirie Greening Program') that allowed State Government to have the confidence that funding is going to the right places for the right reasons and outcomes.

This \$5.7 million partnership will allow Port Pirie to 'minimise lead exposure pathways, beautify community, increase biodiversity, provide increased presentation value of their city as well as assisting in their response to climate variation'. More information can be found here: [Greening the Region | Port Pirie Regional Council](#).

In summary, these are only two examples of South Australian councils that have used evidence-based data to be able to implement their greening strategy, targets and greening programs; to minimise community discussions and angst on where to plant, what and when; to plan for appropriate resourcing; and to attract considerable grant funding. Hence, this is why Alexandrina's Administration recommends continuing to progress Action 3.1 and 3.2 of the draft Roadmap as part of the draft Township Greening Strategy that will provide Council with these benefits in the long-term.

Financial and Economic Implications

In accordance with the Alexandrina Council's Adopted Budget / Long Term Financial Plan, the financial implications of adopting the recommendation is low.

However if the Committee's recommendation to reallocate the budget is resolved then the financial is considered medium.

Comparing costs associated with similar work carried out by other councils (e.g. Charles Sturt, Holdfast Bay), the development of the Action Plan (i.e. greening program; the delivery of Actions 3.1 and 3.2) of Alexandrina's *Roadmap* (in line with C24337) will most likely cost the allocated \$80,000. Alexandrina, as a rural council with a minimum of 11 townships, has a much greater area to cover for modelling than metropolitan councils. But, without going out to market, the real cost remains unknown and is currently based on feedback from other councils.

However, while this cost seems a lot on face value, it will be offset with future financial, community, biodiversity, and climate emergency outcomes. Case in point is the Port Pirie Greening Program that attracted State Government funding of \$5.7 million to help green Port Pirie.

The reallocation of budget to undertake on-ground work, as recommended by the Committee, is considered a short-term solution based on the sentiment to undertake community plantings now. This has the real (negative) potential to result in overall higher costs and the lack of attracting external funding given the complexity of township greening and the long-term benefits that a proper mapped out process can bring – as evidenced by other councils.

The reallocation of the allocated budget of the Annual Business Plan and Budget 2024/25 would require Council to rescind its resolution C24337 and may also require a new community consultation process as the budget was adopted following extensive community consultation during Annual Business Plan and Budget 2024/25 and Long Term Financial Plan roadshow and MySay Alexandrina consultation (see <https://mysay.alexandrina.sa.gov.au/abp2024-25>). This included a video with the Chair of the Committee, who discussed the importance of a draft Greening our Townships Strategy **and** Action Plan. A report on the public consultation outcomes was provided to Council on 17 June 2024 (C24254). Undertaking another extensive community engagement to consult on Alexandrina's Township Greening pathway will require further budget allocation and FTE requirements.

Importantly, significant time has already been lost and will continue to be lost and will set Council back by over 12 months. This will have financial implications as the outcomes of the Action Plan were to provide evidence-based information to Council and Administration on how to allocate and plan budgets, FTEs, and capital equipment required over the next year/s.

Risk Management

In accordance with Alexandrina Council's Risk Assessment Matrix, the risk of adopting this recommendation is considered low.

However, there are two (2) other aspects to consider:

- the risk of not progressing with the development of a Strategy and Action Plan as per Council resolution C24337 following extensive community consultation on this topic; and
- the risk of not endorsing the Committee's recommendations.

Both options may impact negatively on Council's reputational risk, as greening was identified by the Community as a priority in A2040 and during the Village Conversations. With so many diverging ideas on how to undertake township greening, it is considered that this risk will remain unless we have an evidence-based target and greening program, as recommended by Administration. As Charles Sturt identified, understanding first the requirements on what is required and updating the community by having a transparent website, helps to significantly reduce debate in the community on where to plant, what and why.

For the reasons discussed in the body of this report, and in accordance with the Alexandrina Risk Management Policy and Matrix, the risk of not adopting the recommendation proposed by Administration is considered major.

Conclusion

In line with requirements of the Council resolution (C24337) '*That the delivery of the Action Plan resulting from the Township Greening Strategy be a priority project in the consideration of the revised A2040 Strategic Plan*', it is recommended that development of an Action Plan continue (i.e. Actions 3.1 and 3.2 as per the *Roadmap*), and that the Action Plan clearly provides evidence-based information on how to achieve our canopy targets per townships (i.e. where to plant, what, when, and how).

A clear Action Plan, prepared by specialists in the field, is imperative to:

- address Council's priority '*That the delivery of the Action Plan resulting from the Township Greening Strategy be a priority project in the consideration of the revised A2040 Strategic Plan*' (C24337);
- address KPI 1.1 as outlined in A2040;
- identify how Council **and** community can work together to increase canopy cover in each township and how to achieve these targets;
- understand the complexity, the limitations, and the correct areas to plant;
- help focus plantings and species mix in correct areas, including community plantings in allocated township reserves;
- provide evidence-based information to Council and Administration on how to allocate and plan budgets, FTEs and capital equipment required over the next year/s;
- help to identify suitable township reserves where community plantings have their biggest impacts in terms of canopy cover targets, but also biodiversity, urban heat, community vulnerability, and green equity aspects;
- allow for applications of grants (e.g. state and federal) – case in point are Port Pirie's example and the development of Alexandrina's [Coastal Adaptation Study and Plan](#) that allowed Council to receive over \$200,000 in federal and state grant funding;
- help to reduce discussions in the community on where to plant and why because the Action Plan provides a clear implementation pathway across our townships – one of the biggest positive outcomes identified by other councils (e.g. Charles Sturt, [Dubbo Regional Council](#));
- reduce the financial risk because township greening is focused in areas where we know that it can achieve the outcomes / targets; and
- focus the prioritisation of council plantings based on functional areas / sizable units so that Council service and maintenance can be maximised – another benefit outlined by other councils (e.g. [Port Pirie](#)).

This recommendation has not been taken lightly as Administration understands the drive of our community and the Committee to dedicate the budget to the planting. Instead, the recommendation is based on the learnings from, and advice provided by, other councils that are ahead of Alexandrina in the urban greening pathway.