

Melton City Council Environment Plan Community Directions Paper

April 2016

Introduction

Melton City Council is developing an Environment Plan that will guide the way it manages the environmental impacts of its operations and service delivery. The Plan will help reduce Council's ecological footprint, and protect and enhance Melton's natural environment.

This paper outlines the approach to the development of Melton City Council's first Environment Plan. In developing the Plan, Council is seeking community input into its direction. Details of the Community Engagement approach are outlined in this paper.

The following items are discussed in this document:

1. Why does Council need an Environment Plan?
2. Developing the Environment Plan
3. What will the Plan cover?
4. Have your say
5. What has Council done so far?
6. Next steps

1 Why does Council need an Environment Plan?

Council is responsible for managing local environmental issues in the interests of both the community of today and the future. Presently it does this through a range of policies, programs, projects, advocacy and community engagement.

Council is responsible for a range of services that have an environmental impact. Some of these services have a direct environmental focus, such as environmental planning and environmental education programs. Other functions do not have such a clear link to the environment but may have huge environmental impacts, such as town planning and infrastructure management.

Melton City Council is in a position to act as an environmental leader in the community. Council has a significant opportunity to demonstrate leading practices through its service delivery and reduce its organisational ecological footprint to encourage an environmentally sustainable municipality.

The Plan will allow for an integrated response to the environmental impacts of its policies, strategies, programs and environmental initiatives. Benefits of an Environment Plan include:

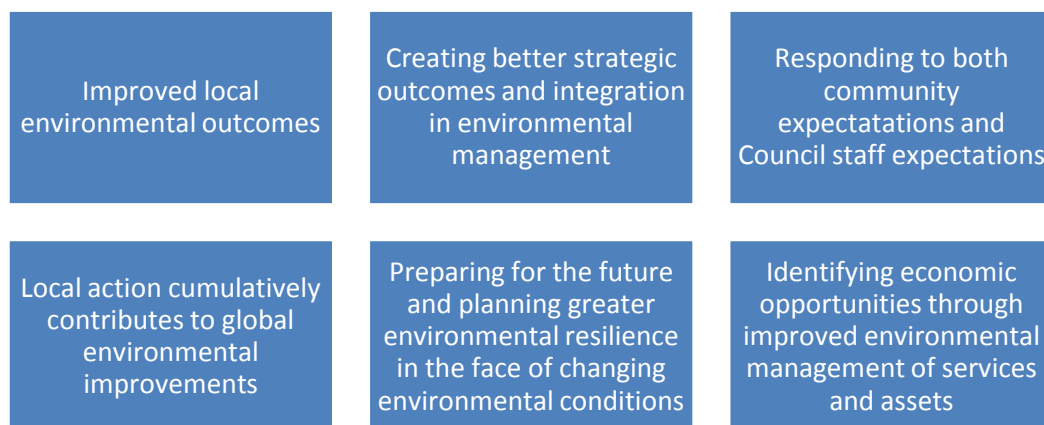


Figure 1: Benefits of an Environment Plan

1.1 Scope of this document

The scope of this Directions Paper is to provide relevant background information to start the conversation with the community about Council’s management of environmental issues.

2 Developing the Environment Plan

The Plan will focus on Council’s *internal* approach to environmental management. This will guide Council service delivery to improve the ecological footprint of the organisation.

The Plan will be developed in two parts:

1. **A Strategic Plan** which establishes the vision and principles for environmental action in the municipality;
2. **An Action Plan** to support the implementation of Council’s intentions, which will provide the detailed actions to achieve the vision.

A clear framework will underpin the development of the Plan. The framework will outline Council’s:

1. **Vision** to define the environmental expectations
2. **Goals, Objectives and Targets** to deliver Council’s expectations
3. **A Plan** to achieve the Goals
4. **Actions** to identify how implementation will occur
5. **Monitoring, Evaluation and Review** to collect data to measure and gauge success

Timeframe for developing the Environment Plan

The Environment Plan is expected to be completed by December 2016. Figure 2 below identifies key milestones throughout the development of the Plan.

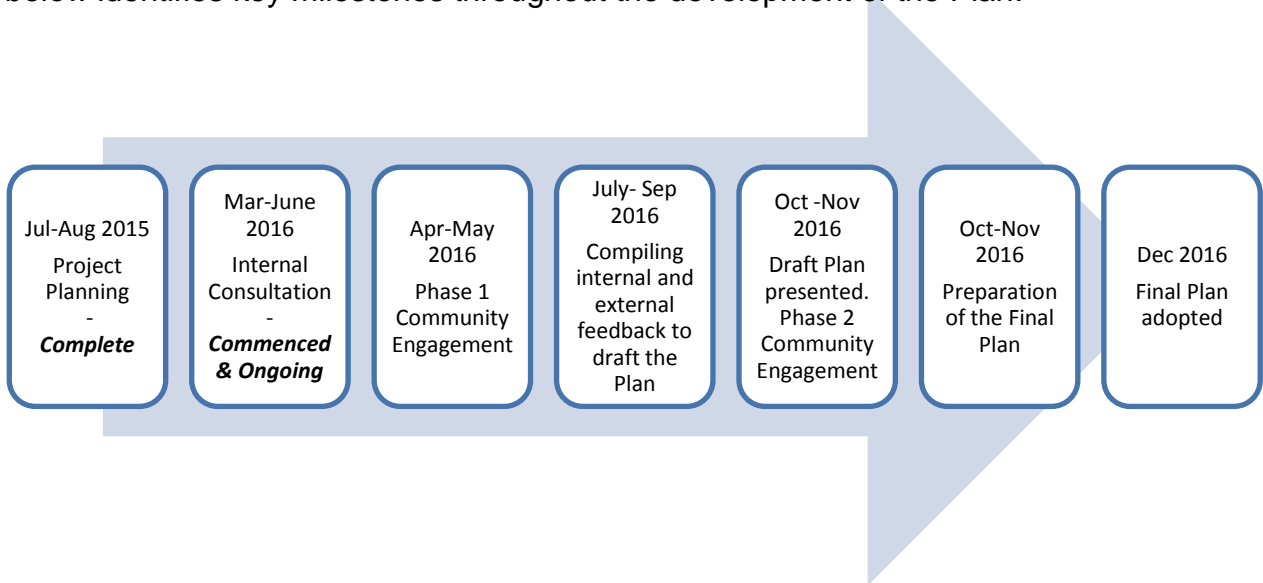


Figure 2: Timeframe for delivery of project activities

3 What will the Environment Plan cover?

To frame the initial discussion, Council will consider its environmental management in the context of three thematic categories (see Figure 3) that relate to its areas of core business.

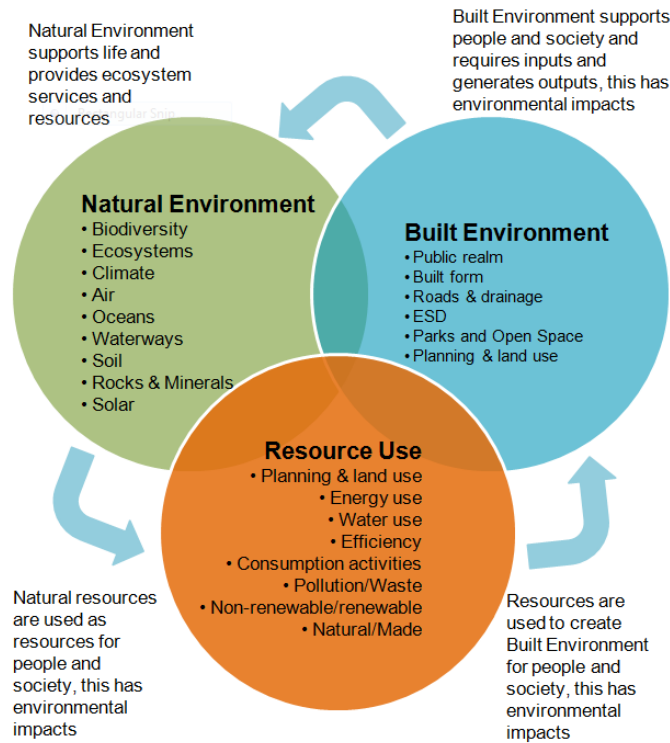


Figure 3: Thematic environmental categories to consider in the Environment Plan

Identifying the relationship between Council services and these thematic categories will provide opportunities for integrated environmental management by Council. These categories are discussion starting points that aim to assist Council to assess its level of influence in environmental management.

3.1 Key environmental topics

Melton City Council has conducted an assessment of its service delivery and identified the associated environmental impacts of these activities. Based on this, four key themes have been identified for further exploration in developing the Environment Plan: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Waste and Water. These themes are to be framed by the many challenges and opportunities of the rapid urban growth that the City is expecting over the next 20 years and beyond.

3.1.1 Growth in the City of Melton

Melton is currently in a phase of booming growth. During 2014/15, the City of Melton had the fifth fastest growth in Victoria at 4.0%. Between 2001 and 2014, the estimated residential population of the City more than doubled. Population projections indicate that the City's population will be more than 315,908 by 2036, making it almost the size of the City of Canberra today. Ultimately, the City of Melton will support a population of over 400,000 people.

This rapid urban growth is one of the biggest issues that will impact upon Melton's natural environment. Growth presents many opportunities but with that will come environmental pressures. Right now, although there are some limitations, Melton City Council has the ability to plan and manage how the municipality transitions from the rural to the urbanised.

This represents a huge challenge for Council in many ways, one of which is the impact this level of development has on the natural environment and shaping the anticipated built environment that stems from this growth. Council will be required to respond to this growth through increased service and asset provision. By considering the environmental implications of the increased service delivery, Melton City Council will be able to plan how it will manage its resource use into the future.

Besides growth, what other big threats to Melton's natural environment should the Environment Plan address?

3.1.2 Biodiversity

Melton is located on the Victorian Volcanic Plains (VVP), Victoria's only biodiversity hotspot and one of only fifteen in Australia. The VVP supports many species of native plants and animals that are protected under Commonwealth and State laws. Over 150 years of agriculture, grazing and urban development has radically transformed the landscape, and as little as only 1% of the former extensive grasslands and grassy woodlands of the VVP survive today. The remaining areas are thus of particular significance.

The remnant patches of VVP support a number of rare or threatened flora and fauna species, including Spiny Rice-flower (*Pimelia spinescens*), Growling Grass Frog (*Litoria raniformis*) and Striped Legless Lizard (*Delmar impar*). In addition to being required under Commonwealth and State legislation, the protection of these and other species is essential to ensure resilient ecosystems that provide a range of services, including provisioning (food, shelter, materials), regulating (climate regulation, pest control) and cultural services (recreational, cultural, aesthetic).

Melton's already reduced biodiversity continues to be threatened on many fronts, including through the clearing of native vegetation for land development, the spread of weeds, predation by invasive species and the impacts of climate change.

Council's role

Council plays a key role in conservation and land management decisions that impact on flora and fauna. As land use planners and public land managers, Council has responsibility for planning and regulating many activities that can impact upon threatened species and biodiversity. Council also plays a role in translating national and state policies and legislations into local action, including the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and the Flora and Fauna Act 1988.

Council currently has a number of processes and programs aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity in the City. For example, the Environmental Enhancement Program sees Council work with rural landowners to improve land management practices, and the Environmental Education program builds partnerships with community groups to promote the health of native vegetation and wildlife. In addition, a number of targeted plans, including the Western Plains North Green Wedge Management Plan, have been designed to ensure biodiversity concerns are considered in land-use planning decisions.

Many other Council strategies reflect a commitment to conserving and enhancing native flora and fauna in the City of Melton. The Environment Plan will provide further direction to ensure Melton's biodiversity is protected now and into the future.

Do you support the key theme Biodiversity? If not, suggest changes.

3.1.3 Climate change

Climate change is already being felt in Melton. According to the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the Bureau of Meteorology, in the future Melton can expect higher average temperatures and increased frequency of hot days, reduced rainfall, higher risk of extreme weather events, and increased bushfire risk days.

As climate change profoundly affects many aspects of the environment, as well as our lifestyles, Council has a responsibility to mitigate climate change through reducing its greenhouse gas emissions, as well as adapting to impacts through forward-thinking, climate-resilient planning.

Council's role

Council's services and activities have both an impact on and are impacted by climate change. Council manages a number of assets that contribute to the City's carbon emissions, including street lights, buildings and Council's fleet vehicles. As Melton's population surges, Council will be required to respond with additional assets to ensure service levels are maintained for the growing population. The challenge for Melton City Council will be to meet future demands for services with climate resilient assets while decreasing net greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2011, Council adopted its Greenhouse Action Plan, which outlined 69 actions to help Council reduce its emissions. As a result, Council has changed over 3,800 mercury vapour streetlights to energy efficient T5 and LED technology. It has also seen a wide range of energy efficiency upgrades into many of Council's buildings, including Melton Waves and other sports facilities, as well as the Melton Civic Centre. Moving forward, the Environment Plan will provide Melton with strategic direction and key actions to guide the City towards achieving its zero-net emissions target by 2025.

Do you support the key theme Climate Change? If not, suggest changes.

3.1.4 Waste

As Melton's population continues to grow, there will be increased pressure to minimise and manage waste in the City. Reducing waste at the source and diverting waste from landfill has a number of benefits, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, conserving natural resources and reducing energy and water use. High landfill rates lead to high greenhouse gas emissions and potential contamination of soil and water, with associated impacts on flora and fauna.

Council's role

Council plays a significant role in reducing and managing waste within the City. Through its operations and service delivery, Council generates waste, as well as being responsible for collecting, reusing, recycling and disposing of waste in the City.

In 2011, Council adopted its Waste Management Strategy 'It Starts With Zero', committing Council to the waste hierarchy; prioritising avoiding, reducing, reusing, recycling, recovering and treating waste, before using disposal as a last resort. The strategy contained a number of actions to improve Council's waste management

practices. Council's Greenhouse Action Plan additionally outlined a number of actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through improved waste reduction and diversion activities, including installing Bokashi bins for organics diversion at the Melton Civic Centre and installing recycling systems at Council owned sporting facilities.

Council also implements a number of waste avoidance practices in its daily operations. The use of a digital file storage system reduces the need to keep hard copies of files, and recently Council trialled publishing its waste services guide and its newsletter Moving Ahead as an interactive digital version, drastically reducing the number of hard copies printed.

There is also considerable potential for Council to include environmental specifications in capital works projects and contracts, in addition to the use of environmentally proactive criteria in the evaluation of tenders. The Environment Plan will explore these and other avenues for Melton City Council to minimise the environmental impacts associated with waste management activities, while reducing waste generation in its operations.

Do you support the key theme Waste? If not, suggest changes.

3.1.5 Water

The City of Melton is located within the Werribee Catchment in the Port Phillip and Westernport Management Authority. The main waterways flowing through the City are the Werribee River and Toolern Creek, with other major waterways including Kororoit Creek and the Djerriwarrh Creek. The Melton Reservoir, which is primarily used for irrigation, is a major storage basin for the Werribee River basin. These water systems provide essential ecosystem services including sustaining many species of native flora and fauna, providing water for agriculture and industry and supporting recreational activity.

Water quality in Melton is affected by various agricultural and urban land uses in the region. Land clearing for urban growth places particular pressure on the system by increasing the cover of impervious surfaces, changing the rate of water flow and contributing pollutants in runoff into rivers and streams. Further, the encroachment of urban development onto the waterway corridor itself can cause additional localised effects including habitat loss and altered water courses.

As Melton is located in an area of low rainfall, with increasing water demands from competing uses such as irrigation for agriculture and urban areas, water quality and availability is a critical issue in the City. These pressures are likely to be exacerbated in coming years by the effects of climate change.

Council's role

Council plays a key role in water management and conservation. Civic buildings and public facilities such as leisure centres are significant water users, as is irrigation for the maintenance of open spaces. In addition, Council controls and influences decisions and assets that impact stormwater runoff and the quality of waterways, including roads, public buildings, drainage, urban planning, landscape architecture and open spaces. For example, in its role as planners, Council prepares Integrated Water Management Plans for the city's future growth areas.

In 2010, Council adopted Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) Guidelines. These outline a set of measures to minimise the impacts of urbanisation on waterways. WSUD aims to protect waterway health by improving stormwater quality and quantity, increasing recycling opportunities and reducing water demand through provision of alternative sources. The Environment Plan will identify further opportunities for Melton to improve its water management.

Do you support the key theme Water? If not, suggest changes.

4 Have your say

Do you think the plan is headed in the right direction?

Have we missed any key themes?

To ensure the Plan reflects the values and concerns of the community, we are seeking your input.

To make a submission, please send an email to citysupport@melton.vic.gov.au addressing the questions raised in this document, or any other comments you may have regarding the development of the Plan.

5 Next steps

Council will incorporate the feedback collected through community consultation into the development of a draft Environment Plan. The draft will then be released to the public for a period of community consultation, where we will be seeking further community input into the Plan.

5.1 Further Information

For further information, questions and comments raised by this Community Directions Paper please contact:

Holly Dillabough, Environmental Policy Officer
citysupport@melton.vic.gov.au
03 9747 7200

6 What have we done so far?

Council has developed and delivered many environmental initiatives across a range of departments.

The following are some highlights. The development of the Plan aims to identify and recognise other environmental achievements to add to this list.

Greenhouse Action Plan 2011-2015

Council has delivered numerous energy efficiency initiatives as part of its Greenhouse Action Plan including solar panels, improved building management systems and energy efficiency retrofits.



This has resulted in a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

LEADS Project

Council's innovative Lead, Educate, Advocate and Demonstrate Sustainability (LEADS) project is an energy efficiency initiative that targets Council assets and delivers community education.



It was the winner of the Keep Australia Beautiful Victoria (KABV) Sustainable Cities Awards 2015, and the Victorian Local Governance Awards (VLGA) Climate Award 2016.



As part of LEADS, Council implemented an energy efficient street light upgrade with up to 77% energy savings and building energy efficiency upgrades to nine key community facilities, resulting in substantial greenhouse gas emissions reductions.

Western Plains North Green Wedge Management Plan

The plan provides a framework to support sustainable land use, land management and development of Melton's Western Plains North Green Wedge. It aims to achieve a balance between the protection of agricultural viability and environmental features and opportunities for other appropriate uses in the Green Wedge.

Melton Library and Learning Hub

The Council delivered Melton Library and Learning Hub is an innovative, environmentally designed building and Australia's first 5 Star 'Green Star' rated library.



It has been designed to maximise energy efficiency and water use whilst creating a warm and welcoming space for library visitors.

Melton Western Business Accelerator & Centre for Excellence (BACE)

The Western BACE provides a workspace and support for new and developing small businesses in the region.



It was designed and constructed with environmentally sustainable design principles and is rated as a 6 Star 'Green Star' office building.

The building is considered a leading example of environmental design and was a recent winner of the Keep

Australia Beautiful Victoria (KABV) Sustainable Cities Awards 2015.

Environmental Enhancement Program

Melton's Environmental Enhancement Program (EEP) sees Council working to encourage rural landholders to improve land management practices.



The EEP has been successfully delivered over the past two decades. The program manages weed control, pest animal control and land degradation, and also provides land management advice.

Environmental Education

Council runs a number of programs, activities and events designed to ensure our residents understand and care about the local natural environment.



In 2014/15, Council's environmental education program engaged with over 1,000 community contacts and provided support to 18 community groups.

Water Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines

Council adopted WSUD Guidelines in 2010. These guidelines provide instruction for developers to design, construct and maintain WSUD treatments to improve stormwater quality runoff before it enters our local waterways.

Environmental Reserves Management

Council manages approximately 2,000 hectares of environmentally significant land.



This includes sites of state and national significance where a number of vulnerable and endangered species including the golden sun moth and the striped legless lizard can be found.