

Green Wedge Management Plan Community Panel

Recommendations
17 November 2018

Preamble

This Panel has come together to consider the question, "What is the best way to manage Nillumbik's Green Wedge now and into the future?"

After considering the evidence and expert opinion presented to us, the recommendations made cover issues that we have identified as being critical, whether they are included in the existing Green Wedge Management Plan or not.

The panel acknowledges the significant amount of work and expertise that has gone into preparing the existing plan. We strongly believe that it should serve as a base from which to prepare an updated plan, and any actions that are yet to be completed should be carried over, unless specifically contradicted by our recommendations.

The panel acknowledges that while this is a majority view, not all of its members agree on all points. Minority reports have been prepared and should be given due consideration.

Vision

Our vision for the Green Wedge in 2030

Management of the Nillumbik Green Wedge will lead the way in supporting a vibrant, resilient, connected and diverse community, living with the landscape to enhance the environmental, social and economic sustainability of the Shire.

Principles

The Panel reviewed the current principles guiding the Green Wedge Management Plan. All remain relevant, but the panel wish to emphasise the following:

Principle 1 - collaboration: the commitment to collaboration between Council, community and stakeholders remains paramount. The voice of both rural and urban residents should be recognised.

Principle 2 - sustainability: a continued pursuit of sustainability is a priority for a Green Wedge community.

Principle 3 - leadership: Council has a responsibility to assume leadership; this should be demonstrated through all its actions around Green Wedge Management Plan review and implementation.

Principle 4 - conserve & enhance: the Council together with the community must recognise our stewardship responsibility to protecting our irreplaceable natural landscape.

Principle 5 - connectedness: both urban and rural areas of our Shire have a role to play in supporting the Green Wedge.

Principle 6 - embrace change: the Green Wedge Management Plan must acknowledge ongoing policy changes and the constantly evolving context provided by climate change, a growing Melbourne, and pressure on our precious Green Wedge resources and natural assets.

Principle 7 - social equity: the Green Wedge Management Plan must balance diverse social needs, including our social mix, differing personal needs and variable access to services.

Principle 8 - celebrate local identity: local diversity of communities within the Green Wedge must be embraced.

Principle 9 - precautionary principle: this remains fundamental to Green Wedge management.

Principle 10 - appreciation and enjoyment: The Green Wedge shall always be a special place for Nillumbik residents and the wider community.

The Green Wedge Management Panel identified several other principles that the plan must address:

1. Focus on the future: there is a danger that short-term pragmatics compromise our stewardship responsibilities. Council and stakeholders must assume responsibility for a focus on the long term, because of the precautionary principle and the need to respect future generations.
2. Indigenous voice: we have much to learn from our First Peoples, particularly about caring for country.
3. Whole of Shire approach: the Green Wedge is a whole of shire responsibility; both urban and rural areas are co-dependent and should have a voice about the Green Wedge future.

4. Relationship to Metropolitan Melbourne: Nillumbik's role as the Green Wedge shire has increased significance, as Melbourne expands within the urban growth boundaries. Nillumbik's role in protecting biodiversity and natural landscape must be supported.

OVERARCHING THEME

Topic Name: Bushfire Preparedness, Mitigation and Management

Recommendation

1. Encourage and support the use of, and further research into the impacts of, indigenous cool burning practices for ecological management and fuel reduction.
2. Promote and support community education that provides a clear understanding of risks, action, obligations and opportunities to protect people and property. This includes consideration of fire bunkers where appropriate, community safe areas, etc.
3. Council collaborate with all levels of government and residents to mitigate the risk of bushfire and resultant impacts on residents, assets and resources in the green wedge.
4. Ensure the Municipal Fire Prevention Plan is up to date, appropriate and compliant with Bushfire Royal Commission recommendations.

Rationale

- For community safety in the event of wildfire
- For the purpose of biodiversity conservation
- To ensure the two above points are not in conflict

GOVERNANCE THEME

Topic Name: Strengthened Governance for the Green Wedge Management Plan

Recommendation

Governance of the GWMP should be strengthened through:

1. Commit to establish a GWMP advisory committee. Subsuming these responsibilities within Environment and Sustainability Committee has led to a reduced focus on monitoring GWMP implementation.
2. Publish an annual budget statement relating to the GWMP about resource allocation and actual expenditure in each financial year, and reasons for variation. This should be accompanied by an annual statement of performance against GWMP performance indicators.

Rationale

- The current GWMP acknowledges the importance of "...strong, active and committed governance, in particular a commitment to proactive leadership in partnership with the community...".
- A stronger demonstration of commitment to implement the plan is required, compared to what has occurred under the current plan so far . This lack of commitment was demonstrated by the need to retrospectively prepare a report on implementation actions, only after a specific request for information by the Community Panel.
- Progress on implementation would be supported by annual assessments against key performance indicators for GWMP implementation

Topic Name: Lobby state government for Green Wedge funding

Recommendation

Lobby the State Government to be recognised as a semi-rural Shire and for increased funding to support the management of the Green Wedge.

Rationale

- GW's are the 'lungs' of Melbourne
- GW's provide a number of services to the whole of Melbourne
- GW's differ from urban environments and need different funding arrangements

ENVIRONMENT THEME

Topic Name: Biodiversity

Recommendation

- A. Develop a broad-scale land management plan to undertake regular review of biodiversity values to protect and enhance remnant vegetation, water resources, fauna and flora, and habitat corridors, and to guide landholders on biodiversity management practices.
- B. Review the placement of the Environmental Significance Overlays on private land, and appropriately fill schedules to ensure all areas of significant biodiversity are protected. These reviews should be conducted by appropriately qualified independent contractors.
- C. Review Nillumbik Biodiversity Strategy to bring into line with recently revised state environment policy.

Rationale

- Arrest the loss of native vegetation (habitat and biodiversity) on public and private land
- Identify actual and potential wildlife corridors and valuable habitat and ensure that these areas are protected
- Ensure that biodiversity data and information is current and credible.

Topic Name: Feral Animals and Pest Species**Recommendation**

Increase and prioritise the focus on feral animal and pest species reduction programs, and measure their effectiveness, in conjunction with other councils and State Government.

Rationale

- Increased community concerns about the impact of rabbits, foxes and deer, in terms of public safety, soil erosion, water contamination, vegetation loss and agriculture.
- Ensure management of feral animals and pest species remains a priority in the Green Wedge.
- Minimize impact of feral animals and pest species, including both fauna and flora, on areas of biodiversity.
- Minimize the impact of non-indigenous plant species.

Topic Name: Conserving the Landscape

Recommendation

- Conserve and enhance bush and rural landscapes to maintain the natural beauty of the green wedge
- Complete an assessment of the Green Wedge Landscape Character and implement planning controls and other recommendations arising from this study

Rationale

- Green wedge landscape is a highly valued natural resource for all people to enjoy
- Maintain natural beauty of the area in perpetuity.

Topic Name: Responding to the challenge of climate change

Recommendation

That Council develop action plans, within the next 3 years, for the mitigation and adaptation to climate change in its many dimensions.

Rationale

- That Council incorporate its Climate Change Action Plan in the Green Wedge Management Plan, this could include encouraging the use of water tanks, solar power, recycling initiatives, etc,
- To respond to the challenge of climate change, focus on revegetation practices as one of many dimensions (water, fire, pests, diseases, etc.)
- As part the adaptation response, encouraging and creating a culture of a community awareness of the impacts, such as checking on vulnerable people in the community during high temperature days.

Topic Name: Water Planning

Recommendation

Increase priority from medium to high of existing GWMP actions (EN5.1, EN 5.2, EN 5.3, EN 5.4) to improve water conservation (supply, use, recycling).

Better protect stream flows in the Green Wedge by ensuring the construction of new dams on private property takes into account water conservation and sustainability.

Rationale

- Climate change and worsening droughts.
- GWMP Background Report, Page 74-76
- Stream flows are steadily declining.

Evidence for this recommendation - GWMP Background Report p 74-76

Topic Name: Light pollution

Recommendation

Manage light pollution in the green wedge so that visibility of the night sky is enhanced and to minimise adverse effects on nocturnal native animals.

Rationale

- Sports grounds, private tennis courts and security lights can produce excess light

Topic Name: Regulation regarding grazing**Recommendation**

Hoofed grazing domestic animals to be restricted to grazing/agricultural private land-holdings appropriate for livestock or properties with low biodiversity values. Grazing to be under guidance and education of a vegetation management plan, which will be *enforceable*.

Rationale

- Diminishing biodiversity is occurring due to grazing stock being introduced to bushland on private properties.
- Current planning controls are ambiguous regarding ability to restrict or police the introduction of grazing domestic animals to bushland and biodiverse areas. State government to be lobbied to remove ambiguities in the planning scheme that will make enforcement viable.
- If the grazing is for issues such as fuel reduction, this could be achieved through guidance of a Vegetation Management Plan, approved by DELWP

Topic Name: Renewable energy

Recommendation

Investigate opportunities to support community-based, distributed, clean energy solutions (from Glossop report). Council to consider developing an Energy Plan.

Rationale

- Provision of clean and green local energy
- Disaster-resilient
- Lowering pollution and doing our bit for climate change
- Economic benefit

Topic Name: Improved road management

Recommendation

Undertake seasonal review of road conditions to improve management, and review current Road Sealing Program to ensure high use roads are prioritised.

Rationale

- It is recognised that many roads in the Green Wedge should remain unsealed, and these should be maintained in an environmentally sensitive manner.
- Reduce runoff from dirt roads; minimise silt, debris & pollution in water courses
- Improved road safety

PLANNING THEME

Topic Name: Township Plans

Recommendation

Articulate a vision and develop a plan for each Green Wedge township, which will:

1. Be a vibrant and attractive gateway to the Green Wedge for visitors.
2. Provide support and essential services for Green Wedge residents.
3. Ensure that future development is in line with environmentally sensitive design principles.
4. Ensure that future development emphasises each town's unique characteristics and remains within existing township boundaries.
5. Increase the range of housing diversity to service the needs of visitors and specific community requirements, e.g. "aging in place".

Rationale

- Townships are the location for many services to visitors (eg. cafes, restaurants)
- Community must feel connected to the townships they choose to live in, to encourage a thriving and resilient community.
- Design guidelines are important to provide clarity and certainty for developers AND residents while protecting the unique character of each township.

Topic: Right To Rebuild**Recommendation**

Residents should have a right to rebuild on existing structure footprints subject to overlays and building permit approvals. This recommendation refers to rebuilding on lots that are below the zone minimum subdivision size.

Rationale

- Enabling existing homeowners to rebuild on small lots under building permits and overlay regulations

Topic Name: Planning Scheme, Environmental Overlays and Rural considerations for GW Zones

Recommendation

Give priority to evaluating current overlays (ESO & SLO) and schedules for applicability to actual on ground conditions i.e. flora and fauna, land usage & purposes, historical uses, environmental characteristics, for conformity to Green Wedge Management Plan objectives.

Ensure that all assessment and investigative works are undertaken by independent experts

Where overlays currently apply, actions of landowners that lead to degradation of environmental values should be addressed by Council officers.

Rationale

- To facilitate cooperation between landowners and council / government.
- To ensure that overlays are able to fulfil their purposes.

Topic name: Housing development - setting the limits

Recommendation

- Advocate to maintain current Urban Growth Boundary (i.e. hard boundary)
- Monitor and regularly review existing overlays and zones.
- Require environmental sustainable design and construction techniques in new developments to work in harmony with nature and fit the character of the town in Green Wedge townships (Panton Hill, Hurstbridge and St. Andrews)
- Maintain consistent transparency about policy intent and approach to development outcomes within the Green Wedge

Rationale

- Urban Growth Boundary is set by the State for the mutual benefit of citizens of the municipality and the outlying country areas
- Changes to policy and Council strategy needs to be made in collaboration with the community and stakeholders.
- We recognise that Climate Change is a reality to which building and community design must be adaptive
- Population growth in the Shire needs to be encouraged to remain within the designated urban growth areas and less into the townships within the Green Wedge.

Topic Name: Right Of Tenure

Recommendation

Provide clear guidelines on use rights for ALL lots.

The Shire Council to be responsible for education and updating new and existing landowners.

Rationale

- Resolve confusion on use rights on lots sizes

Topic Name: Small lots

Recommendation

- Maintain current Local Planning Policy which governs building on small lots (e.g. RCZ3 <8ha) with a view to its increased enforcement
- Investigate the feasibility of a buy-back/consolidation scheme in which vacant small lots are purchased by State or Council and resold where they can be amalgamated into adjoining land. Where not possible, encourage neighbouring property owners to do so

Rationale

- We endorse the intention of Action PC1.1 of the current Green Wedge Management Plan.
- Discourage further development of small lots in the Green Wedge for reasons of fire security and avoidance of suburbanisation

Topic Name: Regulation, enforceability and cost

Recommendation

To support a better relationship between landowners and council staff, education and mediation should be preferred to regulation.

Council should be more aware of the cost of these regulations, and should strongly endeavour to lower the cost and therefore the barriers to the planning system.

Council regulations should be as far as possible

1. Practicable
2. Enforceable
3. Fair and reasonable in cost
4. Necessary

Rationale

- Poor regulations are ineffective and encourage non-compliance, and alienate landowners.

- The financial burden that some residents have faced when dealing with regulations and permit applications process.

Topic Name: Develop trail network

Recommendation

Complete a purpose built trail network for walking, cycling and horse riding within the next 5 years. Refer to Recreation Trails Strategy (2001) and points 10.1-10.4 & PC 8.3 of current GWMP

Rationale

- Completion of Recreation Trails Strategy has been delayed
- Increases tourism & boosts local economy
- Encourages a greater appreciation for our environment
- Improves quality of life for residents
- Safely segregates traffic and recreational uses

PEOPLE & CULTURE THEME

Topic Name: Volunteers

Recommendation

Council should continue to encourage, support, promote and celebrate volunteering that assists the Nillumbik Shire to manage the Green Wedge.

Rationale

- Partnerships between communities, Landcare groups, volunteer groups and Council are vital for the implementation of the Green Wedge Management Plan
- Promotes opportunities for social cohesion, belonging and ownership of shared, common objectives
- Support community engagement to encourage local leadership
- Promote resilience through community connectedness

Topic Name: Ageing Population / Community Health

Recommendation

Better support the ageing population of Nillumbik, specifically those living within the Green Wedge. Options should include the need for aged care services within Green Wedge townships, and programs & services to facilitate people ageing in the community where they have lived for many years. Review current progress against action items in the Positive Ageing Strategy and continue to work with community to implement.

Provide support for ageing landholders to maintain the biodiverse qualities of their land.

Rationale

- Allow land holders to remain in place as long as possible, ensuring local knowledge is kept in place with respect to land management.
- Helps with community cohesiveness and engagement, more likely that people will get involved with local groups.

Topic Name: Supporting community facilities in the Green Wedge

Recommendation

Develop and better utilize existing multi-use community spaces in Green Wedge townships and identify possible gaps in terms of services and infrastructure.

Rationale

- These should offer multiple services (eg. the model used with the Hurstbridge Community Hub) to facilitate greater community access.
- Improve community cohesion.
- Provide services not locally available to rural residents

Topic Name: Cultural Development**Recommendation**

Support the creation of a high quality, regional art gallery, supporting the artists of the Nillumbik Green Wedge which in turn support the importance of cultural heritage and sense of place and wellbeing.

Rationale

- Support local artists across the whole year, opportunity to display and sell their work.
- Support local tourism, create a destination that people want to visit.
- Promote identify / theme of Nillumbik - "artisan hills".

Topic Name: Internet Connectivity**Recommendation**

Continue lobbying government/NBN Co. to prioritise the Green Wedge in providing internet connectivity to particularly support landowners, services and local businesses, and providing enhanced mobile phone coverage.

Rationale

- Economic imperative for business
- Safety (information for bushfires etc)
- Staying in touch in rural areas
- Community engagement

ECONOMY THEME

Topic Name: Rural Business Activities

Recommendation

Support and promote supplementary rural business activities such as farm gate sales, farm stays, and other low environmental and amenity impact enterprise which are consistent with green wedge values.

Rationale

- Increase local employment in the green wedge
- Encourage tourism in the green wedge
- Improve the local economy
- Maintain the character of the area

Topic Name: Right to farm**Recommendation**

Green Wedge landholders should be able to exercise their 'right to farm' on pre-existing cleared agricultural land.

Discourage bush block conversion to agricultural or pastoral use, or any other use that would otherwise degrade/impact vegetation and biodiversity values.

Rationale

- The phrase 'right to farm' is associated with having rules that don't prevent people from farming e.g. even if someone next door to you complains about spray drift, noise etc. The Labor policy platform this election includes an intent to create a new planning provision to enshrine a 'right to farm' to maintain Melbourne's Food Bowl (pers. comm. Geoff Lawler)
- Part of Nillumbik's cultural heritage
- Supports the local food movement
- Provides a source of income for landholders
- Creates local job opportunities

Topic Name: Agriculture

Recommendation

- A. Further fragmentation of agricultural lands to be discouraged, and consolidation of smaller lots in single ownership encouraged - council to facilitate consolidation of titles at zero cost to affected landholders.
- B. Identify opportunities to support community sustainable agriculture (as recommended in previous GWMP Action 7.1, P.48)
- C. Any proposal to change land use should demonstrate that the land is fit for purpose for the new use by preparation of a land management plan

Rationale

- A. maintain viability of agricultural land by reducing risk of fragmentation.
- B. Opportunity for community building and sharing local produce, lower carbon footprint, encourages boutique farming/agricultural industry
- C. inappropriate land uses can have adverse impacts on the land, both onsite and offsite.

Recognition & Support for Landowners Maintaining Land

Recommendation

Improve communication between council and landowners in the Green Wedge with respect to their rights & responsibilities for land management, and the support & services available to them. This information should be provided in a clear concise and accessible manner. Develop an online portal providing a user friendly one-stop-shop for everything a landowner need to know about about a property.

Rationale

- Alleviate frustrations with respect to council and their engagement with landowners.
- Assist with eliminating misinformation or ignorance amongst landowners with respect to their rights & responsibilities.
- Reduce sales of land parcels within the Green Wedge where prospective owner's intended use is not suitable

Evidence for this recommendation - low uptake of green wedge land management incentive program opportunities. Refer page 63 GWMP Background Report August 2018.

Topic Name: Tourism**Recommendation**

We recommend that council refer to the existing management plan, specifically points 3.1, 4.1, 5.1 & 5.2 (economy actions). We also recommend that council aim to implement “destination points” within the Shire to capture ‘through traffic’ where possible. We would also like council to regularly maintain and/or upgrade the existing tourist destinations, such as Watsons Creek Indigenous Trail.

Rationale

- We believe the current points in the existing management plan are viable and do not require amendment.
- Promoting the landscape we have on offer and providing tourists a rest point/ destination point is a low cost yet efficient way of promoting tourism within the shire. For example, recognising the significance of landscapes, with respect to urban settlements, creates a certain identity for each and enhance streetscapes.
- We would like to emphasise that council should aim to provide tourists with easy access to the various destinations within the shire that they can visit, for example an online portal or maps (4.1) which pinpoint certain destinations such as St Andrews Market, tourist routes or the Wattle Festival.
- The regular maintenance or upgrade of existing destinations is necessary and important. E.g. providing safe road cycling for tourists.

Topic Name: Hobby Farms**Recommendation**

To recognise the contribution well managed “hobby farms”* can make to the beauty and biodiversity of Nillumbik and that they form a significant part of the Green Wedge. Hobby farmers should be required to maintain their land using sustainable land management practices.

Rationale

- *hobby farm; a place where some agricultural activities are undertaken but they are subsidiary to living there. More of a lifestyle than a business. No size limitation defined in the planning scheme (pers. comm. Geoff Lawler)
- 47% of the Green Wedge consists of hobby farms, rural residential & low density residential; 20% of which is agricultural land (GWMP Part 1 - background & context 2.1)

Topic Name: Public transport and related infrastructure

Recommendation

Improve public transport options within the Green Wedge.

Rationale

- Endorse, from the current GWMP, actions 8.1-8.4 (People & Communities)
- Advocate strongly for the introduction of smarter services, such as community buses or mini buses to service a wider area - they are more cost-effective and efficient and have greater flexibility to respond to requests as they arise
- Linking Green Wedge townships to existing railway network
- Reduce car usage
- Make travelling more accessible for those who cannot, or prefer not to use private transport

Minority Report #2

We have identified that the statistics between the online and in room voting signified 9% (86% online, 77% in-room) representing 1.5 persons. Resulting in the elimination of what had been a valued recommendation.

Topic Name: Green Wedge Management Authority
Recommendation Advocate for the establishment of a body that provides expert advice and support to both state and local government on green wedge issues.
Rationale <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Green Wedges present specific and unique challenges when compared to other areas, in terms of planning, economics, environment, local government etc.• State-based planning department/personnel that is primarily dealing with Green Wedge issues e.g. social, economic, zoning, environmental and has coordinating oversight to address the tendency for state and local departments to operate in isolation.• Make recommendations for state government and local council to consider• The body could be set up like an Advisory body with the aim to bring together multiple areas of governance (planning, environment, local government).