

# Darebin Nature Trust - Vegetation Improvement Working Group

## Operating Charter - **DRAFT**

The following outlines an operating charter for the DNT Vegetation Improvement Working Group (VIWG).

### **1. Background**

At its 18 February 2020 meeting, the DNT agreed upon the formation of Working Groups to become key vehicles through which its tasks and purpose could be taken forward. It is envisaged that Working Groups will provide a focus for the contribution of community expertise to issues around biodiversity and open space.

In this context, the DNT will only meet formally on a quarterly basis to receive reports from Working Groups and offer guidance about their operation. DNT will continue to be the vehicle by which advice is formally provided to Council and reports from Working Groups will be provided to each of the quarterly meetings for reporting up to Council.

Each Working Group commences from the premise that Darebin Council has a policy acknowledging a climate emergency and that the advent of the DNT was allied to the calling of the climate emergency.

A number of key implications flow from the climate emergency and include the following:

- Darebin's open space, including its streetscapes, must become assets that seek to mitigate the impacts of climate change and help address and reverse the climate emergency for Darebin's citizens and its biodiversity;
- Darebin's biodiversity is not only critically threatened by climate change, but by implication must also be considered in a state of emergency and requiring urgent action to mitigate loss of habitat and a host of ongoing threatening processes, many brought on by its urban context.

In the case of VIWG, a further key premise is that a large number of parks in Darebin have a deficient vegetation cover that neither adequately provides for human amenity and recreational needs, nor offers sufficient habitat for biodiversity. The addressing of this problem is urgent and critical to the purpose of the VIWG.

### **2. VIWG – Statement of Purpose**

The Vegetation Improvement Working Group of the Darebin Nature Trust has a number of purposes. These include being a forum where community members of the DNT can work together with Council officers and under the guidance of the Manager Parks and Open Space to:

- i. enhance mutual understanding of Darebin's open space and vegetation cover in order to mitigate and address Darebin's acknowledged climate and biodiversity emergencies;
- ii. analyse, plan for, and prioritise urgent and comprehensive improvement to the quality of open space across Darebin in order to create better habitat for all of Darebin's natural biodiversity (including fungi and microbes), especially via the use of indigenous plant species and monitor changes especially via indicator species;
- iii. seek the transition of various parks across Darebin that have declining vegetation cover likely to increasingly suffer impacts from a hotter, drier climate, especially where there is an absence of sustainable water sources for irrigation;

- iv. seek implementation of the Open Space Strategy's commitment to having bushland as a default position and model for new open space in Darebin;
- v. develop vegetation improvement plans for numerous parks across Darebin such that the quantum of the vegetation deficiency problem can be assessed and appropriate budget bids prepared and sought;
- vi. advise about implementation of works that are undertaken to improve vegetation cover and quality across Darebin.

### **3. VIWG – Tasks**

The VIWG will determine its tasks and adjust them according to circumstance and as change and improvement in open space vegetation cover and quality occurs.

However, initially, the broad tasks of VIWG will include determining:

- the scope of work to be undertaken by VIWG, how it is to be undertaken and by whom;
- the priority order of its tasks;
- the priority to be assigned to improvement of various open space areas across Darebin; and
- how the work of VIWG aligns with the Darebin Open Space Strategy with a view to ensuring a sound reporting framework for DNT.

At the start of each year, the VIWG should determine a work plan for the following 12 months to ensure guidance is provided, a direction is known and the VIWG is operating within a framework it can be accountable to.

### **4. Vegetation Improvement Working Group - Operations**

Operating arrangements for the VIWG will be guided by the adopted Terms of Reference for the DNT.

#### **4.1 Meeting Frequency**

The VIWG should meet no more than eight times per year.

Suggested meeting dates for 2020 are as follows below, with:

- a spacing of 6 weeks between meetings;
- no meetings in December and January;
- Wednesday as the regular meeting day (although could be Tuesday\*); and
- no meetings in same week as the four scheduled DNT meetings in 2020 (18 Feb; 21 April; 23 June and 18 August)

1. 12 Feb. 2020 (date passed, but used a starting point for 6 week spacings)
2. 24 March 2020
3. 5 May 2020
4. 9 June 2020
5. 21 July 2020
6. 1 September 2020
7. 6 October 2020 (during caretaker period)
8. 17 November 2020 (in new Council term)

*\* consideration needs to be given to meetings of the other three Working Groups and avoidance of clashes, given participation by some VIWG members on those Working Groups.*

## **4.2 Membership**

The membership of the VIWG will be drawn from:

- Council officers assigned to the VIWG at the direction of the Manager of Parks and Open Space, including an executive officer to the VIWG;
- Community members of the DNT; and
- Councillor members of the DNT.

## **4.3 Term of Membership and Vacation of Membership**

Community and Councillor members are provided by way of their volunteering to join the VIWG and confirmation of membership by the DNT.

Community and Councillor members can seek to withdraw their voluntary membership of the VIWG by notification to the VIWG executive officer and the chair.

Membership of VIWG is dependent upon membership of the DNT. The loss of membership of the DNT therefore also means loss of membership of the VIWG.

## **4.4 Expectations of Members**

The expectation of all members of the VIWG is that they will behave with respect and openness by listening to one another and by allowing all to have a voice at meetings.

It is the role of community members to offer advice to meetings so their knowledge and expertise can influence and be incorporated into the management of open space and biodiversity in Darebin.

It is expected that all members of the VIWG will be required to undertake work to progress tasks before the group and to meet agreed deadlines set for work to be completed.

The conduct of members will accord with that set out in the DNT Terms of Reference.

## **4.5 Chairing of Meetings**

VIWG will arrange for a member to chair meetings. Should a Councillor be present, that person should assume the role of chairing the meeting, unless otherwise agreed.

## **4.6 Meeting Agendas**

The executive officer will draft meeting agendas for circulation to members for comment at least 10 days prior to meetings.

## **4.7 Meeting Attendance**

Attendance at meetings of the VIWG is expected in normal circumstances and is critical to fulfilment of duties as a member.

## **4.8 Reporting**

The VIWG will ensure that reports are provided to every DNT meeting and that sufficient members of VIWG are present at DNT meeting to answer questions regarding its operation and performance.

#### **4.9 Sunsetting of the VIWG**

The ongoing need for the VIWG will ultimately be determined by Darebin Council and will take into account advice from the DNT.

Should a new Council elected in late 2020 seek to continue with the DNT, then its Working Groups would also be continued for the term of the new Council. A review of the VIWG should be undertaken in mid 2024 with a recommendation to the new Council to either continue or sunset the Working Group and based around advice from the DNT.

Judgement about the ongoing and longer term need for the VIWG will be largely based upon the rate of improvement of vegetation in Darebin's open space as reported to the DNT and the criticality of VIWG in assisting implementation of vegetation improvement.

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