

# Darebin Nature Trust – Streetscapes, Corridors and Acquisitions Working Group

## Operating Charter - **DRAFT**

The following outlines an operating charter for the DNT Streetscapes, Corridors and Acquisitions Working Group (SCAWG - with title and acronym to be confirmed).

### 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; and
- Darebin's biodiversity is not only critically threatened by climate change, but by implication, itself 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 SCAWG, a further key premise is that a large number of Darebin's streets have poor shade provision<sup>1</sup> and have not been designed to promote habitat connectivity within and across the municipality. It is reasonable to observe that biodiversity considerations have lagged as a key concern in the design of streetscapes.

Likewise the use of other potential corridors exclusively, or in conjunction with streets, for biodiversity purposes, has rarely, if ever, been a primary consideration. Few attempts have been made to utilise land owned by others, such as pipe tracks, to become a means by which habitat connectivity can be enhanced.

The addressing of these problems is urgent in the context of the biodiversity emergency and is critical to the purpose of the SCAWG.

Streetscapes are also burdened by a long history of traditional and unchanging approaches to their design.

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<sup>1</sup> While it is not known if Darebin has calculated a figure, it is noted that neighbouring Moreland has estimated in its Urban Forest Strategy that only 15% of Moreland's streets are shaded. The Strategy does not specify how this figure is derived and it is therefore not known if it is conservative or otherwise. Despite this, it is reasonably assumed that this telling figure is likely to be similar for Darebin.

These traditional features include:

- little or no consideration of shading of the road pavements as a key climate emergency objective to mitigate urban heat;
- east-west streets are not treated differently from north-south streets, despite significant differences in summer shading patterns and requirements;
- little or no consideration given to different nature strip widths in the same street in order to facilitate provision of increased soil volumes for tree growth or to gain space for stormwater re-use, i.e. little apparent desire to re-imagine the streetscape and fundamentally alter conventional design;
- poor consideration of required soil volumes generally and of future tree trunk expansion impacting kerb and channel and other assets and of damage to tree roots from maintenance activities associated with services located under nature strips;
- a preference, often via policy, to only plant small trees under powerlines, thus denying the potential for road pavement shading;
- a dominant view that ongoing pruning of larger trees under powerlines carry costs that are excessive and unwarranted, even though the benefits that such trees can provide in shading of road pavements is not appropriately assessed, monetised and brought to account;
- streets always crowned to drain to sub-surface stormwater drainage on both sides of streets, even where opportunities are available to drain streets to depressed centre medians; and
- no attempts to use stormwater to assist tree growth or to design for infiltration to nature strips to reduce stormwater volumes as part of pro-active local stormwater management.

The other key element of the work of the SCAWG is consideration of future open space acquisition. This was initially recognised as an important task for the DNT and remains so. The Open Space Strategy has called for planning work to guide future land acquisitions. Its Action A1.1 commits Council to: “Acquire additional open space. This may be through purchase, joint use agreements and/or partnerships with public and private entities.”

Action A1.3 importantly seeks that Darebin: “create a strategic land acquisition plan that contains a decision making framework to guide selection of open space referencing section 6.4 [*Increasing the quantity of open space*] of this strategy.”

The formation of the SCAWG provides a potential opportunity, on a continuum from least involvement to greatest involvement, for it to:

- promote and advocate for;
- contribute to; or
- lead

this planning work.

The precise role of SCAWG in relation to planning for acquisitions can be determined collaboratively by its participant members. As always, advice from SCAWG would be provided to DNT and then on to Council for their determination.

However, at an early stage, it is apparent that planning for open space acquisition is a large and complex task. Considerable rigour and care needs to be devoted to such planning because the cost of land purchase is high and benefits therefore need to be obvious and transparent, with scarce resources directed to areas of greatest need and open space deprivation.

It is possible that a sub-group of the SCAWG could be formed to contribute to this significant planning work.

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

The Streetscapes, Corridors and Acquisitions 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 to:

- i. enhance mutual understanding of Darebin's streetscapes, their vegetation cover and role in provision of habitat connectivity and biodiversity improvement across the municipality, as well as community amenity, and how the WG can build its understanding of all aspects of policy and management practices relating to streetscapes;
- ii. analyse, plan for, and prioritise opportunities to create and enhance vegetation corridors across Darebin to provide improved biodiversity corridors that link ecologically significant sites and especially bordering waterways;
- iii. work with other council officers to overcome barriers to ensure that vegetation can have an equally important role alongside other streetscape assets, (e.g. footpaths and road pavements providing a transport carriageway for vehicles and pedestrians), so that streets are seen as vegetation links as much as transport links;
- iv. analyse, plan for, and ensure implementation of works in streetscapes to mitigate the impacts of climate change giving particular attention to increased shading of heat generating black asphalt, reducing the area covered by black asphalt and assessing the potential of streetscape re-design and re-configuration to deliver heat reduction and increased canopy cover, especially via increased soil volumes for street trees;
- v. re-consider policies that might be at cross-purposes with heat mitigation in streetscapes such as the exclusive use of small to medium sized trees under powerlines and instead encourage policies that improve canopy cover, shading, streetscape amenity and use of stormwater within a more comprehensive and integrated planning context and framework;
- vi. ensure opportunities for stormwater to assist vegetation growth and reduce volumes transported to waterways, can be optimised within streetscapes;
- vii. encourage and assist in the development of the strategic land acquisition plan as recommended in the Darebin Open Space Strategy and liaise with the Biodiversity Management Plan Working Group and others regarding any proposed acquisitions to improve biodiversity and open space links and corridors; and
- viii. contribute to the implementation of the Working Group's analyses, plans and recommendations.

### **3. SCAWG – Tasks**

The SCAWG will determine its tasks and adjust them according to circumstance and as change and improvements occurs.

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

- the scope of work to be undertaken, how it is to be undertaken and by whom;
- the priority order of its tasks;
- the priority to be assigned to improvement of streetscapes, corridors and open space acquisitions across Darebin; and
- how the work of SCAWG aligns with the Darebin Open Space Strategy and other key plans, strategies and policies, with a view to ensuring a sound reporting framework for DNT.

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

### **4. Streetscapes, Corridors and Acquisitions Working Group - Operations**

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

#### **4.1 Meeting Frequency**

The SCAWG should meet no more than eight times per year. However, it is suggested that in 2020, only seven meetings be scheduled.

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

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

1. 14 April 2020
2. 26 May 2020
3. 7 July 2020
4. 25 August 2020
5. 29 September 2020 (during caretaker period)
6. 27 October 2020 (during caretaker period?)
7. 8 December 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 SCAWG members on those Working Groups.*

#### **4.2 Membership**

The membership of the SCAWG will be drawn from:

- Council officers assigned to the SCAWG, including an executive officer to the SCAWG;
- Community members of the DNT; and
- Councillor members of the DNT.

It is understood that the Working Group could potentially involve numerous Council officers due to its broad-ranging and multi-disciplinary nature. It will be up to officers to ensure effective coordination across organisational divisions and units to ensure the WG has access to appropriate advice and input.

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

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

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

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

#### ***4.4 Expectations of Members***

The expectation of all members of the SCAWG 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 streetscapes and open space and biodiversity in Darebin.

It is expected that all members of the SCAWG 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***

SCAWG 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 SCAWG is expected in normal circumstances and is critical to fulfilment of duties as a member.

#### ***4.8 Reporting***

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

#### **4.9 Sunsetting of the SCAWG**

The ongoing need for the SCAWG 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 SCAWG 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 SCAWG will be largely based upon the rate of improvement of Darebin's streetscapes and corridors as reported to the DNT and the appropriateness and quality of advice regarding acquisition of open space.

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