

## **Consultation Report** September 2018



## **Draft Monash Urban Landscape & Canopy Vegetation Strategy**

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1	The Strategy .....	2
1.2	Key consultation messages .....	2
<b>2</b>	<b>Consultation process .....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	Outline.....	3
2.2	Information provided .....	3
2.3	Drop in information sessions / staff assistance .....	3
2.4	Opportunities for feedback.....	4
<b>3</b>	<b>Survey responses.....</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1	Response to consultation.....	5
3.2	Demographics .....	5
3.3	Garden city character and valued landscape character .....	6
3.4	Vision and objectives of the Strategy and canopy target.....	8
3.5	Views on implementation .....	9
3.6	Further comments .....	11
<b>4</b>	<b>Written submissions .....</b>	<b>12</b>
4.1	Overview of written submissions .....	12
4.2	Category 1 – General submissions from residents.....	12
4.3	Category 2 – Specific submissions on the Strategy from residents .....	13
4.4	Category 3 – Agency stakeholders .....	14
4.5	Category 4 – Local environment groups .....	14
4.6	Category 5 – Specific site .....	15
4.7	Category 6 – Internal.....	15
<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations.....</b>	<b>17</b>
5.1	Recommended changes to the Strategy .....	17
5.2	Further considerations for implementation / future actions.....	17
<b>6</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>18</b>

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Strategy

The draft Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy (the ‘Strategy’) was prepared to look at what defines ‘garden city’ character, what can be done to improve this characteristic and how to balance development and greening of the landscape.

The Strategy provides the following vision for the City of Monash:

*“Creek corridors that are teeming with birdlife and native fauna amongst the bushland and wetlands, flow through the leafy treed suburbs. The tree lined streets and the parks are vibrant and alive with people walking, cycling, socialising and enjoying the ambience of the green Garden City Character with fresh air and plenty of shade. In the Monash National Employment and Innovation Cluster, the landscaped setbacks with tall trees are bustling with people walking and cycling to and from their workplace or relaxing and socialising during lunch in the dappled shade and after work in one of the adjoining cafes that spill out onto the green landscaped setbacks.”*

To achieve this vision, the Strategy provides a number of objectives / aims, including to protect and enhance the green Garden City character to meet the challenges of climate change and growth, providing more resilience, strengthening biodiversity, retaining and increasing the presence of large canopy trees, promoting health and wellbeing, and developing a cohesive vision for landscape character. Importantly, the Strategy sets a target of increasing canopy cover from 22% to 30% by 2040 to create a more liveable, sustainable and resilient city.

## 1.2 Key consultation messages

The key consultation messages included the following:

1. We are planning ahead to increase the greening of the city so that it is liveable and sustainable into the future.
2. There are a number of key outcomes for the Strategy:
  - a. Identify the existing and preferred landscape character types across the municipality
  - b. Measure the existing canopy vegetation cover and how it has changed over the last 20 years
  - c. Gain community feedback on the existing landscape character types
  - d. Develop recommendations for how the preferred landscape character types can be achieved on both private and public land
  - e. Develop overall targets for future canopy vegetation cover in Monash consistent with the preferred landscape character types.
3. Our canopy cover is lower than in neighbouring council areas, and the Strategy aims to increase canopy cover to 30% by 2040.
4. There are a number of benefits of canopy trees, and problems with canopy trees (particularly if planted without regard for their mature size, form and droppings), and that trees do require maintenance.
5. There are a number of implementation mechanisms Council can consider, including changes to planning controls, a Local Law, development of guidelines for planting, pruning and maximising trees on private and public land, preparing preferred species lists, and providing community education about trees.
6. We want to hear from the community about their views on the Strategy.

## 2 Consultation process

### 2.1 Outline

Consultation commenced on the draft Strategy following the Council meeting on 29 May 2018 with information provided on Council's website, information in the Monash Bulletin, drop in sessions in late July / early August, and encouraging of feedback through an online survey or written submissions before 15 August 2018. In total, the consultation went for 11 weeks.

### 2.2 Information provided

The following information was provided:

<b>Direct notification</b>	Letters / emails to stakeholders (including a covering letter and a copy of the information brochure) were sent out on 29 June 2018
<b>Newsletter</b>	Front cover article in the June edition of the Monash Bulletin (delivered on 18 June 2018)
<b>Printed material</b>	Information brochures (double-sided A3) Bound hardcopies of the draft Strategy (provided on request) Copies of all consultation material (including hardcopies of the survey) available in all libraries and service centres, and at the drop in sessions
<b>Webpage</b>  (During the consultation period there were 1,653 webpage hits, including 1,123 unique hits)	Have Your Say webpage containing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General information</li> <li>• Information brochure</li> <li>• The draft Strategy</li> <li>• The existing and preferred landscape character type sheets (x28)</li> <li>• Index for the sheets (with embedded links)</li> <li>• Discussion paper on implementation</li> <li>• Link to the online survey</li> <li>• Details about the drop in information sessions</li> </ul>
<b>Social media</b>	Social media alerts on Twitter and Facebook with links to the webpage

### 2.3 Drop in information sessions / staff assistance

Five (5) drop in information sessions were held between 23 July and 2 August 2018, with the attendance at each session outlines in the table below. The session times were advertised in the Monash Bulletin, in the brochure and on the Council webpage.

Venue	Date / time	Attendees
<b>Glen Waverley</b> Monash Civic Centre	Monday 23 July, 1-4pm	21
<b>Oakleigh</b> Oakleigh Seminar and Training Centre	Wednesday 25 July, 3.30-6.30pm	4
<b>Mt Waverley</b> Mt Waverley Youth Centre	Monday 30 July, 3.30-6.30pm	16
<b>Mulgrave</b> Mulgrave Community Centre	Wednesday 1 August, 3.30-6.30pm	3
<b>Clayton</b> Clayton Community Centre	Thursday 2 August, 3.30-6.30pm	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>47</b>

Handouts and posters were made available and interested people had the opportunity to speak with Council officers and, at Glen Waverley and Mt Waverley, with Councillors about the Strategy.

Interested people were invited to complete the online survey or provide a written submission so their views could be captured. If people wished to be kept informed of the progress of the Strategy, they could add their details to the 'interested persons register' (at the session or by calling or emailing us).

## **2.4 Opportunities for feedback**

Opportunities for feedback included:

- Completing the online survey
- Completing a hardcopy survey (available at libraries and service centres and mailed out upon request) – these surveys were transcribed into the online survey
- Providing a written submission by mail or email

The responses are analysed in Sections 3 and 4 of this report.

### 3 Survey responses

#### 3.1 Response to consultation

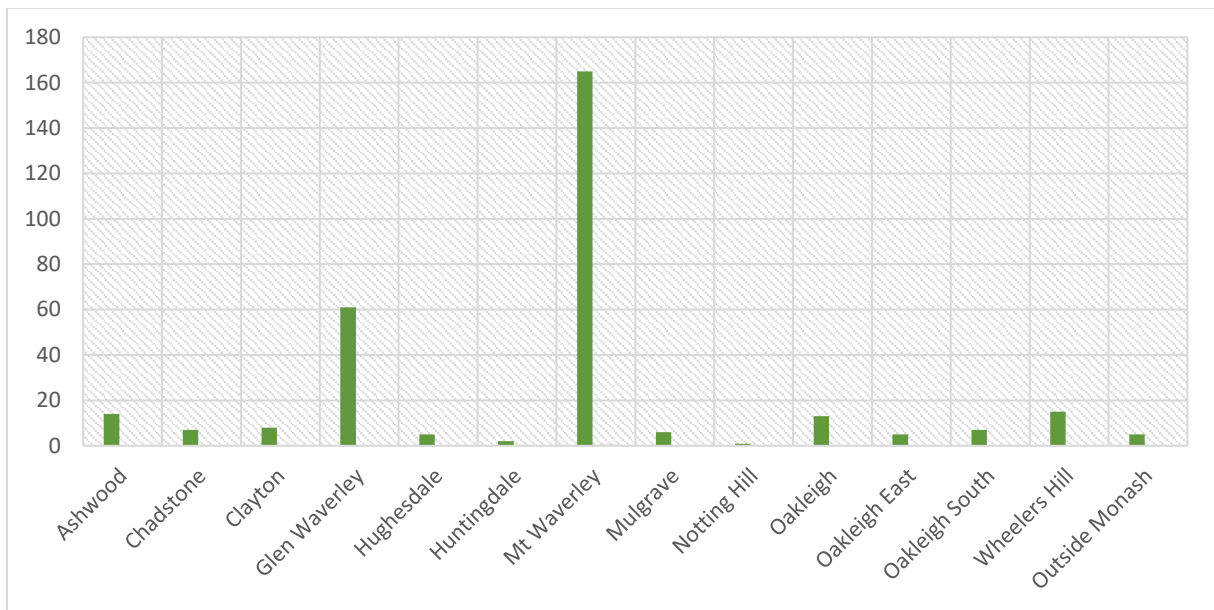
The survey was available to complete online between 18 June and 15 August 2018. Hardcopy surveys (14 in total) that were submitted to us were inputted into the survey by Council officers. A total of 325 surveys were completed.

#### 3.2 Demographics

The median respondent is a woman aged between 40 and 59 who lives in Mt Waverley.

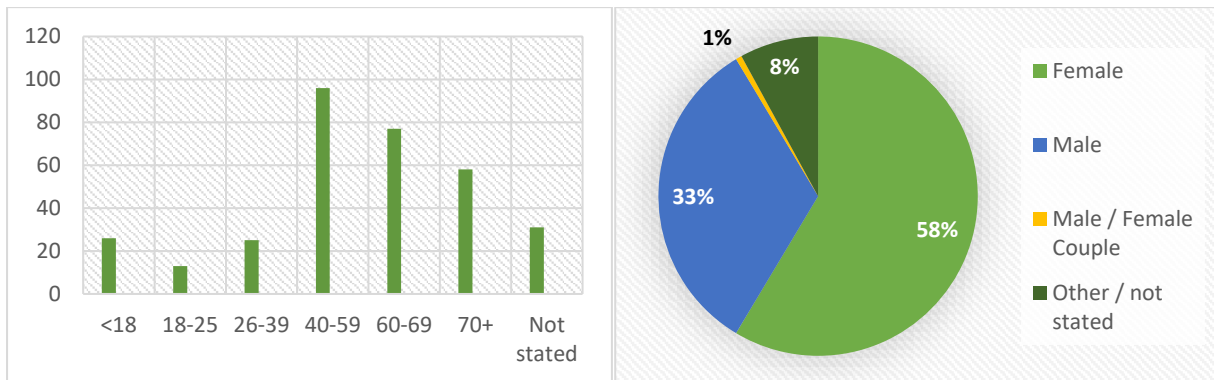
##### 3.2.1 Location

The majority (52%) of respondents who provided a location were from Mt Waverley. Around 20% of respondents were from Glen Waverley. The remaining respondents were spread across the municipality (26%) or from outside the municipality (1.5%).



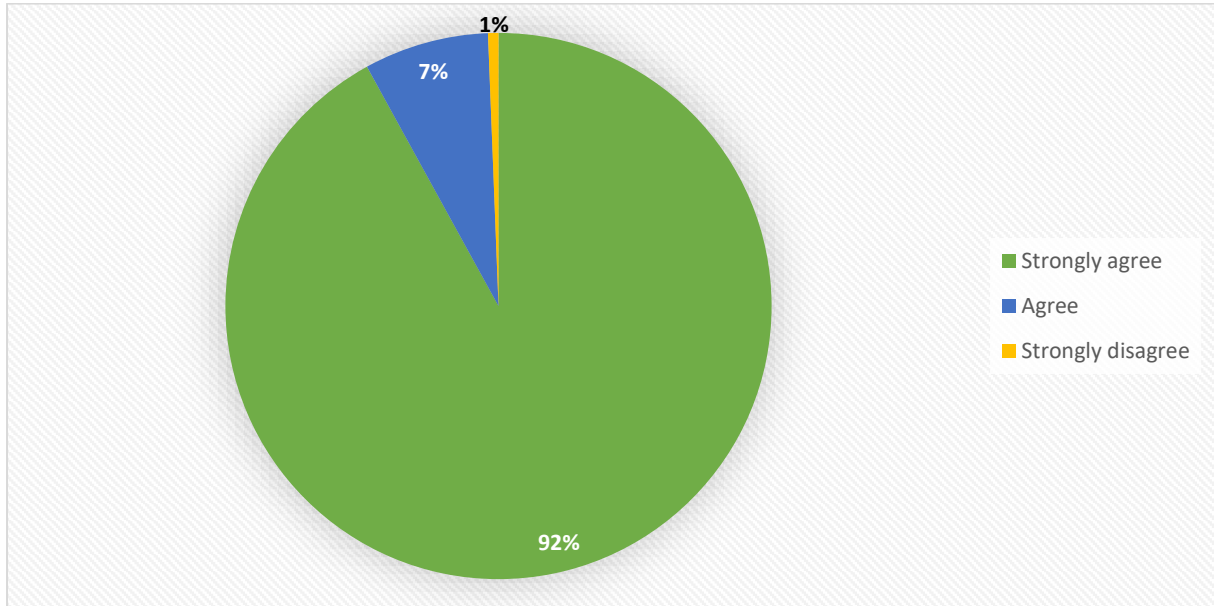
##### 3.2.2 Age and sex

The respondents were well represented across all age cohorts, however, 70% of the respondents were aged 40 or more. A clear majority of respondents were women.



### 3.3 Garden city character and valued landscape character

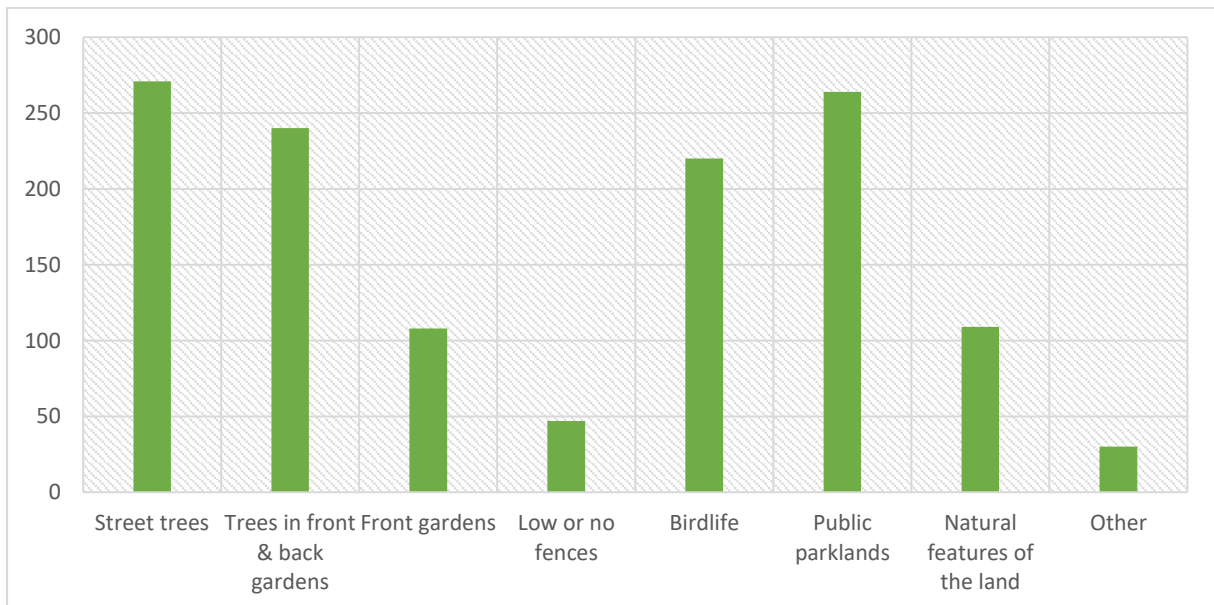
In relation to the question about whether Monash should seek to maintain and improve the “garden city” character of the municipality, there was near unanimous support (99% either agreeing or strongly agreeing).



Responses to Question 1 about 'garden city' character

In relation to the question about what people most value about the landscape character in their area, the top 4 choices were:

- Street trees (271)
- Public parklands (264)
- Trees in front and back gardens (240)
- Birdlife (220)



What respondents valued in their area



### 3.3.1 Further comments provided on garden city character and valued landscape character

The key issues raised through comments in the surveys about garden city character included:

- Impact of development and reduced space for trees. This includes the impact of large volume, single houses (“McMansions”), which generally don’t require a planning permit. (94 responses)
- Environmental impacts of canopy loss (e.g. urban heat island effect, loss of habitat, etc) and inversely the environmental benefits of canopy cover. (48 responses)
- The aesthetic benefits of trees on the character of the area in mitigating the impact of development and urban feel. (40 responses)
- More protection and encouragement of greening. This includes reducing canopy loss and encouraging all residents to value their gardens. (24 responses)
- Affordability of landscaping (planting and maintenance) for residents. This includes ensuring there is equitable and shared responsibility for the landscape character. (10 responses)

*Quote:*

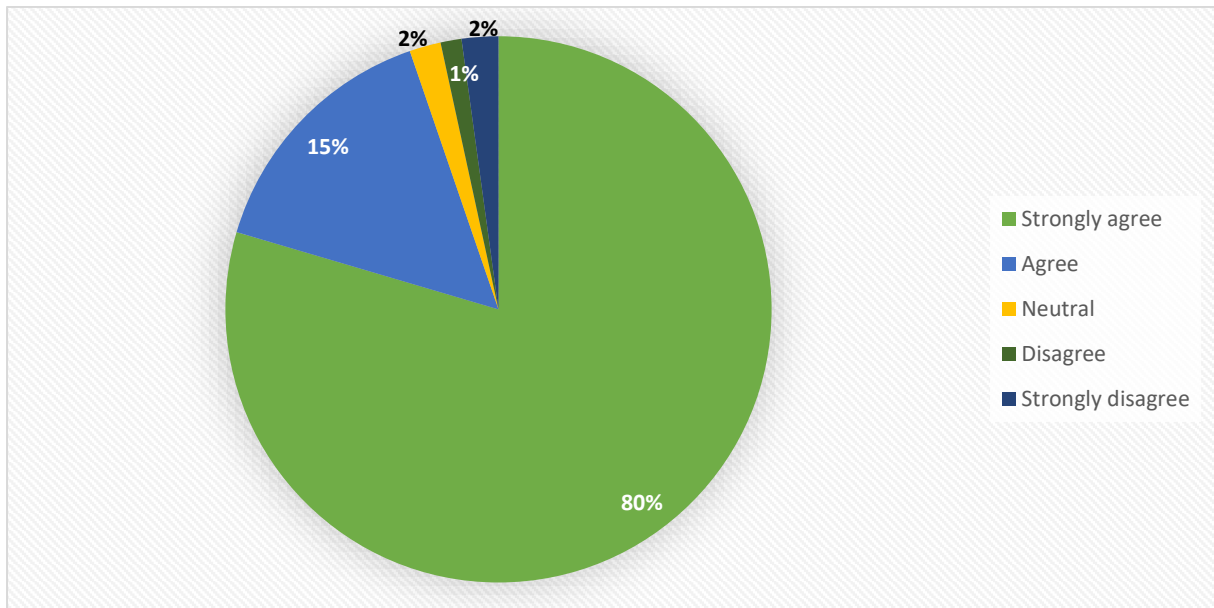
*“Absolutely agree that we need to retain the garden city aspect of our municipality. Whilst I understand that some residents and especially developers want to maximise residential space for housing, we need to ensure that this is not done at the expense of the green canopy and wildlife.”*

For the most popular valued landscape character, respondents identified key issues as:

<b>Street trees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aesthetic qualities and character</li> <li>• Liveability of the area</li> <li>• Shade</li> <li>• Mental health and wellbeing benefits</li> </ul>
<b>Public parklands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety and community</li> <li>• Public gathering</li> <li>• Aesthetic qualities</li> <li>• Relaxation, recreation, and health and wellbeing</li> <li>• Links between parks</li> <li>• Greater importance as population and development increases</li> </ul>
<b>Trees in front and back gardens</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shelter / habitat for wildlife</li> <li>• Privacy</li> <li>• Shade and weather buffering</li> <li>• Aesthetic qualities and character</li> </ul>
<b>Birdlife</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connection to nature</li> <li>• Retain or provide habitats and food</li> <li>• Sounds, sight of birds</li> </ul>

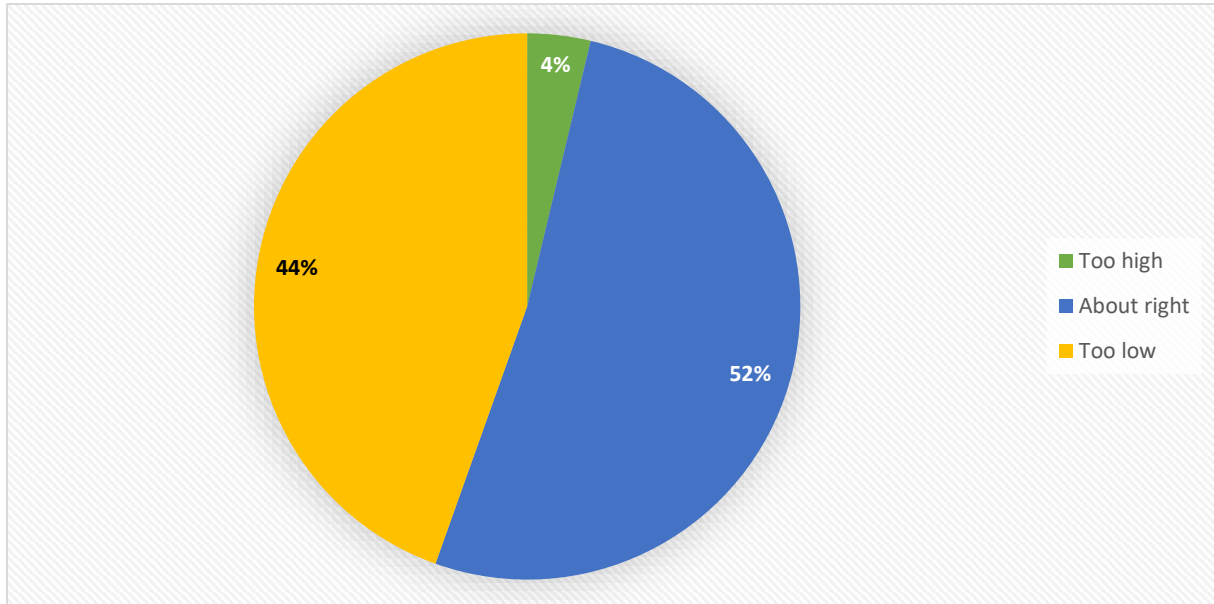
### 3.4 Vision and objectives of the Strategy and canopy target

There was an extremely high level of agreement with the vision and objectives of the Strategy, with 95% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing.



*Agreement with vision and objectives of the Strategy*

There was a slight majority (52%) of respondents who thought the 30% by 2040 canopy cover target was “about right”, with 44% saying that it was too low.



*The 30% canopy cover target*

#### 3.4.1 Further comments provided on vision and objectives of the Strategy

The key issues raised in further comments about the vision and objectives of the Strategy included:

- Time for action - the Strategy must be implemented with appropriate resourcing. (33 responses)

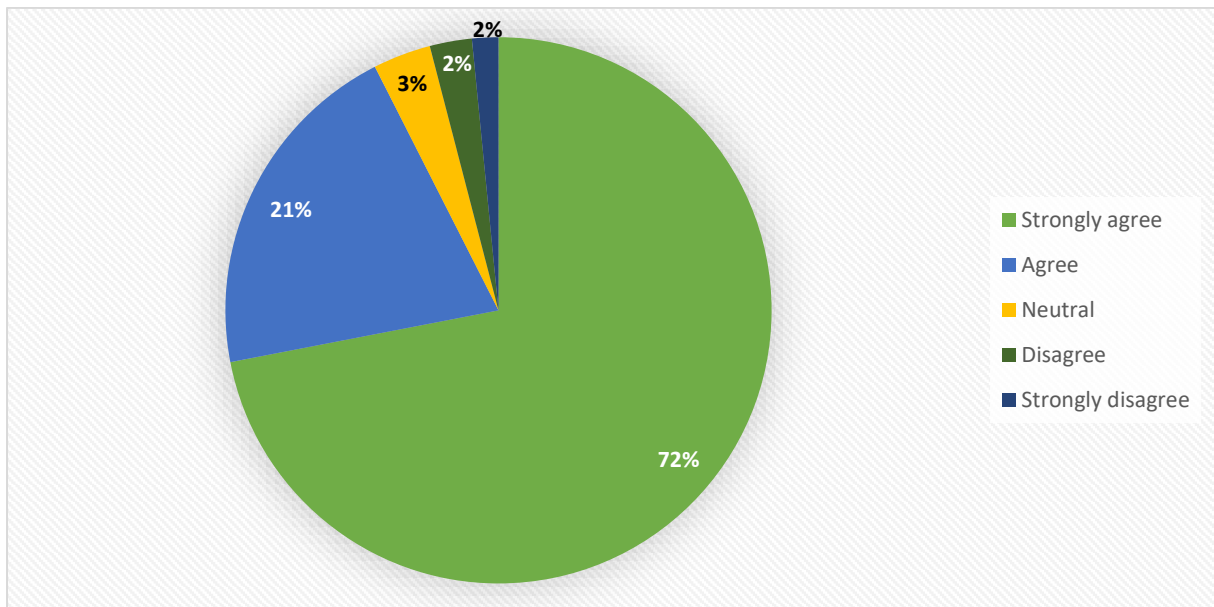
- Council should show leadership, including in vegetating parks and planting street trees (and inversely, not removing significant numbers of trees). (6 responses)
- Recognising the importance of the Strategy. (36 responses)
- The Strategy is insufficient, particularly the target for canopy cover. (12 responses)
- The Strategy is supported in principle but will lead to further restrictions or controls on residents. (14 responses)

### 3.5 Views on implementation

In Question 5, respondents were asked their level of agreement about the following two statements:

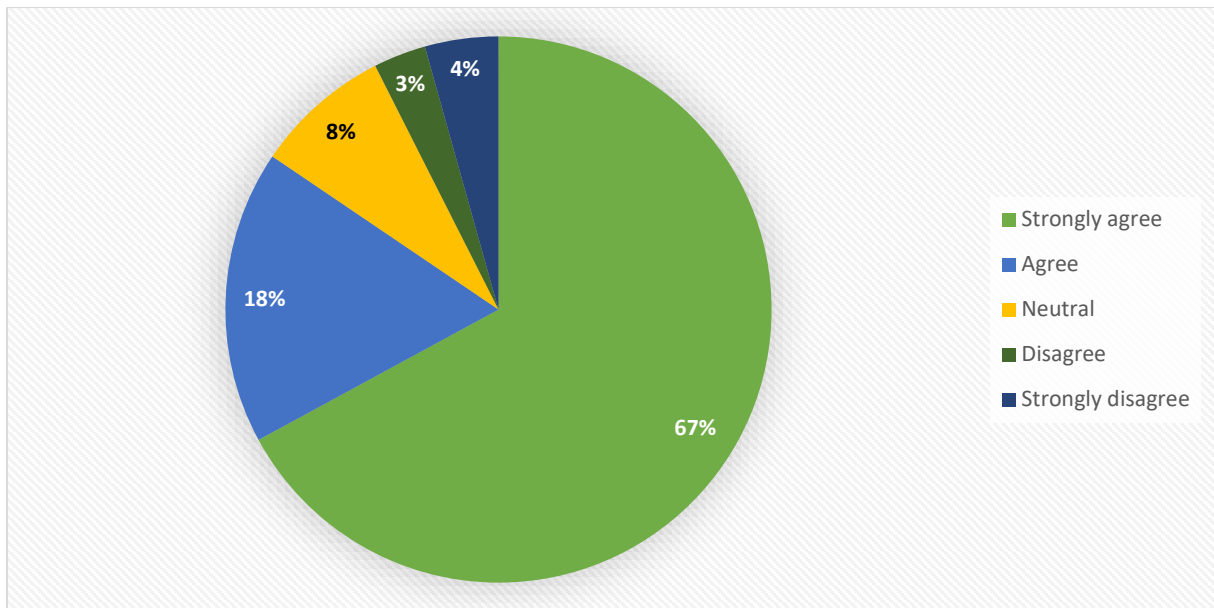
- “There should be a net increase in canopy cover on private land, through requiring more than 1:1 replacement of trees that have been removed”
- “Residents and developers should be required to get a permit to remove a canopy tree on private land anywhere in the City of Monash”

In relation to the first statement, 93% agreed or strongly agreed.



*Respondent views on more than 1:1 replacement of trees*

In relation to the second statement, 85% agreed or strongly agreed that a permit should be required to remove a canopy tree anywhere in Monash.



*Respondent views on permits for canopy tree removal*

### 3.5.1 Further comments provided on implementation

In relation to the question about requiring more than 1:1 replacement of trees, the following key comments were made:

- There should be equity in burden on residents in addressing the deficit of trees. This includes requiring more planting in areas with deficit and not requiring replacement or further vegetation on sites that are already sufficiently vegetated. (21 responses)
- Creating space for trees. (21 responses)
- Recognising the wider community benefit of trees that are on private land. (14 responses)
- More action needed for the maintenance and care of vegetation, and enforcement of landscape plans. (52 responses)
- Guidance and appropriateness of species for replacement trees. (21 responses)

The key comments made in relation to requiring permits for canopy tree removal were as follows:

- Timeliness of decision-making. (6 responses)
- Adequacy of controls in place to act as deterrents. This includes other mechanisms like the payment of tree bonds. (80 responses)
- Accuracy of the information provided with the application. (9 responses)
- Types of trees and ability to replace a canopy tree with a more appropriate species. (15 responses)
- Flexibility in the controls for residents. (23 responses)
- Provision of adequate support for residents in relation to getting permits. (7 responses)

*Quote:*

*“If we want to retain existing mature trees on private land we must all accept responsibility and costs associated, not expect the private land owner to have the responsibility and associated costs.”*

### 3.6 Further comments

Many of the respondents (48%) took the opportunity to provide further comments in the survey. The key comments made included the following:

- Council needs to show leadership in implementing the Strategy but also by setting a good example on its own land. (20 responses)
- Street trees need to be properly maintained and appropriate species selected. This includes not selecting species just because it is easy to maintain but rather because of its contribution to the landscape character. (20 responses)
- Council needs to act quickly in implementing the Strategy. (40 responses)
- Community education aspects are important. (10 responses)
- Recognising the importance of landscape character. (24 responses)
- There is believed to be a very narrow assessment of trees in VPO areas, with a broader assessment being necessary and a more flexible approach taken. (4 responses)
- The need to address the spatial deficit in tree cover, particularly in areas outside the VPO. (7 responses)

*Quote:*

*“It is high time to counter the loss of precious vegetation occurring in Monash due to development of new homes or units which build with such an enormous percentage of hard surfaces. With Melbourne's growth, people will thank a council which has had the foresight to ensure greenery is planted to enjoy and as protection from the concrete jungle. The ability to gain a sense of relief will be essential for good mental health.”*

## 4 Written submissions

### 4.1 Overview of written submissions

A total of 32 submissions were received.

- Fourteen submissions were responding to articles in the Monash Bulletin relating to the Strategy, including the front page article and the article by Cr Lake in Councillor News. The responses touched on general vegetation themes with some comments on the aims and themes of the Strategy. Some of the same respondents may have also provided responses via the online survey.
- In addition to the above, there were nine submissions from other residents who wrote a submission directly in relation to the Strategy.
- Four submissions were government agency stakeholders and Monash University, who were generally supportive of the Strategy.
- Two submissions were from local environment groups.
- Two submissions were internal to Council and provided feedback (on community safety) that was not previously provided through internal stakeholder workshops.
- One submission was in relation to a specific site.

### 4.2 Category 1 – General submissions from residents

There were fourteen general submissions, which touched on the general theme or aims of the Strategy, or current issues with the VPO. It is assumed that some of the same respondents also provided responses via the online survey.

The responses were generally mixed – often simultaneously supporting the approach of increasing canopy cover and developers not being able to remove all the trees on a development site but also expressing specific concerns about the planning application process and “inflexibility” of the VPO controls.

The key issues raised in these submissions were:

- Issues with developers of residential properties (including large homes) removing trees, and lack of ability by Council to control development or enforce existing controls (10 submissions)
- Safety and maintenance issues of living with trees, and unsuitable existing trees (7 submissions)
- Specific problems with the planning application process for tree removal on their property, including the cost of getting an arborist report (5 submissions)
- Support for increasing canopy cover (5 submissions)
- Support for the existing VPO in their area (4 submissions)
- Wanting a more flexible approach to tree controls, and providing more incentives (5 submissions)
- Concern about lack of Council leadership and hypocrisy in removing street trees and trees in reserves (4 submissions)
- Reporting a specific problem with tree removal on a neighbouring property (3 submissions)
- Less interest in gardens in general due to demographic changes (2 submissions)

*Response to submissions: many of the issues raised are in relation to the implementation of the Strategy and will be considered in the preparation of options. There is general support for the aims of the Strategy – even if these are tempered by practical concerns about the planning application process*

*or living with large trees. The Strategy encourages the planting of appropriate tree species and provides guidelines accordingly.*

### **4.3 Category 2 – Specific submissions on the Strategy from residents**

There were nine submissions that were directly written in response to the Strategy of which five were very detailed. The remaining half of the submissions were less detailed and discussed the following key (unique) issues:

- Concern about Council not acting on strategies
- Safety and maintenance issues of living with trees, and unsuitable existing trees
- Concern about the maintenance of the trees in reserves
- Reported unsightly and unkempt nature strips
- Issues with developers of residential properties, lack of setbacks and vegetation
- Consider that density is a trade-off with green space
- No further restrictions should apply on private land
- Council is shifting responsibility to private land owners and not providing enough open space, and space for trees

***Response to submissions:** the Strategy provides a way forward and shares the responsibility amongst everyone to improve canopy cover – in public areas and on private land. It is considered that some increase in density will have an impact on canopy cover, however, apartment buildings can be required to have deep soil zones (as specified in the Better Apartments design standards) where canopy trees can be planted. The volume and site coverage of some single houses can be identical to, or can exceed that of apartment buildings but without the increase in dwelling or population density.*

#### 4.3.1 Detailed submissions

Five detailed submissions provided very specific feedback on the Strategy and possible implementation. All of these submissions supported the Strategy. The key issues discussed in these submissions were:

- Advice about trees, green space and human health, and mechanisms for how Council can increase canopy cover
- Residents have a role to play in maintaining liveability (it is not just up to public authorities with stretched resources), supportive of the guidelines and community education as a key component of implementing the Strategy, suggested the potential to create a fund to offset tree loss and permeable land on development sites elsewhere
- Implementation of the Strategy needs to be considered, and queried whether the Significant Landscape Overlay will be as limited in effectiveness as the VPO
- A lot of hard work is required to implement the Strategy's vision, the updated canopy cover for 2018 may now be closer to 19%, reported issues with the enforcement of existing planning controls and issues with development, increasing site coverage and removal of canopy trees, and also the need to develop stronger development controls.
- Provided ideas for implementation, including community education and reinstating the best garden awards.
- Wanted large trucks to be restricted from residential streets in order to limit tree damage.
- Supported a significant tree study, and advised of some practical ways to achieve short term gains for improving garden appearance (including vertical creepers) while waiting for larger trees to reach maturity.

**Response to submissions:** the detailed responses are welcomed, and the support for the Strategy is noted. The Strategy only outlines the range of implementation mechanisms to be considered, and these can be expanded upon with future initiatives (particularly in relation to guidelines and community education). The Monash Open Space Strategy is currently being finalised for adoption with a planning scheme amendment to be considered to introduce higher rate(s) for open space contributions – which will allow Council in the future to purchase land for new open space. Infrared aerial photography is undertaken on a yearly basis and this can be used to measure canopy gain / loss. Many of the issues raised are in relation to the implementation of the Strategy and will be considered in the preparation of options.

#### 4.4 Category 3 – Agency stakeholders

We received submissions from Parks Victoria, the Environment Protection Authority, Monash University and VicTrack.

Parks Victoria were supportive of the Strategy, as the manager of four reserves along Dandenong Creek. They emphasised that their priority is to protect and enhance existing vegetation and habitat within these areas, contributing to the overall objectives of the Strategy.

**Response to submission:** the support of the Strategy is noted. Council will continue to work with Parks Victoria in ensuring the reserves along Dandenong Creek are sufficiently vegetated. Some of the matters raised in this submission are more directly relevant to the Biodiversity Strategy, however, it is acknowledged that there is some crossover – particularly for this significant biodiversity corridor.

The EPA acknowledged the strategy and stated that it was not within the scope of the EPA's role and didn't need to provide a response.

**Response to submission:** the correspondence is noted.

Monash University were supportive of the Strategy and said that while planning requirements do not apply to their campus, their own plans were aligned with the objectives of the Strategy, and they will consider the tree species listed in the Strategy in their landscape designs / guidelines. They encouraged Council to improve and enhance the local neighbourhood character / streetscapes in the areas around the Clayton campus of Monash University.

**Response to submission:** the support of the Strategy is noted. The work being done by Monash University in terms of internal guidelines and policies is to be applauded. The campus abuts two landscape character precincts – native garden commercial / industrial to the east (where native species are encouraged) and gently undulating leafy garden suburban to the west (where exotic species are encouraged). Council will liaise with the university and VicRoads in relation to improving and enhancing the public realm areas around the campus.

VicTrack were supportive of the Strategy but stated that we must ensure that existing and future trees and plantings do not impact on the safety and function of the rail corridors.

**Response to submission:** It should be noted that all environmental overlays in the Victoria Planning Provisions contain an exemption that allows for lopping or removal of trees for safety and efficiency of the rail corridor.

#### 4.5 Category 4 – Local environment groups

We received submissions from the Friends of Damper Creek and the Friends of Scotchmans Creek and Valley Reserve.



The Friends of Damper Creek provided a short submission in support of the Strategy and the need for Council to implement it – noting that Council had the foresight 50 years ago to rezone Damper Creek and its surrounds as a permanent bushland reserve.

*Response to submission: the support for the Strategy is noted.*

The Friends of Scotchmans Creek and Valley Reserve were highly supportive of all parts of the Strategy (including the overall objectives, guidelines, planting lists, and the potential implementation options). They supported controls that have more “teeth” and better enforcement. The focus of their submission was on the Creek Habitat and Creek Valley Environs landscape character types – particularly supporting native canopy trees in Creek environs but also wanting to ensure that private land adjoining the creeks have canopy trees to ensure that the vegetation corridors are wide enough for wildlife to use. They wanted the benefits of trees to include the provision of wildlife corridors. They note a long involvement with Council in revegetation along Scotchmans Creek and in Valley Reserve.

*Response to submission: Council has prepared the Draft Biodiversity Strategy, which is currently undergoing a consultation process. Some of the matters raised in this submission are more directly relevant to the Biodiversity Strategy, however, it is acknowledged that there is some crossover.. The support for the Strategy is noted.*

#### **4.6 Category 5 – Specific site**

One submission was received in relation to a specific site – the Talbot Quarry site, which was the subject of Amendment C129, now abandoned by Council. The submission noted that remediation of the site to allow for residential use (if an amendment is ultimately approved) may involve the removal of some trees on the site, and that the size of the site should warrant urban consolidation be given priority over other objectives. A tree report provided in support of a previous application noted the trees on the site to be of low or moderate retention value. The submission also noted that significant landscaping would be included as part of the redevelopment.

*Response to submission: The Strategy provides a direction and it is premature to consider the implications of future planning controls on a specific site at this time. Furthermore, any future rezoning and development of this site would be subject to future consideration by Council and future planning processes. The retention of vegetation and the layout of future vegetation on the site would be considered having regard to practical matters such as remediation.*

#### **4.7 Category 6 – Internal**

Two submissions were received from Council officers providing feedback on community safety issues that were not previously provided through internal stakeholder workshops.

These submissions stated that the Strategy didn’t highlight the consideration of accessibility in the community (e.g. for aging population, people with disabilities, families with prams and active members) and the implications of overhanging trees and dropping of vegetation on pavements, and root systems and pavements creating trip hazards. In addition, they stated that trees can impact on the perception of safety by blocking lighting, creating shadows, and dense planting reducing visibility.

The following specific comments were provided:

- Consider incorporating Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles when selecting planting and maintaining trees along pedestrian walkways (footpaths and through parks), so that the effect of planting on visual surveillance is considered.

- To eliminate concealment opportunities and allow clear sightlines, aim for foliage free zones along footpaths and pedestrian walkways between 600mm and 2500mm. While it is not always practical, ideally planting should aim to achieve this within 3m of pathways.
- Pathways with lighting (which means that it is encouraged as the suggested pedestrian route), should particularly aim to achieve good visual surveillance.
- Tree planting or pruning should consider the location of lighting in car parks and along pedestrian paths that are used at night, to ensure large canopies are not blocking the light source to the site.

*Response to submissions: the Strategy will be updated to ensure community safety measures are considered as part of the planting and maintenance of vegetation, and it discusses the practical impact of trees on accessibility (particularly in the public realm). While the Strategy contains a number of guidelines, further guidelines and policy can be developed as part of the implementation of the Strategy that consider accessibility and safety issues.*

## 5 Recommendations

### 5.1 Recommended changes to the Strategy

The following are some recommended changes to the Strategy flowing from specific matters raised by submitters and survey respondents:

1. Add content around community safety measures to be considered as part of the planting and maintenance of vegetation
2. Add some discussion about the practical impact of trees on accessibility (particularly in the public realm)
3. Add some additional benefits of trees in relation to biodiversity and as habitats for birds and other fauna.
4. Changes necessary to ensure that there is alignment between the Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy.

### 5.2 Further considerations for implementation / future actions

The following are some further issues that should be considered in the preparation of an implementation plan or options:

- Utilise ideas from the detailed submissions to inform community education program
- Develop further guidelines that draw on best practice that intersect with the Strategy (e.g. access, safety)
- Liaise with Monash University and VicRoads in relation to improving and enhancing the public realm areas around the Clayton campus

## 6 Conclusion

The consultation for the Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy was undertaken over an extended timeframe of 11 weeks, and included opportunities for residents and interested persons to find out more about the garden city character of Monash and what the strategy aims to do. With five drop in sessions, Council officers were able to engage with community members and provide information on the strategy and vegetation issues more generally.

The submissions received from community members, authorities, and through the on-line surveys indicated a high level of support for maintaining and improving garden city character, and for the vision and objectives of the Strategy itself.