

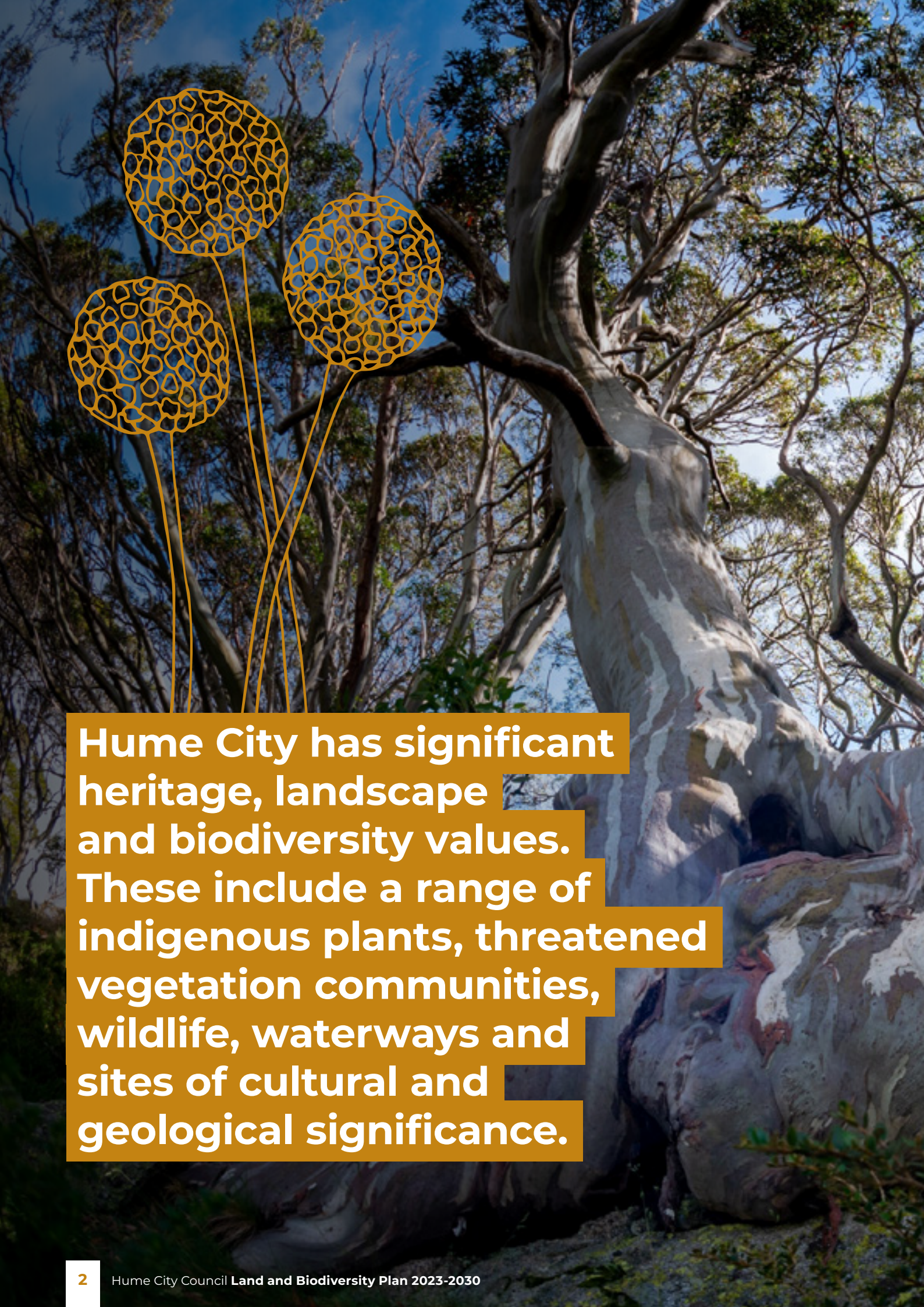


HUME CITY COUNCIL

Land and Biodiversity Plan 2023-2030

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Hume City has significant heritage, landscape and biodiversity values. These include a range of indigenous plants, threatened vegetation communities, wildlife, waterways and sites of cultural and geological significance.



Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people

Hume City is located on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung have a deep and enduring relationship with, connection and responsibility to land, water and sky. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung have been managing land and water for more than 60,000 years. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people continue to safely steward the diverse landscapes of Hume through Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung land management practices. The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have a deep understanding and knowledge of Country and this connection should be respected and valued.

Hume City remains rich in Aboriginal cultural heritage. The municipality has more than 700 registered Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Places including burial sites, artefact scatters, earth features, low density artefact distributions, object collections, quarries, scarred trees and stone features. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have a cultural obligation in preserving not just their cultural objects, but the natural landscapes of cultural importance. Significant cultural, community and environmental value require protection. This is essential to the identity and wellbeing of the Wurundjeri people.

Hume has a large and growing population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who come from varied backgrounds, locations and life experiences, and have their own connection to country, culture and community.

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Introduction



Hume City is a culturally diverse municipality. Hume City has significant heritage, landscape and biodiversity values. These include a range of indigenous plants, threatened vegetation communities, wildlife, waterways and sites of cultural and geological significance.

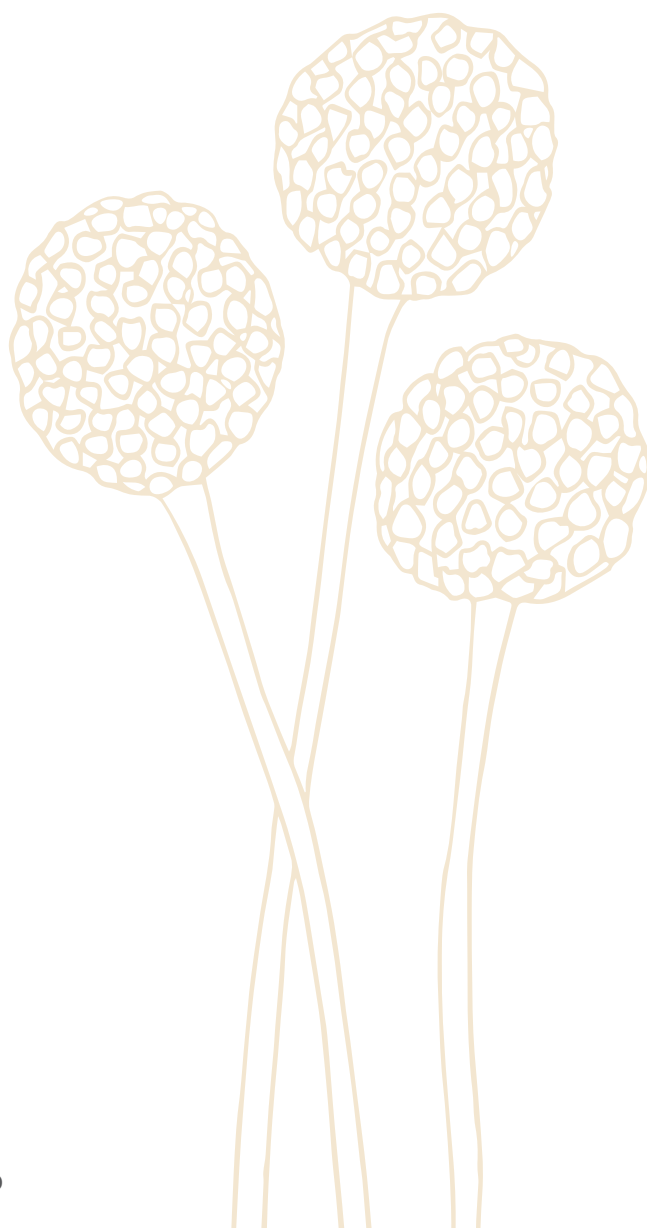
Many of these values, such as the ancient River Red Gums, deep creek valleys and Aboriginal artefact scatters, define the character of our landscape and contribute strongly to Hume City's identity and sense of place.

The *Land and Biodiversity Plan 2023-2030* outlines Hume Council's strategic direction for the protection and management of these important values. The Land and Biodiversity Plan identifies:

- The particular land and biodiversity values/assets that necessitate protection and/or enhancement in Hume City,
- The planning and policy context for the management of land and biodiversity values in Hume, including Council's roles and responsibilities,
- Impacts of climate change on the health of Hume's nature reserves, on landscape connectivity, urban biodiversity, cultural heritage assets and Hume's rural landscape and
- An overarching goal, clear objectives, actions, and targets to direct the implementation of this plan over a seven-year timeframe.

The *Land and Biodiversity Plan 2023-2030* follows the *Land and Biodiversity Plan 2015-2019*. Under the previous plan, Council committed to 21 actions across three goals.

Thirteen actions were completed entirely with seven actions ongoing and carried over to the new Plan. Three actions are considered redundant, superseded by related actions.



Actions achieved, Land and Biodiversity Plan 2015-2019



GOAL:

The city's natural heritage, environment and rural spaces are protected, enhanced, maintained and valued

ACTIONS: 15

COMPLETE, REDUNDANT OR INCOMPLETE:

- **10** complete
- **1** redundant, superseded by related actions
- **4** carried forward and implemented to specific projects



GOAL:

Cultural heritage sites and identified, protected and effectively managed

ACTIONS: 4

COMPLETE, REDUNDANT OR INCOMPLETE:

- **2** complete
- **2** ongoing and carried forward to new Plan



GOAL:

Suburbs are leafier, with increased canopy cover

ACTIONS: 2

COMPLETE, REDUNDANT OR INCOMPLETE:

- **2** considered redundant, superseded by related actions

Council's roles in relation to land and biodiversity

The Council Plan establishes several strategic objectives to guide progress for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity. One key strategic objective is to:

“Facilitate appropriate urban development and enhance natural environment, heritage, landscapes and rural places.”

This strategic objective defines the scope of the Land and Biodiversity Plan. As such, it has been adopted as the overarching goal of the Land and Biodiversity Plan from which several themes, objectives and actions have originated.






Council's four overarching functions as a local government are to provide community services, act as a Statutory Authority, facilitate service delivery with other organisations, and advocate on behalf of the Hume community. The table below explains how Council performs these functions in relation to land and biodiversity.

Council's Role	Relevance to land and biodiversity
Statutory Authority	Council has a legal obligation to manage land, including protecting threatened plants and plant communities, protecting cultural heritage, and controlling declared weeds and pests. Council also has an important role to play in reviewing and implementing the Hume Planning Scheme and ensuring that development complies with planning requirements around protection of the environment and cultural heritage.
Service Provider	Council provides a range of services to the community that aim to protect and manage land and biodiversity whilst supporting community wellbeing. This includes offering financial incentives for sustainable land management, delivering workshops, field days and other events as engagement and capacity-building programs for residents and local community organisations, developing information resources and providing advice and guidance. Council also manages some privately owned or state-owned land for conservation purposes by agreement with the landowner.
Facilitator	Council has a role to play in supporting and partnering with other land managers in Hume, in neighbouring municipalities, and sometimes across the State to better manage land and biodiversity. Council also facilitates collaboration between a range of community and government stakeholders to mobilise and direct resources to where they are most needed.
Advocate	Council advocates to all levels of government for the best outcomes for the Hume community and the local environment. This includes important advocacy around issues such as weeds and pests, native vegetation protection and government investment into land and biodiversity initiatives.



Themes

The objectives and actions of the Land and Biodiversity Plan relate to five key themes, described in the table below.

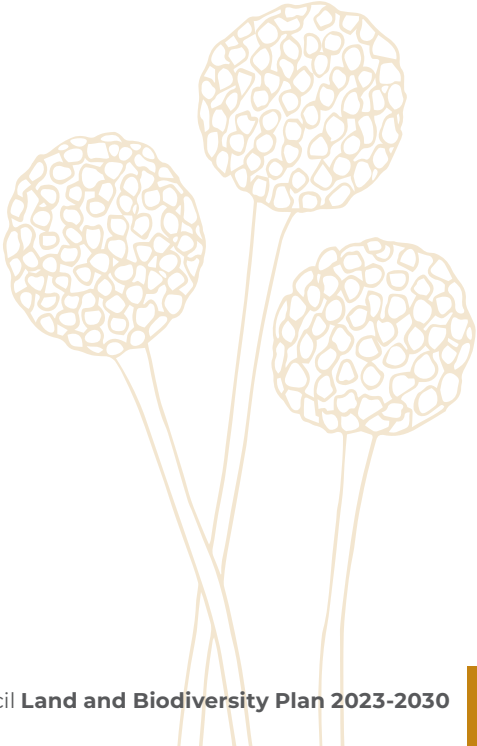
 <p>THEME 1: A healthy and thriving network of nature reserves</p>	<p>This theme relates to Council's role as a land manager, specifically the management of conservation areas and flora and fauna. It focusses on how Council can enhance the current system of management to achieve a healthy and thriving network of nature reserves.</p>
 <p>THEME 2: A well-connected landscape for wildlife</p>	<p>This theme explores the important function that adjoining vegetation plays within the landscape to facilitate movement of flora and fauna across and between urban, rural, and natural environments in Hume and beyond Hume's borders.</p>
 <p>THEME 3: Urban biodiversity and health and wellbeing</p>	<p>This theme explores the important role that urban areas play in supporting biodiversity, including parks, streetscapes and residential gardens. This theme recognises the important link between nature connection and community health and wellbeing.</p>
 <p>THEME 4: A landscape rich in cultural values and heritage</p>	<p>This theme supports the cultural values of the Traditional Owners of Hume City, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. It supports significant cultural landscapes, heritage and connections and the return of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the ongoing custodians of their Country. It also supports non-Aboriginal heritage requiring protections.</p>
 <p>THEME 5: A healthy and productive rural landscape</p>	<p>This theme explores the vast rural landscape of Hume City, and Council's role in supporting rural landowners to manage their land sustainably as custodians of one of Melbourne's green wedges.</p>

Planning and policy context

The Land and Biodiversity Plan sits within a broader framework of Council strategies and plans (Figure 1). The Land and Biodiversity Plan is identified as a strategy or action plan within Figure 1. It seeks to meet the land and biodiversity-related priorities of the *Council Plan*, and the overarching *Community Vision*, alongside a range of other Council strategies and action plans.

Key actions identified within the Land and Biodiversity Plan will be incorporated into the Council Plan and linked to team and individual staff performance objectives to drive their implementation.

Figure 1: Council’s planning framework.





Council Plan and Pathways to Sustainability Framework

The Land and Biodiversity Plan is underpinned by important principles of social justice and sustainability. It seeks to progress Council's *Pathways to Sustainability Framework*, which is contained within the *Council Plan 2021-2025*. Three Pathways from the Pathways to Sustainability Framework are particularly relevant to the Land and Biodiversity Plan; 'provide strong environmental stewardship' (Pathway 3), 'support self-determination and partnerships with Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' (Pathway 7) and 'recognise the rights of nature' (Pathway 8).

Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025

Hume's *Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025* provides directions for promoting equity of health outcomes. One of these key directions is 'green, interconnected and social environments.' Priority 4 of Hume's *Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025* is 'a green environment, climate action and community resilience.' The link between natural spaces and health and wellbeing is an important principal underpinning the Land and Biodiversity Plan.

Open Space Strategy

The *Hume Open Space Strategy* guides Council's work in planning for and managing a high-quality open space network that supports the health and wellbeing of the community and the natural environment in a changing climate. The Land and Biodiversity Plan complements this strategy and progresses the natural environment priorities for open space in Hume.

Climate Action Plan 2023 – 2028

Hume's *Climate Action Plan 2023 – 2028* recognises the need to build climate resilience across Hume's nature reserves, as well as increase tree canopy cover throughout Hume City's open space network to reduce heat in urban areas.

Reconciliation Action Plan

Hume's Reconciliation Action Plan acknowledges the journey towards reconciliation, demonstrates recognition and respect for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and provides practical actions to assist with health, education and employment opportunities.

Rural Strategy

Hume's Rural Strategy 2022 outlines Council's role in protecting the curfew free operation of Melbourne Airport, protecting the rural qualities and opportunities in Hume by maintaining the diverse lot sizes and urban growth boundary, and maintaining important natural and cultural values. The Rural Strategy provides details of the steps Council is taking to support rural landowners and land managers as the caretakers of the rural areas in Hume. The Rural Strategy recognises environmental and landscape values in the planning scheme.

External drivers and state and regional strategies influencing this Plan

Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037

This state government strategy aims to improve the health of Victoria's biodiversity. It also seeks to increase people's connection to nature by supporting environmental volunteering. The sections of the Land and Biodiversity Plan that contribute to the priorities in *Biodiversity 2037* include Theme 1: *A Healthy and Thriving Network of Nature Reserves*, Theme 2: *A Well Connected Landscape for Wildlife* and Theme 3: *Urban biodiversity and health and wellbeing*.

The Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (BCS) for Melbourne's Growth Corridors identifies Conservation Areas and outcomes required under the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999. The BCS is being implemented as part of the Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA) program and is the basis for protecting and securing conservation land along Merri Creek, Jacksons Creek, and Emu Creek.

Climate change, Victoria's Climate Change Strategy and Building Victoria's Climate Resilience

Climate modelling shows that the climate of Victoria, and therefore of Hume, is becoming hotter and dryer, with an increase in extreme weather events, bushfires, floods and heatwaves are becoming more frequent and intense (*Hume Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025*). This presents an immediate and ongoing threat to the health of people, animals and ecosystems.

The Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (NAGA, 2021) reports that under the current high emissions scenario, predicted climate change impacts for Melbourne include:

- 2.4 degrees Celsius temperature increase by 2050,
- Double the number of very hot days,
- Longer fire seasons with up to 60% more very high fire danger days
- Melbourne's climate will be more like Wangaratta's

During heat waves, green spaces in our urban areas are particularly important to help provide heat havens for local wildlife and for people. Green spaces in urban areas help to reduce heat from roads and buildings on hot days. Native trees and ground cover near waterways also help provide a buffer to reduce the impacts of flooding.

One of the aims of Victoria's Climate Change Strategy is to recognise and safeguard the role of our natural environment in reducing emissions. Climate change is a major threat to biodiversity and land values. Ongoing drought conditions, storm damage and floods present challenges to retaining the values of nature reserves. Additional resources will be required to protect biodiversity in the future.

Hume is a participant in the Victorian Climate Councils Alliance.

Healthy Waterways Strategy (HWWS) for Port Phillip & Westernport region

The Healthy Waterways Strategy sets priorities and targets for waterways across the Yarra and Maribyrnong catchments, including in Hume City. This includes targets for revegetation and control of weeds to achieve an improvement in the health and biodiversity of creeks and rivers. The targets both complement and contribute to the priorities for conservation in Hume's Land and Biodiversity Plan, particularly in theme 2, *A Well Connected Landscape for Wildlife*.

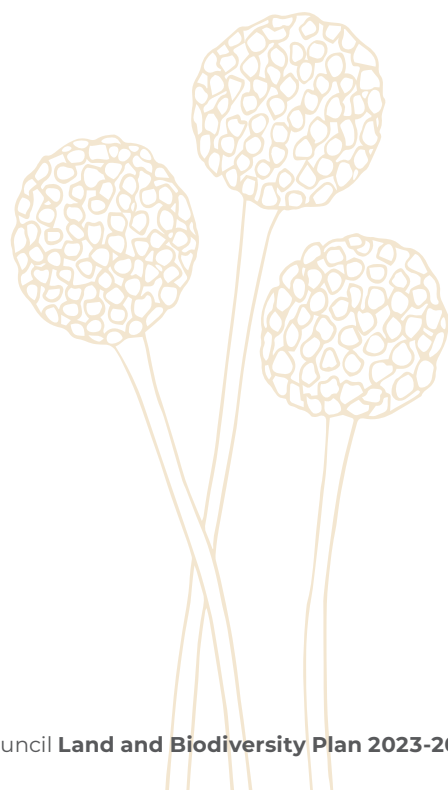
Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy, Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, Heritage Act 2017 and Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018 - 2023

The Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscape Strategy represents a shared vision of Traditional Owner communities across Victoria to heal Country and culture. It sets a number of priorities that enable organisations like Council to support this vision with local Traditional Owner communities. The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 and Heritage Act 2017 outline Council's obligations to protect cultural heritage in capital works developments, and to ensure that developers have effective Cultural Heritage Management Plans when required. The Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023 emphasises the importance of culturally safe services for Aboriginal people and describes Aboriginal self-determination as a human right, encompassing a spectrum of rights that are necessary for Aboriginal Victorians to achieve economic, social and cultural equity, based on their own cultural values and way of life.

This includes rights to not be discriminated against, enjoy language, culture and heritage, land and natural resources, have access to the basic necessities of life and be economically self-sufficient, make decisions that impact their lives from a position of wellbeing and empowerment and for 'grassroots community' to have ownership and responsibility for their own affairs and their own communities, including through designing and delivering policy and services on their own terms, setting their own funding priorities and holding their service providers accountable. These priorities are explored in theme 4 of the Land and Biodiversity Plan, *A Landscape Rich in Cultural Heritage*.

Living Melbourne, Greening the West and Greening the North initiatives

Living Melbourne, Greening the West and Greening the North initiatives are collaborative projects to extend and link urban forestry and nature conservation initiatives to foster improved community health and wellbeing and reduce climate change impacts. The Land and Biodiversity Plan will address several priorities identified through these initiatives in Theme 1 of the Plan, *A Healthy and Thriving Network of Nature Reserves*.





THEME 1:

**A healthy and thriving
network of nature reserves**



Hume City Council manages conservation areas totalling approximately 841 hectares across the municipality. Some of these areas are owned by Council and some are managed via formal agreements. The actions in this Plan will guide Council to build on our knowledge of ecological features across our nature reserves.

The actions in this plan will also guide the strategic assessment of Hume City's conservation management practices. This approach is particularly important as changing climatic conditions will alter ecosystems already under threat and increase the spread of invasive species. Evidence-based, informed decisions can then be made to effectively inform land management approaches that are adaptable to changes in local ecosystems.

Climate change places pressure on plants, animals, and landscapes, making it one of the leading threats to biodiversity in Hume and more broadly across the world. Hotter, drier conditions and more extreme weather events place direct and ongoing pressures on nature reserves and can exacerbate other threats such as weeds and landscape fragmentation.

Further investigation needs to occur into how Council can manage nature reserves to build climate resilience. By understanding which species will respond better than others under changing climatic conditions, Council can increase diversity across Hume's conservation areas to create resilient strongholds for plant and animal species.

Monitoring and evaluation of our land management practices will assist us to continually improve our methods for protecting local vegetation and wildlife, whilst providing opportunities for the community to connect with nature.



Environmental values across the nature reserves

Native vegetation

Hume supports some of the most endangered vegetation types or ecosystems in Australia, including grassy woodlands and grasslands. Compared to their original distribution, these remaining areas are small and fragmented. Of the 457 native flora species that have been recorded throughout Hume's nature reserves, 31 are listed as threatened or endangered under State and/or Federal legislation. In addition, 218 flora species have been identified as 'unique', as they have been recorded in five or less nature reserves and are underrepresented in Hume.

Hume's rural roadsides span 300 kilometres and feature some dedicated roadside nature reserves. Rural roadside reserves contain significant remnant native vegetation, provide habitat for native wildlife and create linkages between vegetation patches. Rural roadside reserves are actively managed by Council to control noxious weeds.

Council manages nature reserves using a variety of land management techniques, including revegetation, weed control and ecological burning. Hume's ecological burns are influenced by the traditional land management practices of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung. Ecological burns stimulate natural regeneration of indigenous plants and reduce biomass, thereby reducing the risk of wildfire.

Adaptive management in Hume's nature reserves involves a 'learning by doing' approach, incorporating the latest scientific information. This approach is important as changing climatic conditions are altering ecosystems already under threat.

Wildlife

Eastern Grey Kangaroos, echidnas and native birds are commonly sighted across Hume. The elusive Platypus is less commonly sighted along Jacksons, Deep and Merri creeks. The threatened Growling Grass Frog inhabit the Merri and Yuroke creeks. The vulnerable day-flying Golden Sun Moth has been recorded across the municipality, with the largest known population in greater Melbourne occurring at Broadmeadows Valley Park.

As climate change progresses, it's also important to understand and monitor how animals are being impacted by changes to their habitat and food chain, so that Council can make informed decisions about strengthening the resilience of vulnerable ecosystems.

The extent of land protected in nature reserves and linkages between reserves will become increasingly important for wildlife. As the pressures of climate change increase – small isolated conservation areas will be at greater risk of losing their biodiversity values.

Natural Landscape

Hume City's natural landscape is characterised by expansive plains, volcanic hills and deeply cut river valleys. The prominent landscape summit at Mt Holden provides scenic views over Sunbury and greater Melbourne, to Port Phillip Bay and the You Yangs. Hume's landscape includes impressive remnant trees that are hundreds of years old. Old, gnarled River Red Gums are common along creeks and reserves throughout Mickleham and Greenvale, providing vital habitat for many wildlife species.

The volcanic cones across the municipality hint at the basalt geology of much of Hume that has nurtured the municipality's significant grasslands and distinctive biodiversity. These volcanic cones, including Reds Rock Hill, Deverall Hill, Fitzgerald Hill, O'Brien Hill, Burke's Hill, Crowe Hill, Fairbanks Hill and Gellibrand Hill are part of the world's third largest basalt plain that stretches west to the South Australian border. These cones continue to provide important viewlines that punctuate the landscape.

Hume's waterways include the Jacksons, Deep and Emu creeks in the west, the Merri and Moonee Ponds creeks in the east and the Maribyrnong River in the South. Each are connected to a network of smaller streams. Waterways support abundant native vegetation that plays an essential role in supporting wildlife habitat and movement across corridors. Hume's waterways vary in their degree of health, which has implications for healthy wildlife. Natural waterways are essential for the spiritual, cultural, mental and physical wellbeing of people, and have been central to the wellbeing of local Aboriginal people for thousands of years.

Collaborating for better outcomes

Biodiversity values transcend political borders. Hume is involved with important cross-organisational partnerships with other Councils and state government agencies, including the Merri Creek Management Committee, the Chain of Ponds Collaboration for the Moonee Ponds Creek, the Jacksons Creek biik wurrdha Regional Parklands Partnership Group, and marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parklands Partnership Group. Opportunities exist to build on existing relationships with these agencies to enhance biodiversity and encourage community connection to nature.

Council recognises the importance of adopting traditional land management practices across Hume's nature reserves and is committed to working alongside the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to learn culture and traditional management techniques.

By striving to improve our knowledge of Hume's native vegetation, wildlife and natural landscapes and through effective evaluation of land management practices, we will create an even more healthy and thriving network of nature reserves.

The recent partnership with WWCHAC to develop the Jacksons Creek biik wurrdha Regional Parklands Plan has provided a model for supporting the cultural knowledge and self-determined priorities of the Traditional Owners in the ongoing planning and management of their traditional lands.



Objectives

 OBJECTIVE 1.1:	Improving our understanding of Hume’s biodiversity
 OBJECTIVE 1.2:	Strategic management of Hume’s reserves
 OBJECTIVE 1.3:	Collaborating with other organisations to foster well informed land management practices







THEME 2:
**A well connected
landscape for wildlife**



Landscape connectivity is the degree to which native wildlife can move across the landscape between patches of native vegetation and waterways on both public and private land. Connectivity in the natural world can be likened to a human transport network. Wildlife need to move between available areas of habitat to continue to support strong populations into the future. Without a suitable degree of connectivity, populations will go into decline and some local extinctions may occur.

Climate impacts such as hotter, drier conditions and more extreme weather events will make landscape connectivity even more important for survival of native wildlife species. Extreme weather events impact wildlife as they need to move away from impacted areas in search of food, water and suitable habitat. Increased movement of species is already experienced in times of drought, or in response to fire and floods.

Climate change will also impact landscape connectivity across Hume, particularly how species interact with each other and their environment. It is likely that valleys and escarpments (such as cliffs and slopes) will be less vulnerable to climate change, as they are naturally buffered from extreme variation in climatic condition. Therefore, these areas may become important habitat sanctuaries as climate change progresses.

Protecting existing connectivity

To ensure landscape connectivity does not decline any further, it is critical to protect existing habitat patches and corridors, including waterways. This involves sustainable land management approaches that address threats to structural connectivity such as overgrazing, competition from weeds, soil erosion and the removal of native vegetation. Council is pursuing avenues to provide legal protections for habitat including an Environmental Significance Overlay in the Hume Planning Scheme, correct zoning of open space areas for public recreation and conservation and Trust for Nature Covenants. This involves an expansion of environmental and landscape overlay provisions and improvements to local policy in the Hume Planning Scheme.

Planning for future urban development provides opportunities for innovative approaches when addressing impacts from physical barriers, such as roads. For instance, installing functional wildlife crossings across major roads, can provide aerial cables for arboreal animals (possums) and enable ground-dwelling species to successfully move across the landscape.

Enhancing existing connectivity

Enhancing existing connectivity involves creating new vegetation patches / corridors, extending existing patches / corridors, encouraging natural regeneration of native vegetation and planting scattered or clusters of trees and shrubs across the landscape and waterways. Non-living habitat components such as tree hollows, fallen logs and rocks will also enhance connectivity. The installation of fabricated hollows using tree limbs pruned during tree maintenance, can increase the number of nesting sites for a range of species in open space areas and rural properties.



Collaboration

Places managed by Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water, such as Woodlands Historic Park in Greenvale and the Tarnuk Reserve in Westmeadows, are fundamental to the network of habitat patches and corridors found on public land within Hume. Opportunities exist to collaborate with road and rail authorities to enhance connectivity along linear corridors. Stakeholder networks such as the Moonee Ponds Creek Chain of Ponds collaboration and Merri Creek Management Committee offer opportunities to work at the waterway catchment scale to enhance connectivity. Other significant stakeholders in Hume include the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Corporation, which owns and manages sites of natural and cultural significance in Hume such as the Sunbury Rings, and volunteer groups that have worked tirelessly over decades to restore the natural environment through revegetation and weed control projects.

Monitoring and improvement

Council uses computer modelling to monitor changes in landscape connectivity over time. This helps us understand when species may be impacted and what action can be taken to reduce this impact.





Values that landscape connectivity aims to protect in Hume

Ecosystems and wildlife

Patches of native grasslands and woodlands are concentrated in Hume's rural areas, within parklands and nature reserves and along creek valleys and waterways. They are vital to ensuring landscape connectivity, as they provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife species.

Wildlife Species

Approximately 270 mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian, and fish vertebrate species have been recorded in Hume. Some of these species are in low numbers or are in decline, highlighting the critical importance of improving connectivity in the landscape.

Cultural values

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have been custodians of the Hume area for tens of thousands of years and value the landscape in its entirety for the spiritual, archaeological, historical, ecological and living connections that it provides. This is set out for example in the Jacksons Creek biik wurrdha Regional Parklands Cultural Values Study 2021.

Many of the natural areas that remain in Hume today are as culturally significant as they are ecologically significant. Protecting structural connectivity in the landscape assists in preserving cultural heritage.

Other structural connectivity elements

Many forms of vegetation exist across the landscape that contribute to connectivity in Hume. This includes non-native vegetation such as pine trees; trees and other vegetation in urban streetscapes and green spaces; native and non-native gardens on residential, industrial, or commercial properties; and any vegetation within rural areas. These structural connectivity elements enable some wildlife species to persist and even thrive in urban areas and provide resources for other species that may need to use urban sites to move between habitat patches.

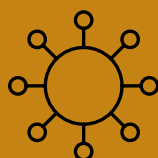


Objectives



OBJECTIVE 2.1:

Protecting vegetation that supports landscape connectivity



OBJECTIVE 2.2:

Enhance connectivity in the landscape



OBJECTIVE 2.3:

Collaborating with other stakeholders to enhance connectivity



OBJECTIVE 2.4:

Undertake monitoring and improvement





THEME 3: **Urban biodiversity and health and wellbeing**



The value of biodiversity in the urban environment

Neighbourhoods that are abundant in nature support an abundance of wildlife. People can readily connect and interact with biodiversity in a positive way. Nature connection plays an important role in maintaining and improving the mental health and wellbeing of people.

Hume's location on the urban fringe means it is not uncommon to see native animals in our everyday life. In Hume, urban gardens, streetscapes, parks and waterways are homes for more than 170 species of bird, 21 types of reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles), 13 frog species and nearly 30 different native mammals (including 12 microbats). Within Hume's urban areas, several threatened species exist including Golden Sun Moth, Growling Grass Frog, Swift Parrot, Matted Flax-lily and a protected population of critically endangered Eastern Barred Bandicoots at Woodlands Historic Park. Over 200 flora species found in less than a handful of Hume's nature reserves and are at risk of regional extinction.

Habitat plants in urban areas include groundcovers, wildflowers, grasses, shrubs, bushes and large trees. Mature hollow-bearing trees are vitally important to over 40 species of hollow-dependent fauna as nesting sites to rear their young.

Pollinators including birds, bees, butterflies, moths, flies, beetles, wasps, bats are under threat from habitat loss as well as the overuse of chemicals, disease, and climate change.

Residential, industrial and commercial environments serve as important habitat for many species of wildlife that have adapted to the built environment. Human-made structures provide nesting sites. Urban backyards, streetscapes and parks contribute to habitat connectivity.

Urban biodiversity programs

Council's urban biodiversity programs include Gardens for Wildlife, Community Greening and Citizen Science. Gardens for Wildlife supports community volunteers to provide advice to residents about wildlife friendly gardens. Citizen Science activities include bird count events and iNaturalist workshops such as the City Nature Challenge.

Community health and wellbeing

Healthy communities rely on healthy ecosystems. Without clean air, fresh water, clean food and food security, human health is put at risk. Large industrial estates produce a significant amount of air and stormwater pollution, which affects waterways, animals, and plant life. Pollution of air and water from industrial fires affects children, older residents, people with heart disease and lung conditions and people with disabilities in a disproportionate way. It is crucially important to prevent industrial pollution from occurring.

Being in the presence of nature can relieve stress and improve physical and mental health. For children, playing within nature supports creativity, problem-solving, and emotional and intellectual development. People thrive in physical environments that support social interactions in nature.

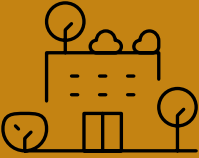

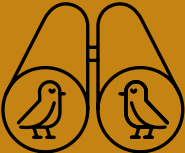
Food growing

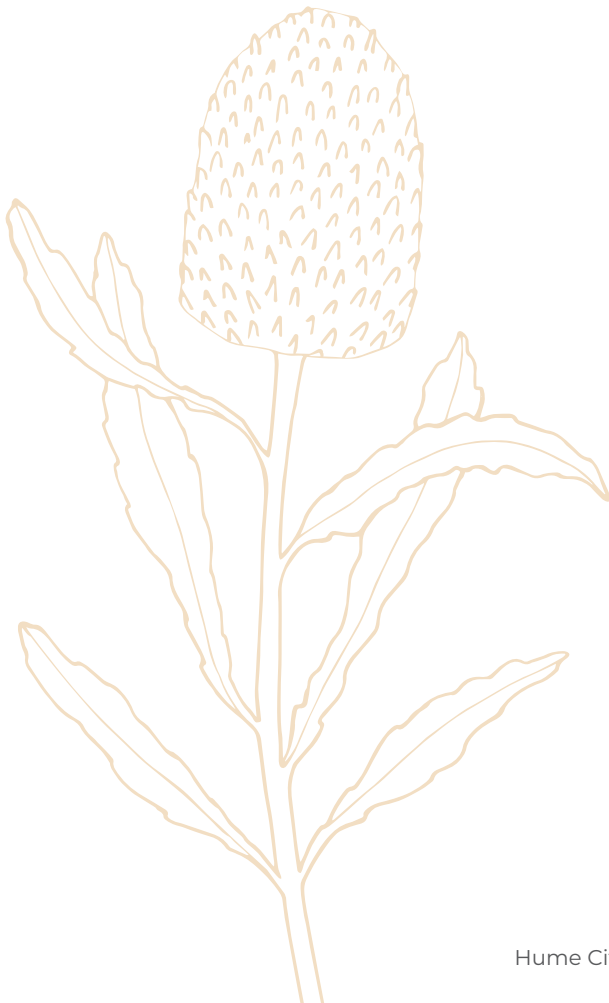
Growing our own food has benefits including food sovereignty (access to and control over healthy food produced sustainably and in a culturally appropriate way). In recent years food growing in urban areas, including Hume City, has increased in popularity, with more gardening happening in schools, community spaces and private gardens. This helps forge stronger social connections between people from different age groups and cultures. Food growing is extremely important for urban biodiversity, as birds and insects perform the vital function of pollinating plants. This is crucial to the health of the whole ecosystem.

Living with Wildlife

Council will redevelop the Living with Wildlife policy and will introduce elements of 'the rights of nature' addressed in the Council Plan's Pathways to Sustainability. Council will also update behaviour change messaging around commonly reported issues such as bird feeding, responsible recreational fishing, litter impacts on wildlife, and swooping magpies.

Objectives

 OBJECTIVE 3.1:	Enhance biodiversity connectivity within the urban environment
 OBJECTIVE 3.2:	Provide opportunities for the community to connect with nature through citizen science, engagement programs, and restoration projects
 OBJECTIVE 3.3:	Support residents and the community to live safely and harmoniously with wildlife





THEME 4: **A landscape rich in cultural heritage**



The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have an unbroken relationship with Country, caring for this land, its waterways, its plants and animals. The traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, extend from the north of Melbourne to Lerderderg State Park in the west to Baw Baw National Park in the east.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people nurture the environment to sustain their community as living culture. Traditional methods of managing Country sustain the land. Their living legacy of tens of thousands of years of occupation and land management is evident in archaeological sites scattered across the landscape and in oral histories passed down through generations. As inheritors of this vast cultural history, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people today continue the tradition of caring for Country and protecting cultural heritage.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung objectives, as outlined in the Cultural Values Strategic Principles prepared for Hume's Open Space Strategy include:

Cultural objective: redress the interruption of culture, enable meaningful continuity of culture through cultural practice, recognise and enable Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to share and educate others about culture.

Environmental objective: redress the degradation of lands and waters, ensure the protection, care of and connection to Country, ensure and enable meaningful participation in and control of the planning and management of Country (lands and waters), recognise Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung knowledge and enable Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to share and educate others about that knowledge.

Social objective: redress social inequity and ongoing oppression, enable and support Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to live and work on Country, recognise social and community values, enable and support Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to share and educate others about Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung society and history.

Economic objective: redress historic and ongoing dispossession and repair economic damage to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung society, ensure that a greater share of the resources taken from Country goes to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, enable and support economic self-determination.

Hume's landscape has changed significantly compared to the time when it was exclusively managed by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. Early colonial people pioneered a way of life that profoundly changed the land. Vegetation was removed for farming, roads and urban settlements. This caused environmental degradation at a rapid rate. This legacy continues to affect biodiversity, human and ecological health today.

Hume Council will partner with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Traditional Owners to work towards their cultural objective as outlined in the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Statement of Country prepared for Hume City Council to guide their Open Space Strategy and other related land, biodiversity, waterway strategies and plans, to redress the interruption of culture, enable meaningful continuity of culture through cultural practice, and recognise and enable Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to share and educate others about culture.

Cultural Heritage Values

Aboriginal cultural heritage

From volcanic hilltops to waterway valleys, Aboriginal heritage is abundant across the Hume landscape. Archaeological remnants include stone tool artefact scatters, middens, camp sites and scar trees. These sites hold living stories. Their significance is supported by historical records and oral histories in telling a narrative of how Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people utilised and managed the land and its resources in a sophisticated way. These sites hold historical, spiritual, educational, and scientific value for the community and a deeper significance for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.

The biik wurrdha valley along Jacksons Creek in Sunbury is of particular significance, being one of the few places in Victoria with preserved earth rings. While the exact story of the site is unclear, the Sunbury Rings are believed to be an important gateway for other tribes interacting with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung. Sections of freehold title of the Sunbury Rings Cultural Landscape are owned outright by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation. The return of Wurundjeri Country will continue, as set out in the Jacksons Creek biik wurrdha Regional Parklands Plan.. Each year through cultural heritage investigations, more Aboriginal heritage places and artefacts are rediscovered. Sharing of this cultural heritage needs to be done according to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung protocols.

As the effects of climate change include more severe storms, floods and fires, there is a risk that elements of significant sites may be destroyed and/or displaced.

Non-Aboriginal heritage

The former Bulla Shire Office and the site of the Sunbury Music Festival 1972-75 are sites of non-Aboriginal heritage significance. Remnants of homesteads and dry-stone walls and are a reminder of Hume's colonial history. They are part of the story of change in Hume City. Council takes various roles in managing non-Aboriginal heritage features including protection through policy including in the Hume Planning Scheme, and encouraging adaptive reuse where possible. A priority remains protecting heritage features as former agricultural land is developed around Sunbury and in the northern growth corridors.





Protecting and valuing cultural values

Council has both a legal and moral obligation to protect cultural heritage on the land it owns and manages, and to ensure as a statutory authority that cultural heritage is considered in development. Council has a responsibility to support self-determination for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung. Three key pieces of legislation that guide Council's role are the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, Heritage Act 2017 (dealing with non-Aboriginal heritage matters), and the Planning and Environment Act 1987 that informs the Hume Planning Scheme. The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) is the Registered Aboriginal Party for all land within Hume City and is responsible for enforcing the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006.

Council also has a broader goal to support Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents and communities in Hume and work towards reconciliation, which is addressed through the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). An important component of reconciliation is truth-telling. Truth-telling enables Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents and communities to educate non-Aboriginal community members about the impacts of ongoing colonisation, the stolen generations and genocide. The Hume Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recognition Policy recognises the impacts of dispossession and intergenerational trauma and highlights the need for self-determination for Aboriginal people. The Stolen Generations Marker at Malcolm Creek Wetlands, Craigieburn pays tribute to the Stolen Generations – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly removed from their families and communities - denied their identity, family, traditional culture and country through the race-based policies of State and Federal Governments between 1910-1970s.

Hume partners with a number of local Aboriginal networks and community organisations including the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group, Sunbury Aboriginal Corporation and Wandarra community organisation to redress social inequity and ongoing oppression and redress historic and ongoing dispossession. Council does this by making community spaces available, providing enhanced maternal child health services run by Aboriginal staff, supporting the Elders and Boorais group and supporting local Aboriginal artists.

The Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy identifies five strategic directions over the next 10 years to progress the healing of Country and people. The priorities most relevant to the Land and Biodiversity Plan are:

- To enable Traditional Owner cultural landscape planning
- To embed Traditional Owner knowledge and practice into policy, planning and management of Country
- To enable the application of Traditional Owner cultural objectives, knowledge and practice in the management of public land.

Objective 18.1 of the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018- 2023 aims to increase the recognition and enjoyment of Aboriginal land, water and cultural heritage rights. The Victorian Traditional Owner Culture Fire Strategy recognises that fire allows for healing and caring for Country. Burning is cultural responsibility of Traditional Owners and applies the approach of right fire, right time, and right way for the right cultural reasons. There are substantial positive impacts to Traditional Owner wellbeing and confidence through providing access and authority to practice on Country. Cultural burning practices meet cultural and ecological objectives while also reducing the risk of damaging bushfire. Land managers to recognise the authority of Traditional Owners to lead the development and application of fire practice on Country. Fire management is to be viewed as more than asset protection, and future parkland planning will apply more holistic reflection of fire management.

To respond to the priorities of Hume's Reconciliation Action Plan, Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy, Victorian Traditional Owner Culture Fire Strategy, The Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018- 2023 and legislation, Council will focus on three priority areas under this theme:

- **Governance** – Ensuring Council's internal processes are adequate to meet statutory and moral obligations.
- **Partnership** – Partnering with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to conserve and manage land.
- **Community engagement** – Raising awareness about the importance of cultural heritage and involving the community in managing and celebrating it.

Governance

As a statutory authority Council must ensure that any development proposal, whether on Council or private land, considers the protection of heritage values. For development proposals that require a planning permit, Council must ensure that the requirements of the Heritage Act 2017 and Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 have been adequately addressed. Proponents of development must understand how their development may impact on heritage values and demonstrate that they have put measures in place to minimise or negate those impacts to have their permit approved. Council must follow a similar process for development projects it undertakes on public land, ensuring that project plans mandate the need for heritage due diligence.

Council has Cultural Heritage Guidelines for project managers to assist in effectively considering the requirements of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 and Heritage Act 2017 in their projects on Council land. These guidelines prescribe when an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) is required for a project, or if a Cultural Heritage Permit is needed to undertake an activity near an existing Aboriginal Heritage Place. Both approvals are granted by the WWCHAC and place strict requirements on the developer to ensure harm to cultural heritage is minimised or negated. Ensuring Council staff are aware of and can effectively apply the guidelines will be fundamental to achieving compliance with regulations at all times.

Heritage advisors

In instances where a Due Diligence Assessment, Cultural Heritage Management Plan or Cultural Heritage Permit are required, the advice and assistance of an internal Heritage Advisor would provide readily accessible information on cultural heritage matters across multiple sections in Council. While the Cultural Heritage Guidelines are a valuable tool for project managers, they will not remove the need for expert cultural heritage advice from a registered Heritage Advisor in many instances.





Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Partnership:

A key aspiration of the WWCHAC is to provide a holistic approach to working on Country. To this end the WWCHAC has established the Narrap Team, a team of rangers working on Country to manage ecosystems. The Narrap Team operate under the philosophy of relearning and applying traditional land management practices in conjunction with contemporary techniques.

Council's Reconciliation Action Plan and Pathways to Sustainability Framework recognise the importance of self-determination, self-advocacy and the aspirations of Aboriginal people. This includes being empowered to make decisions about cultural heritage values on Country. To meet these important needs, Council is initiating a land management partnership with the WWCHAC. This partnership agreement will evolve over time to ensure the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have a voice in how Council-owned and managed sites of Aboriginal cultural heritage significance are managed.

Council also works with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung to incorporate the principles of cultural flows in the management of waterways in Hume. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung representatives were involved in the development of the regional Upper Merri Creek Integrated Water Management project.

It is a priority for Council that the voices of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Traditional Owners are heard, to have relationships based on respect and shared understanding. Council recognises that Cultural strength is an enabling factor for the Aboriginal community.

WWCHAC have been central partners in the planning of marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parklands and the biik wurrdha Jacksons Creek Regional Parklands and cultural values and priorities are now embedded in the strategic directions for these parklands.

Community engagement:

The sharing of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural knowledge must occur with permission of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Traditional Owners. One of five themes in Council's Live Green Plan for sustainability engagement with the community includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ecological practices. Council organises and supports community education workshops with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Traditional Owners and educators.

Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recognition Policy (September 2020) states that in regards to the naming of places with Woi-wurrung place names, Council will actively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities including Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, the RAPWG and broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members in the naming of places.

Objectives



OBJECTIVE 4.1:

Ensure legislative compliance and increase Council's capacity to protect cultural heritage values through land development projects



OBJECTIVE 4.2:

Increase active management of cultural values on Council land under guidance by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung



OBJECTIVE 4.3:

Establish and implement a long-term, living land management partnership agreement with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation



OBJECTIVE 4.4:

Support Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to build their capacity to care for Country in Hume



OBJECTIVE 4.5:

Partner with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung to engage the Hume community in understanding the Aboriginal cultural heritage significance of sites across Hume City



THEME 5:
**A healthy and productive
rural landscape**



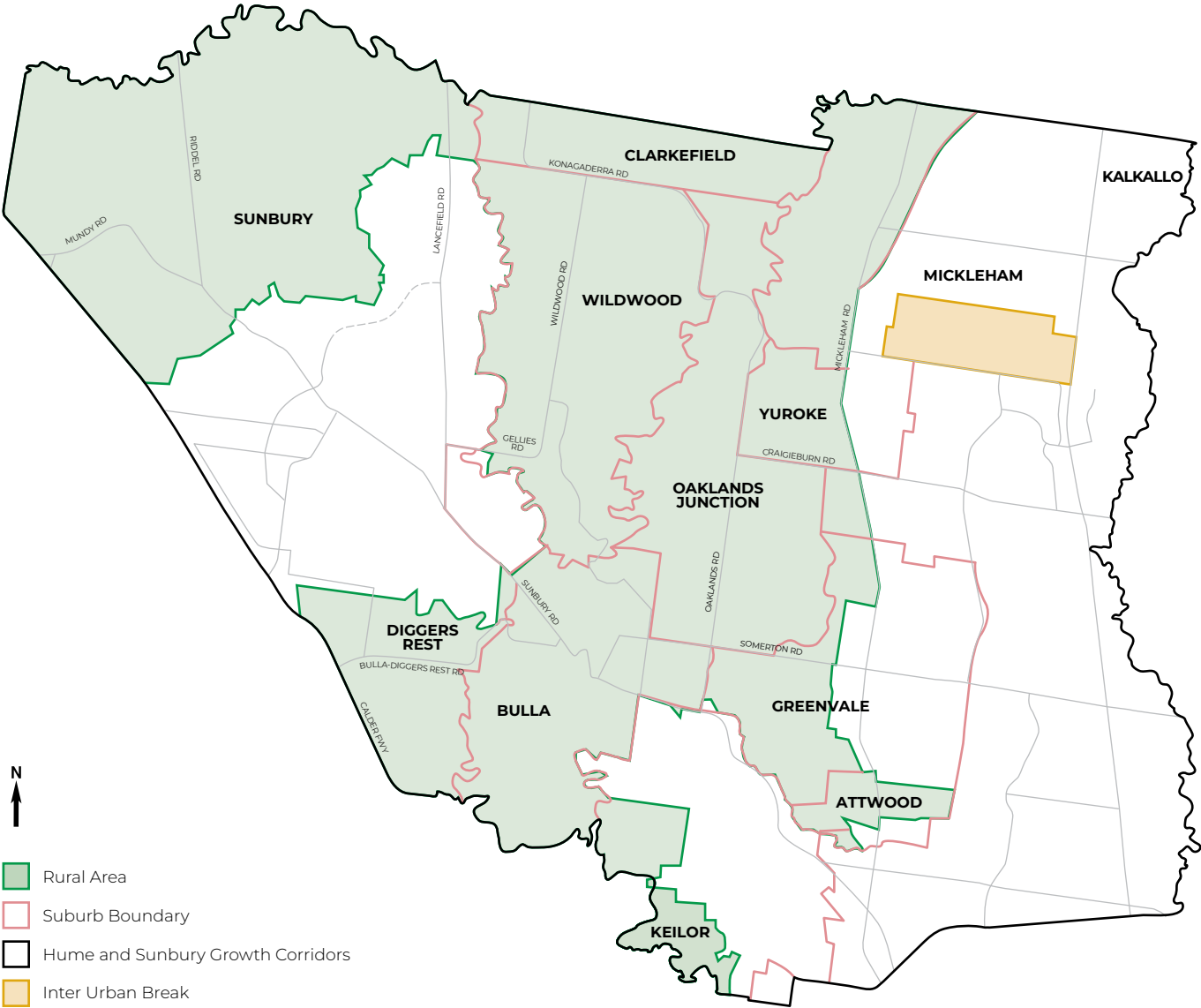
About half of Hume City's total land area – more than 250 of 504 square kilometres - is designated as green wedge zone, outside Melbourne's urban growth boundary and protected from development by State government policy. This land is characterised by grasslands and grassy woodlands of the Victorian volcanic plains and intersected by several steep creek valleys and narrow floodplains.

Landholders in the rural areas face challenges including pressures from surrounding development, climate change, weed infestation, land banking, illegal rubbish dumping, absentee landholders and an aging farming community. Hume's Rural Engagement Program supports landholders with incentives and education to manage natural, agricultural and landscape values.

Hume's green wedge includes the significant state infrastructure of Melbourne Airport. Development regulations protect the ongoing curfew-free operations of the airport. The rural community play an important role as stewards of the land, protecting, conserving and restoring Hume's green wedge.



Figure 3: Map of the rural area of Hume City, showing suburb boundaries and the adjoining urban growth corridors.



Agriculture/horticulture production

Agricultural and horticulture pursuits in Hume include grazing for beef and sheep, horse agistment/ownership, grape and olive production, cropping, orchards, regenerative farming and lifestyle farming. Farming in Hume supports livelihoods, retains natural processes such as water and oxygen circulation and is a cultural way of life.

Biodiversity

Hume's rural areas are rich in biodiversity. In fact the rural areas support most of the native vegetation and wildlife habitat that occurs in the municipality. Despite land clearing and other farming practices, biodiversity provides economic benefits to the community through natural pest management and revitalisation of soils. Hume's biodiversity is integral to the municipality's character, and there are opportunities to support landscape-based tourism and hospitality activities that support a regenerative approach to landscape renewal as part of a sustainable local economy.

Rural Strategy and Rural Engagement Program

The priorities set by the Land and Biodiversity Plan for a healthy and productive rural landscape align with Council's Rural Strategy. The Rural Strategy explores the broader challenges facing the rural community and identifies opportunities for protection and enhancement of the rural landscape.

Vision for Hume's Rural Areas

Council's primary role in supporting a healthy and productive rural landscape is to support people living and working on the land by providing services that invest in social and economic wellbeing. People who are well-supported are more likely to succeed in their endeavours to manage the land sustainably.

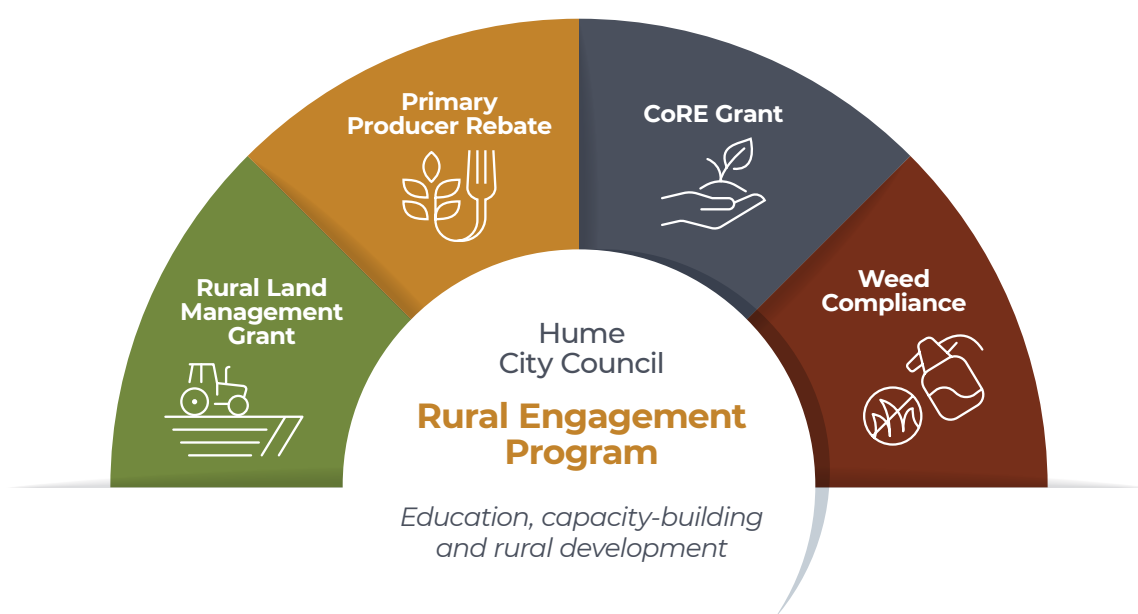
Control of weeds is particularly important in Hume. Weed infestations are already a significant land management issue and are expected to increase as a result of climate change. Many weeds respond well to flood and fire, both of which are expected to intensify as climate change progresses (Steffen et al., 2009, p. 133) and some weeds are well adapted to hotter and drier conditions. The Weed Compliance and Education Program aims to work with rural landholders on making a reasonable effort to control noxious weeds on their land.



Council's Rural Engagement Program (Figure 4), includes the following initiatives that support the rural community to manage the land sustainably for production and biodiversity:

- Primary Producer Rate Rebate (PPRR) – a 30% rate rebate for agricultural businesses in the green wedge who typically have higher cost and time inputs associated with managing their land. Council staff visit properties annually where the landholder is a recipient of a Primary Producer Rate Rebate.
- Rural Land Management Grant (RLMG) – a \$300 grant, plus an additional \$20 per hectare of land owned, targeted at the non-farming community or those undertaking hobby farming to support land managers to manage land in an environmentally sustainable way.
- Conserving our Rural Environment (CoRE) Grant – a grant of up to \$10,000 per eligible property to undertake environmental works to protect and enhance biodiversity. This program was established in 2012 and supports landowners to protect and manage the vast nature reserves on rural land in Hume City.
- Weed Compliance and Education Program – Under the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (CaLP Act) all landholders are responsible for controlling and reducing noxious weeds throughout their property. Council's local law gives authorised officers the ability to provide directions to landholders to control significant weed infestations. Landholders may receive infringements if they do not comply.
- Education, capacity-building and rural development – Council offers workshops, field days and information resources to assist landowners to build their capacity to manage weeds, pest animals, revegetation, conservation, soil health and agriculture. This program will continue, with new topics including agribusiness and climate change adaptation. Landowners can also apply for an Agriculture Scholarship up to \$1500 for on-farm advice to build their skills for specific productive and sustainable land uses.

Figure 4: Diagrammatic overview of Council's Rural Engagement Program, including the Rural Land Management Grant, Primary Producer Rate Rebate, Conserving our Rural Environment (CoRE) Grant and Weed Compliance Program. Underpinning these programs is a focus on supporting education, capacity-building and development of landowners.



Objectives



OBJECTIVE 5.1:

Reduce the spread and extent of noxious priority weeds within the rural area of Hume



OBJECTIVE 5.2:

Support primary producers to practice sustainable agricultural production in Hume



OBJECTIVE 5.3:

Increase the capability of rural landowners to manage their land sustainably and enhance resilience to climate change



OBJECTIVE 5.4:

Support collaboration between rural residents engaged in sustainable land management



OBJECTIVE 5.5:

Increase native vegetation and wildlife habitat in the Hume's rural areas





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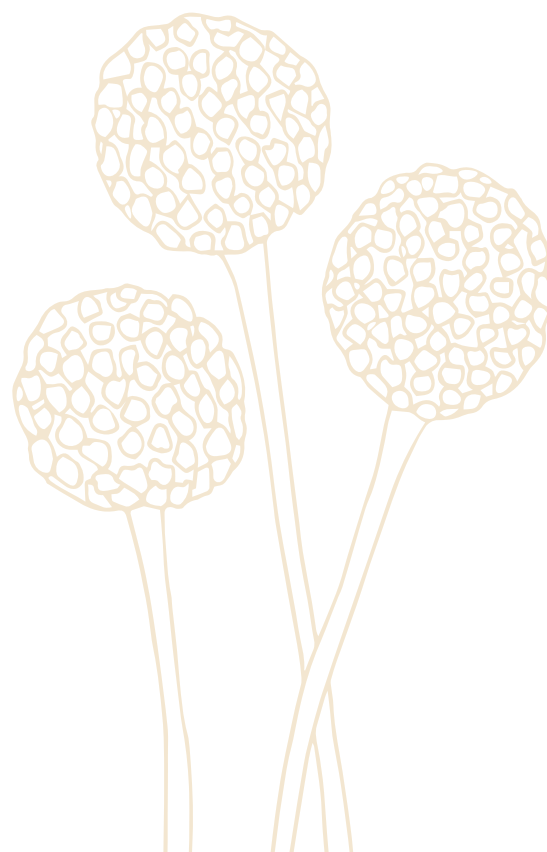
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