

# Nature Strip Guidelines Phase One Engagement Summary Report

June 2023



## Background

In August 2022, Councillors endorsed a recommendation to review the current Nature Strip Policy and Guidelines. As per the Council report this review would include both participatory and deliberative engagement opportunities and:

*'..... include a survey of permit applicants and the broader community and deliberation on the identified issues and opportunities in a workshop of interested parties'.*

There are six stages to the review:

- Stage 1 – Environmental analysis of local government
- Stage 2 – Community engagement targeting the existing permit applicants and the broader community
- Stage 3 – Issues and opportunities workshop
- Stage 4 – Policy information
- Stage 5 – Community feedback on draft policy
- Stage 6 – Council consideration

## Methodology

The first community conversation sought views on nature strips generally and asked for ideas on how they should be developed in the future.

The engagement period covered a five week period from 20 February 2023 to 26 March 2023.

An article on Nature Strips featured in the Autumn edition of the Maribyrnong Matters newsletter which was distributed to 38,000 households across the municipality, introducing the project and calling for feedback including ideas and suggestions on the future of nature strips.

A blog and a social media post on 24 February 2023 also promoted the project and invited residents to share their views and stories on nature strips, calling for examples of nature strips in their neighbourhood, or elsewhere, that they felt could work in Maribyrnong, using the Gather Tool on Your City Your Voice.

An online questionnaire, including a mixture of quantitative and qualitative (free text questions), was also provided as the primary tool for collection of community feedback.

A hard copy survey was also distributed to permit holders, with additional questions specific to the permit process. Letters were sent out on 26 April 2023, after community engagement closed.

There was no in-person engagement in phase one, noting this will occur during the second engagement phase later in 2023.

## Overall Response (Your City Your Voice)

**775** people visited the project page resulting in **203** contributions from **198** contributors, which is a feedback rate of **25.68%**.

This included

- **200** contributions via the questionnaire
- **three** contributions via the gather tool

The current Nature strip Landscape Policy and Guidelines document was downloaded **22** times.

Early interest in the project from 20 February coincided with the delivery of Maribyrnong Messenger into letterboxes across the municipality. The greatest number of visits (**102**) and highest number of visitors (**80**) to the page occurred on 21 February. Two further peaks occurred on 24 and 28 February, following a social media post promoting the project.

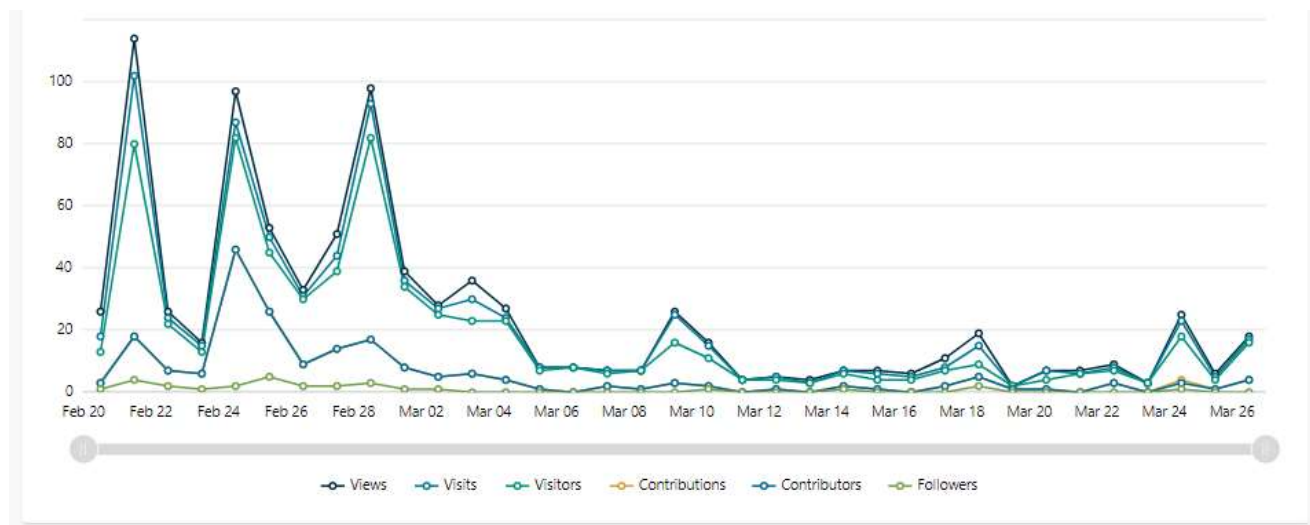


Figure 1: Digital engagement performance summary

In addition, **38** hard copy responses were also received from permit holders detailing their experience with the permit process and how they have maintained the nature strip at the front of their property.

Further information on the nature strip permit holder responses is available in the Appendices.

## Findings

### Online Questionnaire

#### Question 1: Do you think that nature strips contribute to the look and feel of a street?

Responses were overwhelmingly positive (**94.5%**), with almost every answer – yes:

- Yes – **94.5% (189)**
- No – **2.5% (5)**
- Mixed response – **1.5% (3)**
- Could be better than they are – **1% (2)**
- Not at present – **0.5% (1)**

### Question 2: If yes, in what way?

Of the 193 responses 'Colour/visual pleasure' **45.08% (87)** and 'Changes the look and feel of a street' **41.97% (81)** were in the majority, followed by 'Environmental Considerations' **22.28% (43)** and 'Increased biodiversity/variety' **21.24% (41)**.

*"Beautiful nature strips make beautiful streets."*

*"I have a 6 month old and do a lot of street walking and the nicest ones are the ones providing shade for me and the pram, she loves looking at trees".*

### Question 3: If not, why?

Of the 21 responses, 'Property owners don't maintain the nature strip' **28.57% (6)** was the predominant reason.

### Question 4: Can you point us to any examples of nature strips near you that you feel work well?

A variety of locations and suburbs were included in the 160 responses to this question with West Footscray **8.13% (13)**, Yarraville **6.25% (10)** and Pentland Parade **5.63% (9)** specifically highlighted.

### Question 5: If so, what in your view made them successful?

Of the 152 responses, 'Colour/visual pleasure' **28.95% (44)**, 'Increased biodiversity/variety' **26.97% (41)** and 'Natives' **21.05% (32)** were highlighted.

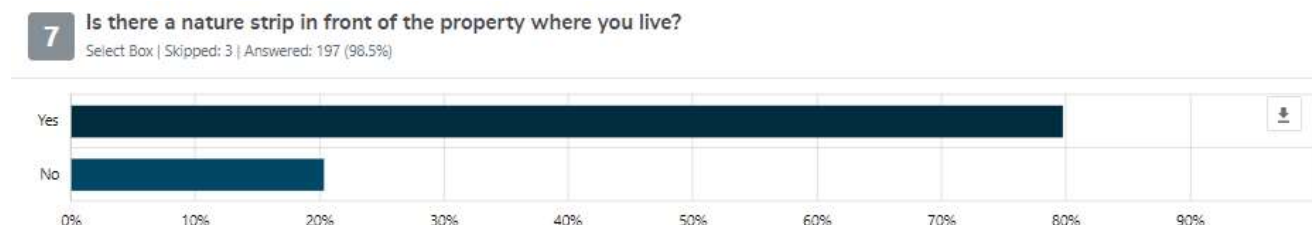
### Question 6: Are there any properties in your neighbourhood that have planted out their nature strips?

Of the 195 responses to this question:

- Yes – **21.03% (41)**
- A few – **50.77% (99)**
- Not many – **17.95% (35)**
- No – **10.26% (20)**
- Just mine – **0**

### Question 7: Is there a nature strip in front of the property where you live?

There were 197 responses to this question with responses largely aligned to those in question 6 – with **80%** saying 'yes'.



**Question 8: If you answered yes, what is on the nature strip outside the property in which you live?**

'A street tree' **76.43% (120)** and 'Just grass' **63.69% (100)** were the options ticked mostly by the 157 respondents.

**Question 9: Do you maintain the nature strip outside the property in which you live?**

Of the 187 responses to this question:

- Yes – **78.61% (147)**
- No – **21.39% (40)**

**Question 10: Would you support more use being made of nature strips generally?**

There was almost unanimous support for this with **93.91% (185)** answering Yes. **4.57% (9)** answered No and just **1.52% (3)** answered Other.

**Question 11: If so how would you like to see them being developed?**

Of the 184 responses, 'More plants' **42.93% (79)**, 'More trees' **21.20% (39)** and 'Vegetable gardens' **18.48% (34)** were most popular which aligns with earlier feedback around the things respondents most like about nature strips.

**Question 12: If not, why not?**

Of the **nine** responses, the main reason provided was 'Property owners don't maintain the nature strip'.

**Question 13: If you selected other, tell us more.**

Similarly, the **three** respondents were concerned that people needed to maintain them more.

**Question 14: Do you have any other feedback on nature strips you would like to share?**

Free text responses largely aligned with earlier feedback, particularly support for the work Council is doing in this space. The most popular tagged responses were calls for 'More Trees' **17.54% (30)**, 'Consideration of vegetable and fruit gardens' and 'Native Plans', all receiving **12.28% (21)** each.

*"It should be encouraged by council to grow and plant shrubs and plants on nature strips. Council could provide native plants and plans on how to improve your verges with all applications".*

*"I've noticed how important gardening's become since COVID arrived. Now I meet many folk who stop to chat. All ages get involved. With my choice of plants, I would include veggies, herbs, native plants and perhaps people sharing a garden".*

## Demographics

**Question 15: What is your gender?**

Of the 200 responses to this question:

- Female: **65.50% (131)**
- Male: **30.50% (61)**
- Self-described: **1.50% (3)**
- I prefer not to say: **2.50% (5)**

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## Age Group

There were **196** responses to this question. The majority of responses were aged 30 to 49.

Age Group	Response
Under 9	0
10-14	0
15-19	1.02% (2)
20-24	0.51% (1)
25-29	4.59% (9)
30-34	13.27% (26)
35-39	17.35% (34)
40-44	18.88% (37)
45-49	12.76% (25)
50-54	11.22% (22)
55-59	6.63% (13)
60-64	5.61% (11)
65-69	5.10% (10)
70-74	2.04% (4)
75-79	0.51% (1)
80-84	0
85 and over	0.51% (1)

## Question 17: Where do you live?

There were 199 responses to this question. The majority (**almost 60%**) live in Footscray, West Footscray and Yarraville. There were no responses from Tottenham residents.

## Gather tool:

Residents were also asked to share their views and stories on nature strips. Just three stories were shared via this medium and were titled:

- Spaces for community connection and expanding quality public green spaces
- Stop erecting non necessary signs on the nature strip
- Nature Strip Guidelines submission

## Appendices

### Nature Strip Permit Holder Feedback Forms

Council wrote to nature strip permit holders (both property owners and tenants) asking them to 'share your thoughts and views on nature strips', specifically asking what prompted you to apply for a permit to landscape your nature strip?

Questions specific to residents of permitted properties prior to occupation were modified, including asking 'whether they were aware Council has a Landscape Policy and Guidelines governing what can and cannot be done on the nature strip... and whether they were aware there was a permit attached to their nature strip'.

**Thirty-eight** responses were received, **23** from permit holders still residing in the same property and **15** from residents of permitted properties prior to occupation. A breakdown of results is provided below.

#### Permit holders still residing in the same property:

**We're keen to understand what prompted you to apply for a permit to landscape your nature strip (add options ticked/selected).**

Of the 51 responses to this question:

- To plant a garden – **9.6% (10)**
- To add more vegetation to the nature strip – **17.6% (9)**
- For environmental or biodiversity reasons – **25.4% (13)**
- To reduce nature strip maintenance – **21.5% (11)**
- Other – **15.6% (8)**

*"Nature strip gardening was encouraged by Footscray Council back 1990's. The garden has been there for 25 years plus in some form. My cottage garden has attracted native bird and bees".*

*"To add attractiveness and value to my property and also to act as a noise and pollution buffer to traffic and the impacts of the Westgate Tunnel Project".*

#### **How soon after receiving your permit did you plant out your naturestrip?**

Of the 23 responses to this question, the most popular was 'Pretty much straight away' **56.5% (13)**.

#### **If you decided not to, why was that?**

Of the 5 responses to this question, reasons included 'starting before receiving the permit' and 'it was getting harder to mow the lawn'.

#### **On a scale of 1-5 how did you find the Nature Strip Permit Process? (1 very easy and 5 very difficult)**

Of the 23 responses to this question:

- 1 – **21.7% (5)**
- 2 – **13% (3)**
- 3 – **26.1% (6)**
- 4 – **26.1% (6)**
- 5 **13% (3)**

**Is there anything you would like to see changed? Either in relation to the guidelines or the application process, or both?**

Of the 18 responses to this question, calls for more flexibility in the guidelines to allow for a greater variety of plants, an easier process and more awareness of the guidelines and application process were the most popular responses.

**Whether you have landscaped your nature strip or not, do you maintain the area outside your property?**

Of the 25 responses to this question, **56% (14)** regularly maintain the area outside their property.

**Since planting the naturestrip have you made any further changes to it?**

Of the 23 responses to this question:

- Yes – **39.1% (9)**
- No – **60.9% (14)**

**If yes, what changes did you make?**

The most popular responses were replanting when plants died or including additional plants.

**Looking at the area today, did you achieve the result you were looking for?**

Of the 25 responses to this question, **80% (20)** felt it achieved the result they were looking for when they applied for a permit.

**If no, what would you like to have achieved?**

Respondents took the opportunity to add other comments in this question, including the following:

*“I’ve got a landscaper to maintain the nature strip each month”.*

**Do you have any other comments you would like to share around planting out nature strips?**

Comments were overwhelmingly positive including:

*“I have received a lot of complements about the nature strip. Lots of people help themselves to the herbs and the children love picking some flowers”.*

*“We are very happy to no longer have grass here”.*

*“Should be strongly encouraged - even organise for it to happen for those who might not have the skills or health to do it for themselves”.*

**Residents of permitted properties prior to occupation:**

**Are you aware Council has a Landscape Policy and Guidelines governing what can and cannot be done on the nature strip outside your property?**

Of the 15 responses to this question:

- Yes – **66.67% (10)**
- No – **33.33% (5)**

**Did you know, under this Policy there is a permit attached to your nature strip, giving you permission to plant there?**

Of the 15 responses to this question, there was a near even split between those who were aware and those

**If yes, and it was planted out when you moved in, have you maintained it?**

Three of the four responses to this question said they applied for the permit and have continued to maintain their nature strip.

**If no, and it wasn't planted out when you moved in, have you planted it out yourself?**

The most popular response to this question was 'no'.

**If not, knowing there is a permit, would you want to plant it out now?**

Of the nine responses to this question, the majority said they would not plant it out knowing there is a permit.

**Whether your nature strip is planted or not, do you maintain the area outside your property?**

Of the 15 responses to this question, almost all **86.67% (13)** answered yes.

**If yes, how often?**

Of the 15 responses to this question, just over half **53.33% (8)** regularly maintain the area outside their property.

**Do you have any views around the planting out of nature strips?**

Comments were overwhelmingly positive including:

*"I like it, maintaining grass is too hard and looks boring. Planted nature strips add character to the house and street scape".*

*"I absolutely love it. More should be encouraged. I planted very low maintenance, drought resistant garden. Birds, bees & children love it".*

*"The naturestrip has provided considerable pleasure to use the owners and also to passers-by. It is planted to enhance the streetscape and is often admired by passers-by. The practice should be encouraged more".*

**I am:**

The majority of respondents were the owners of the property **80% (12)**.



## **Demographics**

Figures are taken from both questionnaires – 38 responses in total.

### **What is your gender?**

The majority of responses identified as Woman **55.2% (21)**. This was consistent with the Your City Your Voice questionnaire.

### **What age bracket do you fall into?**

The majority of responses were aged 31-60, with 51-60 the most popular age group **28.4% (11)**.

### **I live in:**

Yarraville was the most popular suburb **31.6% (12)**, consistent with the Your City Your Voice questionnaire.