

ITEM 4 WOLLONGONG BOTANIC GARDEN DRAFT MASTERPLAN

During 2017-18, a draft Masterplan for the Wollongong Botanic Garden was prepared by consultants with input from a number of key stakeholders. This report provides a background to the Botanic Garden service and overview of the draft Masterplan's direction. The report recommends that the draft Wollongong Botanic Garden Masterplan be exhibited to allow for broader community engagement and feedback, and subsequent report back to Council.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1 The draft Wollongong Botanic Garden Masterplan be exhibited for a minimum 28 day period.
- 2 Following a review of submissions received and the need for any amendments, the draft Wollongong Botanic Garden Masterplan be reported back to Council.
- 3 Key stakeholders be formally thanked for their initial input into the draft document, and advised of the public exhibition period.

REPORT AUTHORISATIONS

Report of: David Green, Manager Environmental Strategy and Planning (Acting)
Authorised by: Andrew Carfield, Director Planning and Environment - Future City and Neighbourhoods

ATTACHMENTS

- 1 Draft Wollongong Botanic Garden Masterplan

BACKGROUND

Established in 1971, the Wollongong Botanic Garden has developed into a popular community asset of high horticultural, conservation, educational and recreational value. The 27 hectare (ha) site located in Keiraville is open 363 days per year (closed Christmas Day and Good Friday) and is free entry.

The Garden hosts a range of passive recreational activities and events, an all-abilities playground, wedding and commitment ceremonies, cultural programs such as Sculpture in the Gardens, and small community events to larger commercial activations such as Sunset Cinema.

Key built features of the site include the heritage listed Gleniffer Brae Manor House and Gardens (home to the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music), the Discovery Centre (Cratloe Cottage) from which Council runs education and sustainability programs, the Towri Volunteer Centre, Greenplan Nursery and operations/administration area, Kawasaki Bridge and the Sir Joseph Banks Glasshouse.

Kooloobong Oval Soccer fields are located within the boundaries of the Botanic Garden and are currently under lease to the University of Wollongong.

The Botanic Garden also manages three natural area Annexes including the 20 ha Puckey's Estate located at North Wollongong, the 9 ha Mt Keira Summit Park located on the escarpment and the 9 ha Korrongulla Wetlands at Primbee. The Botanic Garden and Annexes combine to provide an accurate geographical representation of the City of Wollongong itself, which sits on a narrow coastal plain with a diverse range of vegetation communities ranging from escarpment sandstone heath, wet and dry sclerophyll forest, down to coastal plain dunal systems with fresh and saltwater communities.

Nearing 50 years old, the Botanic Garden contains a relatively young yet significant living plant collection, with representative Australian forest plantings displayed along with exotic collections of high integrity including succulents, palms and various flowering trees and shrubs.

The Nursery produces local native plant material to support the restoration of the city's natural areas and provide a subsidised plant sale service to ratepayers via Greenplan. In addition, the Nursery coordinates plants for the living collection, city landscape and new urban greening program.

Many built assets on site are nearing the end of their design life and require refurbishment or replacement.

Since 1981, the Friends of the Wollongong Botanic Garden have been volunteering to raise funds for specific projects in the Botanic Garden, and also deliver a range of value adding services such as guided tours, propagation groups, merchandising, information exchange and general promotion of the site's values.

A Councillor briefing occurred on 12 June 2018.

PROPOSAL

Development of a Masterplan for the Wollongong Botanic Garden is a key action from the draft 2016 Wollongong Botanic Garden Plan of Management, and was a funded project in Council's 2017-18 annual budget.

The draft Botanic Garden masterplan (Attachment 1) takes a 20 year horizon, and has proposed the following Vision and Mission:

Vision:

- The Wollongong Botanic Garden is a Regional Botanic Garden of Excellence meeting the diverse visitor experience and expectations of the community at the local level, whilst making a valued contribution at a global level through our work in Horticulture, Plant Conservation and Environmental Education.

Mission:

- To deliver a beautifully presented contemporary landscape space for the people of the City of Wollongong that provides a diverse recreational benefit whilst respecting the site's history and its role in supporting broader plant conservation objectives.
- To continue to be innovative educators promoting an awareness and appreciation for the natural environment, and the greater role plants have in supporting our everyday lives.

The core conceptual elements that underpin the design of the masterplan include:

- Structure and Precincts – a landscape framework that forms the setting for a series of connected visitor, management and character precincts.
- Access and Circulation – a legible and logical arrival sequence and an intuitive circulation flow and hierarchy.
- Collections and Gardens – a clear and coherent thematic strategy for the nature, purpose and layout of the garden across the entire site. In essence, defining the Garden's inherent "botanic-ness".
- Visitor overlays – a layering of uses and functions that complement the core purpose of the Garden such as wayfinding, public art, interpretation etc.
- Design language – a consistent approach to all design elements across the Garden that are unique to this site and which reflect the Garden's mid/late 20th Century origins.
- Education – continuing to deliver innovative educational experiences through the Discovery Centre along with the immediately adjacent University of Wollongong, and opportunities for collaboration in academics such as research and conservation. The Botanic Garden is also an optimal venue for introducing Australian culture to international students and visitors.

The draft Botanic Garden Masterplan (Attachment 1) provides a comprehensive overview of the service and recommended future direction including:

- Issues, constraints and opportunities.
- Planning, design and management principles.

- A strategic precinct framework.
- Concept masterplan.
- Living collections review.
- Character precedents.
- Preliminary concept costings and phasing.

Key Masterplan proposals include the following future projects (subject to detailed design and consultation, approvals and funding):

- A major new public entry to the site from Northfields Avenue, incorporating a remodeled operational and administration area to enrich the visitor arrival and orientation experience whilst also providing an active interface with the multiple activities of Botanic Garden (visitor services, administration, depot and nursery, education, The Friends).
- New Café and toilet facility near the Duck Pond.
- Café restaurant in refurbished Cratloe Cottage (Discovery Centre educational service to be relocated).
- Options for increased parking and vehicular circulation along the Paulsgrove Street boundary.
- Upgraded entry at Murphy's Avenue carpark.
- Refurbished Sir Joseph Banks Glasshouse facility as a 50 year anniversary project in 2021.
- Completion of Stages 2 and 3 of the Rainforest Walk (Stage 1 completed 2018).
- Gleniffer Brae Functions and parking upgrade.

CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Council has conducted initial workshops with key stakeholders to assist with the formation of the draft Masterplan including:

- Friends of the Botanic Garden.
- Neighbourhood Forum 5.
- Wollongong Conservatorium of Music.
- University of Wollongong.
- Staff of Wollongong Botanic Garden and various Divisions of Council.

In addition to the above, an external expert peer review workshop was conducted along with numerous presentations to various Council divisional staff covering the design, property, planning, engineering and community/cultural service portfolios.

It is proposed to exhibit the draft Wollongong Botanic Garden Masterplan for a minimum 28 day period, including an on-site engagement event, Council libraries and the "Have Your Say" website portal to engage with the broader community and receive comments.

On consideration of feedback received and any necessary amendments, report the matter back to a future Council meeting.

PLANNING AND POLICY IMPACT

This report contributes to the delivery of Our Wollongong 2028 goal "We have a healthy community in a liveable city". It specifically delivers on the following:

Community Strategic Plan	Delivery Program 2018-2021	Annual Plan 2018-19
Strategy	3 Year Action	Annual Deliverables
5.2.1 Provide a variety of quality public spaces and opportunities for sport, leisure, recreation, learning and cultural activities in the community	5.2.1.4 Develop a Regional Botanic Garden of Excellence	Enhance Botanic Garden visitor experiences via programs, interpretation, education and events

Ecological Sustainability

A key goal of the Masterplan is to ensure that “our impact on the natural and built environment safeguards the Botanic Garden for future generations”. This overarching goal will influence our approach to asset management, operations and service delivery. It will also be demonstrated through our approach to environmental education, partnerships and environmental leadership to the community, our visitors and stakeholders.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The draft Botanic Garden Masterplan includes a documented strategic direction and concept design to guide service delivery and asset management for the next 20 years. Business proposals will be prepared for any proposed service and capital enhancements in accordance with Council’s usual budgeting and approval processes. It should be noted that detailed designs and approvals will be required for each concept proposal.

CONCLUSION

The Wollongong Botanic Garden Masterplan will provide the community a 20 year vision to guide the ongoing development and service delivery focus of this key regional facility. The Masterplan identifies long term improvements that maintains or enhances the horticulture and plant conservation, environmental education and heritage aspects of the site in addition to the Botanic Garden’s role as a highly valued recreation space for the community.