

ITEM 4 CONNECTING NEIGHBOURS GRANTS - VERGE GARDENS PILOT

The Connecting Neighbours Grants Program Verge Gardens Pilot was open for grant applications from 16 October to 30 November 2020. This special round was run in conjunction with the release of Council's Verge Garden Guidelines to foster neighbourhood connections through the establishment of verge gardens. Twelve applications have been considered by a review panel and are recommended as successful recipients for funding.

RECOMMENDATION

Council note the successful recipients for the Connecting Neighbours Grant – Verge Gardens Pilot.

REPORT AUTHORISATIONS

Report of: Paul Tracey, Manager Open Space + Environmental Services (Acting)
Authorised by: Joanne Page, Director Infrastructure + Works - Connectivity Assets + Liveable City (Acting)

ATTACHMENTS

- 1 Connecting Neighbours Grants Verge Gardens Pilot - Assessment Panel Recommendations

BACKGROUND

The Connecting Neighbours Grants Program provides small one-off grants to community members and groups who want to make a positive impact in their local area. The program aims to build positive neighbourhoods and community connections, support creative, innovative and unique activities and events while providing opportunities for vulnerable groups and individuals. The first four rounds of the program saw projects funded for delivery across our City in 2018-2021.

In conjunction with the launch of Council's Verge Garden Guidelines, Open Space and Environmental Services in collaboration with Community Cultural and Economic Development ran a pilot round of the program to support the community to establish verge gardens and build neighbourhood connections.

Applications were assessed by staff against the criteria on 9 December 2020 with recommendations for funding made. The General Manager approved the Assessment Panel's recommendations on 18 January 2021.

The grants are to be distributed in the form of \$250 vouchers from Council's Botanic Garden Greenplan Nursery to fund the purchase of plants for each project. A total of 12 applications are recommended for \$3,000 in total funding.

PROPOSAL

Council endorses the Connecting Neighbours Grants Program Verge Gardens Pilot successful recipients as listed below:

Project Title	Suburb	Funding Amount (\$)
Fernhill Verge	Fernhill	\$250
Lyndon Street Grocer	Corrimal	\$250
Brickworks Bees	Bulli	\$250
Heaslip Grove	Coniston	\$250
Scenes from a Memory	Berkeley	\$250
Jum-bulla Native Habitat Garden	Mount Kembla	\$250
Bellevue Road Garden Path	Figtree	\$250
The Shady Spot	Fairy Meadow	\$250
The Goodrich Gardens	Scarborough	\$250
Dapto Ambulance Native Verge Garden	Dapto	\$250
Sturdee Gardens	Towradgi	\$250
Gilmore Green Garden West Wollongong	West Wollongong	\$250

CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

The Connecting Neighbours Grants Program Verge Gardens Pilot was open for a six-week period between 16 October to 30 November 2020 and was promoted utilising the following means:

- Council and Our Wollongong websites
- Council’s Social media channels
- Distribution through existing formal and informal networks; and
- Notice in the Wollongong Advertiser.

PLANNING AND POLICY IMPACT

This report contributes to the delivery of Our Wollongong 2028 Goal 1 “We value and Protect our Environment”, and Goal 4 We Are a Connected and Engaged Community”. It specifically delivers on the following:

Community Strategic Plan	Delivery Program 2018-2022	Operational Plan 2020-21
Strategy	4 Year Action	Operational Plan Actions
1.1.1. The community is actively involved in the expansion and improvement of our green corridors and other natural areas connecting the escarpment to the sea	1.1.1.1 Implement programs and events which facilitate community participation to improve natural areas	Provide opportunities to work with volunteers, community groups and government to actively participate in urban greening
4.2.1 Support residents, business and visitors to be actively involved in diverse community activities helping to connect neighbours	4.2.1.2 Support community participation in community activities	Pilot, evaluate and implement a ‘connecting neighbours’ grant

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Council's ongoing commitment to Urban Greening and the recently adopted Verge Garden Guidelines acknowledges that the area between houses and the street provides a valuable opportunity for greening our public spaces with the assistance from residents.

The Connecting Neighbours Grants Program Verge Garden Pilot will fund low cost demonstration projects that promotes verge gardening and will contribute to improving our City's sustainability. Lessons learned from the pilot will help to shape future city greening outcomes.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The Connecting Neighbours Grants Program is to be distributed as per the Financial Assistance Procedures Management Policy in accordance with Council's resolution of 29 January 2019. Council staff will provide support to successful applicants to ensure verge gardens are established to comply with the Verge Garden Guidelines. The assessment panel recommended specific changes to any project that contained non-compliant elements, and these will be specified in the letter of offer.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding for the Connecting Neighbours Grants Program Verge Garden Pilot round has been delivered in accordance with current budget allocations. There are no unforeseen ongoing costs related to this pilot project.

CONCLUSION

The Connecting Neighbours Grants Program Verge Garden Pilot round has provided a further opportunity for Council to expand the existing programs offered through the Financial Assistance Policy and create greater flexibility in how support is provided for small locally based activities. This pilot round demonstrates Council's commitment to working with community members to build on local neighbourhood strengths with an urban greening focus.

CONNECTING NEIGHBOURS GRANTS – VERGE GARDENS PILOT

REVIEW PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

No.	Name of project	Name of project co-ordinator	Project Location	Project Description
V1	Fernhill verge	Luke Armstrong	Fernhill	I would love to put in a small verge garden to share veggies and fruit with our neighbours
V2	Lyndon St Grocer	Beth Croft	Corrimal	Planting a large garden bed on the verge to plant out with seasonal herbs for the neighbours in the street, bugs and lizards. We have several kids in our street, some of whom don't really know each other, and it would give them a way of spending time together, we plan to invite them to choose some herbs and flowers to plant. Several neighbours have compost bins that need emptying so we could use that to enrich the soil. We all use herbs and this would reduce plastic waste from us all purchasing them, and waste from throwing out unused portions. Grass barely grows on our verge because it is exposed, hot and sunny, so raising the bed would make it a perfect place for herbs to thrive and cool down the soil. We already have a pretty friendly street, but this would give us a focal point to meet and work in together.
V3	Brickworks Bees	Lena Darrow	Bulli	I'd like to create a garden bed on the verge between 80-82 Wallbank way, Bulli. This is a new estate with lots of young families so it would be great to have a communal garden where kids can be involved in the cultivation of vegetables as well as being witness to the many benefits of our green spaces such as attracting our native bees and lizards.
V4	Heasilp Grove	Jeff Blundell	Coniston	I have already put garden along the fence and wish to put a garden on the roadside of the path. A number of passer-by's suggested some shade trees would be good to offset the heat from the concrete is summer. It is a long narrow strip so some native grasses and ground covers would be appropriate. If room available some herbs for community use could be planted also. The path has been well used by children on bikes, etc and people going to the local café so some shade in summer would be appreciated.

V5	Scenes from a Memory	Joshua Christie	Berkeley	<p>I grew up in Woodford, a village in the heart of the Blue Mountains. When I was a teenager, my mother, along with several of her neighbours coordinated efforts and resources and agreed to all plant a native and edible verge garden through the whole street. Within a few years, the street had changed vibe to something surreal. Driving through this street in Woodford is like escaping into a fantasy. The neighbours have placed sandstone paths so that there's walkways weaving in and out of towering hardenbergas and wattles, small garden beds full of herbs which are free for community use, so you can grab rosemary or thyme during your afternoon walk and throw it in that night's dinner. I've not seen another locale quite like it.</p> <p>My particular block in Berkeley has a reasonably wide frontage and has many pedestrians walking past as it leads to Lake Illawarra. I'm aiming to create a snippet of what my mother and her neighbours have built in Woodford. I would like locals walking past to look forward to walking past my verge and weaving their way through the paved trail, freely picking flowers if they're in bloom or being blown away at the amount of insect life fluttering around. Berkeley is a budding location but many of the yards are simply kikuyu lawns and colorbond fences and could really use a bit of wild native growth and edible garden.</p>
V6	Jum-bulla Native Habitat Garden	Sheridan Novotny	Mount Kembla	<p>As we watch more and more gardens in mount Kembla (Jum-bulla) disappear, we are hoping to green our verge and provide further native habitat for our local wildlife, especially the birds. We have a passion for bird watching, and gardening, and hope to spread our enthusiasm for greening our environment but showing our community how gardens can enhance our local environment. We hope to attract some smaller species of birds by selecting native shrubs and grasses that provide both food and shelter for birds and insects alike. We would also include a bug hotel, which will appeal to the children in the street. We aim to bring our street together by sharing our love of wildlife and gardens.</p>

V7	Bellevue Road Garden Path	Kathryn Morgan	Figtree	<p>Aim: To create a "garden path" corridor through colourful flowers, edibles and local native plants for the enjoyment of the countless pedestrians and our local community. Council has already planted a <i>Corymbia ficifolia</i> in the proposed new bed and the bed will complement this tree. Context: Kathryn has already started a verge garden with this theme and has received positive feedback and interest from people who like the combination of colour, herbs and local natives. Resident walker, Helen likes to dead-head flowers, and the Latif family access herbs and contribute seed and cuttings. Neighbourhood children on route to school enjoy the flowers.</p>
V8	The Shady Spot	Lisa wellings	Fairy Meadow	<p>This is a very exciting prospect. The verge in front of our house already has some trees in place and this provides a great amount of shade during the day and from the hot westerly afternoon sun. I would like to transform the grass area to be a space of native and edible shrubs and plants, with a path meandering through it so people of all ages can enjoy this small patch of cool greenery and nature in a suburban streetscape. I would like to make it a space and habitat for bees, small lizards, insects and birds and to encourage neighbours to spend time here and source flowers and plants for their own use. We live in a very quiet street and lots of people walk by with children and dogs because of this, so a shady spot will benefit the neighbourhood by providing a place to stop and enjoy. Thank you for providing this opportunity - it is a great initiative.</p>

V9	The Goodrich Gardens	Elizabeth Tadic	Scarborough	<p>The nature strip that borders the southern end of Goodrich Street (corner of 1 Goodrich & 1 Fifth Street) is a very large area, which is currently overgrown with difficult, invasive, allergenic weeds such as wandering jew and lantana in some areas and as a result it is unattractive and under-utilized. We propose to turn it into a burgeoning native garden area, which would connect neighbours and bring the community together.</p> <p>We also have several children of various ages on our street and some are showing a huge interest in nature, gardening and cooking, especially since the local school has a Kitchen Garden programme. They have already been asking for a space in which to plant and look after vegetables and herbs and here we have this unused, messy yet perfect sunny space! We would like to plant a garden of unique, drought-tolerant plants with amazing flowers that will enrich the neighbourhood, improve our environment and attract and care for the native birds and bees. Native flowering plants like Grevilleas, Kangaroo paw, Native Bluebell and native grasses would be on our list and we would also like to plant some edible native plants such as a small Lilly-Pilly and Warrigal Greens. We would carefully consider plants of different heights and purposes in our design to create an ultimately easy care and beautiful space for everyone's appreciation.</p>
V10	Dapto Ambulance Native Verge Garden	Jess Whittaker	Dapto	<p>We would like to plant the verge at Dapto ambulance station to show the Dapto community that caring for the environment is a great way to promote mental and physical wellbeing. We would like to use local native grasses and ground covers to improve the site that is next to a bus stop.</p>
V11	Sturdee Gardens	Adam de Rooy	Towradgi	<p>Our address is situated within a cul-de-sac, this naturally has created a great safe place for kids to gather on bikes, scooters, or skateboards safely. We also have a public garden space located at the end of the street that I have maintained now for the past few years as it was previously overrun with weeds. My plan is to incorporate both my verge garden and that garden to help make the street look and feel more kid friendly as they utilize both hard and garden surfaces in their play. Having kids playing out on the street like this has brought parents out together meeting one another chatting and forming relationships.</p>

V12	Gilmore Green Garden	Nigar Raihana	West Wollongong	Both my neighbour and I love gardening and hence decided to name Gilmore Green Garden. I am planting different types of vegetables i.e., zucchini, chili, lettuce, tomato, spinach, long beans which I share with my neighbour. We all enjoy the evening meeting and the green view of the garden. This increases good bonding among the neighbours. We will extend our garden onto the Council verge.
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ASSESSED on 11th December 2020:

Name	Role	Signature
Jane Caldwell	Engagement Officer	Jane Caldwell signed electronically 11/12/2020
Sandra Bass	Parks + Open Space Project Officer	Sandra Bass signed electronically 11/12/2020

APPROVED BY

Name	Date	Signature
Greg Doyle	18/1/2021	