

11 QUARTERLY ENVIRONMENT REPORT

FILE REFERENCE INT178615

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RECOMMENDATION

That the report be noted

Attachments

Nil.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of some key environmental sustainability projects currently being undertaken by Council. Projects have been categorised according to the Sustainable Environment Strategy themes:

- Climate change and energy conservation
- Development and built environment
- Water conservation
- Waste minimisation and sustainable procurement
- Natural systems

A similar report will be presented each quarter highlighting new programs or projects that have achieved significant milestones

BACKGROUND

There are a broad range of environmental actions taking place throughout the organisation. While many of these occur within or are led by the Environment Unit, the vast majority of the organisation is involved in environmental sustainability to some degree. Below is a highlight of some of the key projects currently being undertaken.

All actions fall within the Council Plan 2016-17 under the key performance area of Environment 'we will continue to plan and manage the natural and built environment for present and future generations'.

Climate change and energy conservation

Council Plan action – Reduce Council's energy consumption and help the community to do likewise.

1. Solar rates community program

Council has partnered with a group of 20 Victorian councils and greenhouse alliances on a program to provide low income households (specifically aged pensioners) with access to solar energy systems to reduce their energy costs. This program is made possible by the Victorian Government's New Energy Jobs Fund.

Installing solar PV can deliver immediate savings on household electricity costs while also providing the ability for vulnerable householders to cool their homes during heatwaves without fear of price

shock. However, the high initial costs associated with installation limits the ability for some households to add renewable energy options to their homes.

This program will utilise the council rates mechanism to assist with financing the solar PV systems to support these households. Council is aiming to support the delivery of the solar electricity systems to nine vulnerable households over the next two years to establish and trial the funding mechanism as part of the program.

2. Update on carbon reductions

Since the endorsement of the Aspirational Energy Transition plan Council has implemented numerous activities to reduce its emissions and energy costs. These include:

- upgrades of Council facilities including Cardinia Life, the Cardinia Cultural Centre and the Beaconsfield Community Complex
- upgrade of decorative street lights with energy savings globes
- installation of 243 kW of solar electricity systems comprising of over 930 solar panels at 14 sites
- incorporation of sustainable design in new Council facilities

These initiatives are saving over 1,200 tonnes of CO₂e per annum and \$165,000. Council has a planned ongoing role out of projects similar to these in the coming years. In 2012, Council's emissions were 9,064 tonnes of CO₂e, hence the 1,200 tonnes of CO₂e reduction achieved by these initiatives equates to 13% of Council's 2012 emissions levels. The Aspirational Energy Transition Plan also includes Council's intention to move to 100% renewable electricity, based on a competitive financial solution being available to achieve this.

Development and built environment

3. Sustainable Homes Workshops

Council has partnered with the Koo Wee Rup regional health service to deliver four workshops focussing on living sustainably. The three hour workshops ran in August, September, October and November 2016 and focused on energy, water, waste and sustainable gardening.

The workshops were facilitated by a specialist facilitator and included presentations from Council officers. The workshops took place at the recently renovated Hewitt Eco House at the health service that demonstrates how the environmental performance of an existing home can be improved.

Each event had 15-20 participants, many attended all four sessions. Positive feedback was received from workshop participants on the content and the assistance it provided. Participants were provided with a sustainable homes guide and devices to reduce utility costs such as energy saving light globes. The workshops followed the sustainable homes program model developed by the South East Councils Climate Change Alliance (SECCCA) in 2011.

4. Review of the Sustainable Environment Strategy

Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy (SES) 2009-12 is now out of date. Over the next 18 months the Environment Unit will coordinate the review of the outdated SES and develop a new document. The new strategy will provide a vision and clear direction to help guide decision making in relation to best practice environmental management. In addition it will form the umbrella framework to environmental sustainability and provide a holistic policy direction to ensure there is cohesion between those more targeted strategies such as the Integrated Water Management Plan and Aspirational Energy Transition Plan.

The new plan will provide an overview of environmental indicators for the Shire, focusing on the following themes:

- Climate change
- Biodiversity
- Sustainable development of human settlements
- Water
- Waste
- Council leadership and engagement

Work has begun and the next step is to engage the services of a specialist consultant to provide some of the information required in order to accurately assess the current state of the environment in Cardinia Shire. This will enable officers to determine appropriate indicators (where we don't already have the information) that will form a part of the Sustainable Environment Strategy.

Water conservation

Council Plan action – Plan to manage water in an integrated manner, including the reduction of potable water consumption by Council and households.

5. Melbourne Water living rivers funding

Council has been successful in obtaining two grants through Melbourne Water's living rivers program.

- \$20,000 for the detailed design and investigation of erosion control and a raingarden at Gembrook Park
- \$40,000 to implement some of the findings from the living rivers funded water sensitive urban design study in the hills. Officers are currently working through the report findings and decisions on the best allocation of these funds will be made in the near future.

Waste minimisation and sustainable procurement

Council Plan action – reduce the amount of waste going to landfill to meet the State governments waste and resource recovery policy targets.

6. Annual waste and recycling services guide

Council's 2017 Waste and recycling services guide was distributed in December along with Council's Connect magazine. This continues to provide cost savings for distribution of the guide and more timely communications on waste initiatives and emerging issues. This year's guide has a strong focus on the new kerbside flexible plastics recycling initiative launched in November, while also directing the community to use Council's online community compass tool for searching key waste collection dates.

7. Biannual hard and green waste collection results

Council's new contractor WM Waste Management Services have performed its first biannual hard and green waste collection service, running from 31 October to 2 December. Preliminary data has shown increased resource recovery rates, including excellent take up of the new couch recycling stream, at over 2,000 recycled (as of week 4), rather than sent to landfill. Final data will be available with the next report.

8. Kerbside flexible plastic recycling

During National Recycling Week (7-13 November) Council launched the new kerbside flexible plastics recycling collection, a first in metropolitan Melbourne. Cardinia Shire residents along with those from partner councils Hobsons Bay and Nillumbik were distributed 10 special recycling plastic bags, along with information on how to easily recycle flexible plastics conveniently at home. City of Boroondara is set to launch the initiative locally in February 2017.

The information packs distributed to households advise residents to bundle and bag their plastics, which allows for them to be easily sorted at SKM's Recycling facility.

Interest by the community in the project has been high with 10,033 likes (as of 24 November) on related social media posts and other overwhelmingly positive responses. Feedback is also starting to come through, indicating that the message is translating into actions, with residents already starting to collect and bundle together their flexible plastics for recycling. Audits on the success of the project are expected to be carried out early in 2017.

This initiative is made possible by funds from SKM Recycling (\$160,000) and the Metropolitan Waste Resource Recovery fund (\$30,000), as well as \$10,000 contribution from each partner council and the Australian Packaging Covenant.

The initiative will reduce waste to landfill. Already other Victorian and interstate councils have been enquiring on the innovative project.

Natural systems

Council Plan action – Preserve and improve our bushland and natural environment by implementing weed management strategy and programs and continuing activities on high conservation bushland reserves and roadsides.

9. Emerald Starbush

Council is part of the Emerald Star Bush Community Partnership Project (ESBCPP). The Emerald Star Bush (ESB) is considered to be one of the rarest plants within the Cardinia Shire region, with only approximately 6,400 individual plants known to exist.

The partnership project volunteers have logged over 2,000 volunteer hours to conserve the plant since the groups' inception.

The group received a \$50,000 grant to promote and conserve the ESB through community awareness raising activities and to advocate for sustainable land management on private and public land. This includes targeted control of weeds, revegetation and removal of biomass during fuel reduction works that is considered to conserve the ESB.

The grant also includes the installation of signage, population health monitoring, surveying of public and private land to locate and identify potential new populations and research into the plants seed dormancy to assist with propagation.

The ESBCPP is also advocating for 'endangered' listing of the species within the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. This is supported by the State Action Statement for the species under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.

10. Weed control grants

Council's annual weed control grant scheme is open to any owner or manager of private property in the Shire, to assist with the costs associated with weed control of noxious and environmental weeds. The grant can assist with funding the purchase of herbicides, equipment hire, contractor labour and weed disposal. Funding is offered on a first come, first served basis, to those that meet the selection criteria (including considering chemical free weed control as the first choice where appropriate).

A maximum of \$250 is available to any one landowner, with environmental groups also encouraged to apply. Landowners are encouraged to work together to control weeds on their properties, and across property boundaries.

The budget for 2016-17 is \$40,000. Currently 90% of the annual budget for this program is allocated.

11. Wattle Creek Reserve Restoration Project 2015-17

Wattle Creek Reserve is located within the Emerald region and drains into Lake Treganowan, within the Emerald Lake Park. This reserve forms part of the vegetation corridor linking Wrights Forest to the west and Bunyip State Park to the north east. This riparian corridor shelters Wattle Creek and contributes to water quality improvements, creek bank stabilization and sediment retention.

The Wattle Creek Reserve restoration project is a two year project that commenced in 2015, and is funded (to the value of \$40,000) through the Victorian Government's Dandenong Ranges Environmental and Bushfire Reduction Community Grants Program.

The project focuses on restoring vegetation along the reserve, with the recent planting of 1,000 indigenous plants and removing the heavily invaded weeds.

Engaging local landowners has also occurred, to encourage participation in weed control works on their land. Council partnered with Johns Hill Landcare Group, in delivering a 'good neighbour' program to landowners in six streets in close proximity to the Reserve. This program provided advice on weed management delivered by two weed identification workshops and plant giveaways. 42 properties have engaged in this process.

This project is nearing completion with the final report due to be submitted to the funding agent by the end June 2017.

12. Pepis land wetlands restoration project

The Pepis land wetlands restoration project commenced in 2015 and saw the large scale removal of willow, blackberry and other woody weeds which had invaded the land surrounding the two spring fed dams at the site. These works are in line with the Emerald Spatial Plan and the Pepis land Masterplan.

In addition, a Pepis land wetland management plan 2016 (Rakali Consultants) has been finalised, and provides a 10 year plan guiding the restoration and rehabilitation of the conservation area surrounding the two dams.

The plan outlines staged removal of the large willows that currently dominate the site, and seek to replace the canopy and ground storey plants with indigenous species and appropriate aquatic species.

During 2015-16, 20 fenced revegetation beds were established in the outer dam areas, to further enhance the slopes around the dam with indigenous species, formerly inundated with woody weeds.

13. Roadside weed control program 2016-17

The Roadside weed control program (co-funded by the Victorian Government through the Roadside weed and pests management program), is well underway with a focus on the township areas of Cardinia, Officer, Officer South, Pakenham, Pakenham South, Lang Lang, Heath Hill and Tonimbuk. This program targets regionally prohibited and regionally controlled noxious weeds such as blackberry, broom, thistle and ragwort. Environmental weeds (i.e. weeds not listed in noxious category) are not targeted through this program.

CONSULTATION/COMMUNICATION

Where internal and external consultation has taken place it is captured in the background information above.

CONCLUSION

This report has focused on how Council is leading the way providing community awareness, education and engagement opportunities in the areas of waste reduction, energy and water consumption and biodiversity conservation. Many of these programs are ongoing.