

Draft Nature Strip Garden Guidelines Engagement Summary 29 June – 13 August 2023

Introduction

Metropolitan areas across Australia are seeing an increased desire from residents to modify the nature strips adjacent to their homes. While the area is public and not private land, it is not uncommon for residents to believe that as they are responsible for maintaining the nature strip, they should have the ability to landscape it as they see fit. The purpose of this community engagement was to understand our community's passion for, and desire to landscape a nature strip to ensure that we deliver a set of guidelines that balance resident aspirations, Council's operational requirements, and the safety of pedestrians and road users.

The existing guidelines were developed throughout 2014 and came into effect in 1 January 2015. This project will refresh the guidelines to ensure they:

- are consistent with current urban design approaches
- support Council's and the community's environmental ambitions
- provide an appropriate balance between the freedom to landscape a nature strip and the provision of a safe and fit for purpose road reserve.

The key issues that were identified during phase 1 and saw amendments made to the new draft guidelines included:

- **Approval and inspection** – there are currently no requirements for inspection and approval of modification made to nature strips. It is proposed in the draft that residents/owners will be required to apply for a specific 'Nature Strip Modification Permit' at a cost of approximately \$88. Application will include the submission of a plan showing the proposed modifications which will be assessed and approved if compliant. Completed modification will be inspected to ensure they match the approved plans.
- **Environmental impact** – limit the use of materials that have a negative environmental impact. It is proposed in the draft that synthetic grass will no longer be allowed, while compacted sand/crushed rock will be limited to use in conjunction with planting (as shown below).
- **Parking on nature strips** – some materials are more likely than others to encourage illegal parking. It is proposed in the draft that compacted sand/crushed rock will be limited to use in conjunction with planting (as shown below).
- **Simplicity and flexibility** – the draft guidelines will simplify the requirements for nature strips while allowing some flexibility in approach. It is proposed in the draft that the nature strip layout will feature a single access point from roadside to footpath to enable planting across the nature strip rather than the current layout that has multiple access points and limiting planting zones. Other proposed changes include increasing the allowable maximum plant height from 30cm to 90cm and allowing relocatable planter boxes to encourage the planting of edible crops.

How we engaged you

Phase 1: Analysis and review to develop the draft Nature Strip Garden Guidelines -COMPLETED March 2022 – March 2023

Between March 2022 and March 2023 Council undertook an in-depth analysis of its Nature Strip Guidelines reviewing feedback received from the community over the proceeding few years. Council also undertook an examination of other Nature Strip Guidelines to determine best practise across the local government sector. This information was used to shape the new draft Nature Strip Garden Guidelines, which was presented to council for further feedback prior to being presented to the community for feedback.

Phase 2: Draft Nature Strip Garden Guidelines presented to community for feedback - 29 June- 13 August 2023

In June and July 2023 Council shared both the draft Community Local Law and draft Nature Strip Garden Guidelines with the community. Community feedback was sought online through Council's Engage Whittlesea platform and at face-to-face engagement activities that were co-located with the draft Community Local Law which was also open for community feedback. The face-to-face engagement activities included community-based pop-ups, roadshows, and targeted meetings with registered CALD community groups that are traditionally harder to reach.

Through a dedicated project page on the Engage Whittlesea platform Council shared key recommendations of the guidelines and asked the community to indicate their level of support using a five-point scale ranging from 'I like it a lot' to 'I don't like it at all'. The Draft Guidelines and a detailed FAQ section was included on the page to provide the community with all relevant project background.

Participants of the digital consultation were posed other questions to capture their insights. These questions were:

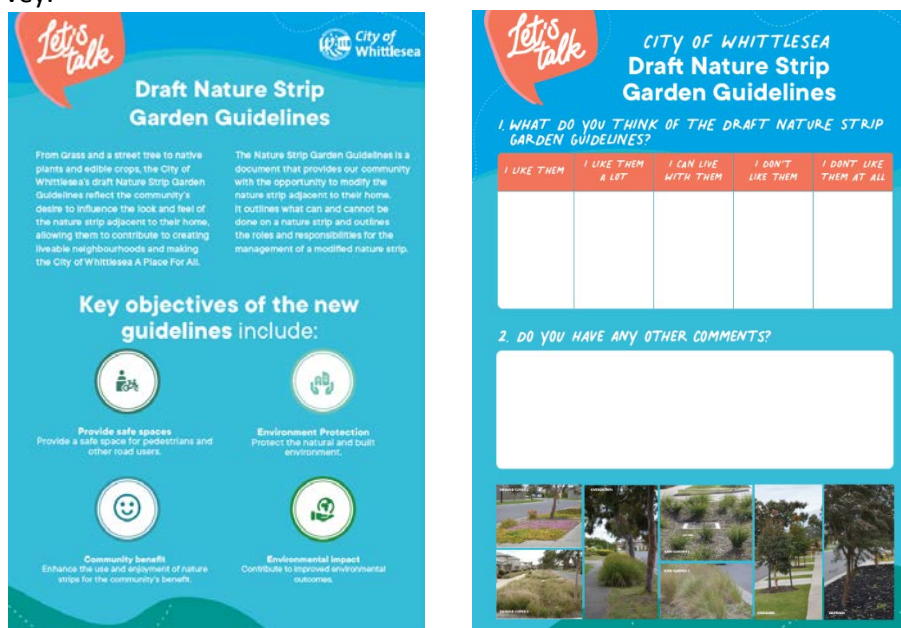
- What do you think the most important function of the nature strips are?
- What do you want the nature strip outside of your home to consist of?
- Currently, what does the nature strip outside of your home look like?
- Does the nature strip outside of your home have at least one tree?
- Would you like Council to plant a street tree?
- What specifically do you like about the new guidelines?
- What specifically don't you like about the new guidelines?
- What are the most important benefits of a landscaped nature strip?
- Are you interested in landscaping the nature strip outside your home? If not, why?
- Is there anything Council can do to encourage you or to influence you how you might landscape the nature strip outside your home?
- We would like to hear any additional comments or suggestions you might have about the landscaping of nature strips in the urban areas of City of Whittlesea.

The project page featured a Nature Strip Ideas survey that presented seven nature strip ideas and asked participants to indicate their thoughts on each from four options - no way; its ok; I love this but not outside my house; or I'd love to do this outside my house.

Visitors to the project page could easily ask a specific question to the project team and were offered the opportunity to upload images of any nature strips that they liked or wanted to share.

The Engage Whittlesea platform utilises an in-built translation tool to ensure that the information provided can be translated into the audience's preferred language to ensure it is understood.

Participants of in-person engagement activities at community-based pop-ups, roadshows and meetings with registered CALD community groups were presented with the same key recommendations of the guidelines and encouraged to indicate their level of support on the same five-point scale ranging from 'I like it a lot' to 'I don't like it at all'. The dot boards used to capture this community sentiment had space for participants to share any missed opportunities or other comments with the project team. The project team provided those they spoke with a flyer promoting the consultation with a link and QR code to the project Engage page and survey.



Above: information board and dot board activity used at in-person engagement opportunities.

The community engagement was promoted utilising a wide range of tactics including:

- Postcards distributed at community-based pop-ups
- Notification to members of the Engage Whittlesea platform
- Social media – we shared posts across Council's channels (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter)
- Email to key stakeholder groups including the Business Advisory Panel, Youth Advisory Committee, Sporting Clubs and key not for profit organisations
- Meetings with key internal stakeholders



Above (L-R): Project team engaging with the community at Westfield Plenty Valley and consulting with the Somali Men's Swim Group at Mill Park Leisure Centre.

Fourteen community-based pop-ups were held in high foot traffic locations including:

- Olivine at Donnybrook, 19 July 2023 from 9.30am - 11.30am
- Mernda Junction Shopping Centre, 20 July 2023 from 9.30am - 11.30am
- Westfield Plenty Valley, 20 July from 3.30pm - 5.30pm and 25 July 2023 from 9.30am - 11.30am
- Kirrip Community Centre in Wollert, 25 July 2023 from 1.30pm - 4pm
- Church Street shopping area, Whittlesea, 26 July 2023 from 9.30am - 11.30am
- Mill Park Village the Lakes Boulevard, 26 July 2023 from 2.30pm - 4.30pm
- Aurora Shopping Centre in Epping, 27 July 2023 from 9.30am - 11.30am
- Lalor Library, 1 August 2023 from 9.30am - 11.30am
- Hazel Glen Shopping Centre in Doreen, 1 August 2023 from 2.30pm - 4.30pm
- Thomastown Recreational Aquatic Centre, 2 August 2023 from 9.30am - 11.30am
- The Stables Shopping Centre in Mill Park, 4 August 2023 from 2.30pm - 4.30pm
- Bundoora Square Shopping Centre 4 August 2023 from 9.30am - 11.30am
- Mill Park Leisure Centre, 5 August 2023 from 5.30pm - 6.30pm

The project was featured at the five Safer Communities and Community Local Law Roadshows held at:

- The Brookwood Community Centre, Doreen, 6 July 2023 from 6pm – 8pm
- The Galada Community Centre, Epping, 9 July 2023 from 1pm – 3pm
- The Great Hall at Civic, South Morang, 12 July 2023 from 11am – 1pm
- The Whittlesea Community Centre, Whittlesea, 13 July 2023 from 6pm – 8pm
- The Barry Road Community Centre, Thomastown, 16 July 2023 from 10am – 12pm

The project met with four registered CALD community groups including:

- Punjabi Men's Group, 27 July 2023 from 11.30am - 12.30pm
- English conversation class at Mill Park Library, 31 July 2023 from 9.30am - 11.30am
- Citi North -West African Community Group, 30 July 2023 from 12pm – 1pm
- Somali Men's Swim Group, 5 August 2023 from 5.30pm - 6.30pm

Participation

A total of 611 contributions were made online or in-person throughout the community engagement period.

A snapshot of consultation activities and community participation is below:



530 people attended 23 community-based pop-ups and roadshows.



2124 visitors to the project Engage page



350 in-person contributions



260 digital contributions



12% members of a registered CALD community group



8% aged under 16
27% aged 46-55
19% aged over 66 years



51% Female
47 % Male
2% Prefer not to say



4% person with a disability



13% from South Morang, Wollert and Mernda



Draft Nature Strip Garden Guidelines downloaded 270 times

What we heard

The main question asked the community at face-to-face engagement activities and on the digital project page was “what do you think of the draft guidelines”.

A total of people 476 responded as below:



69.5%

I like it/I like it a lot



21.6%

I can live with them



8.9%

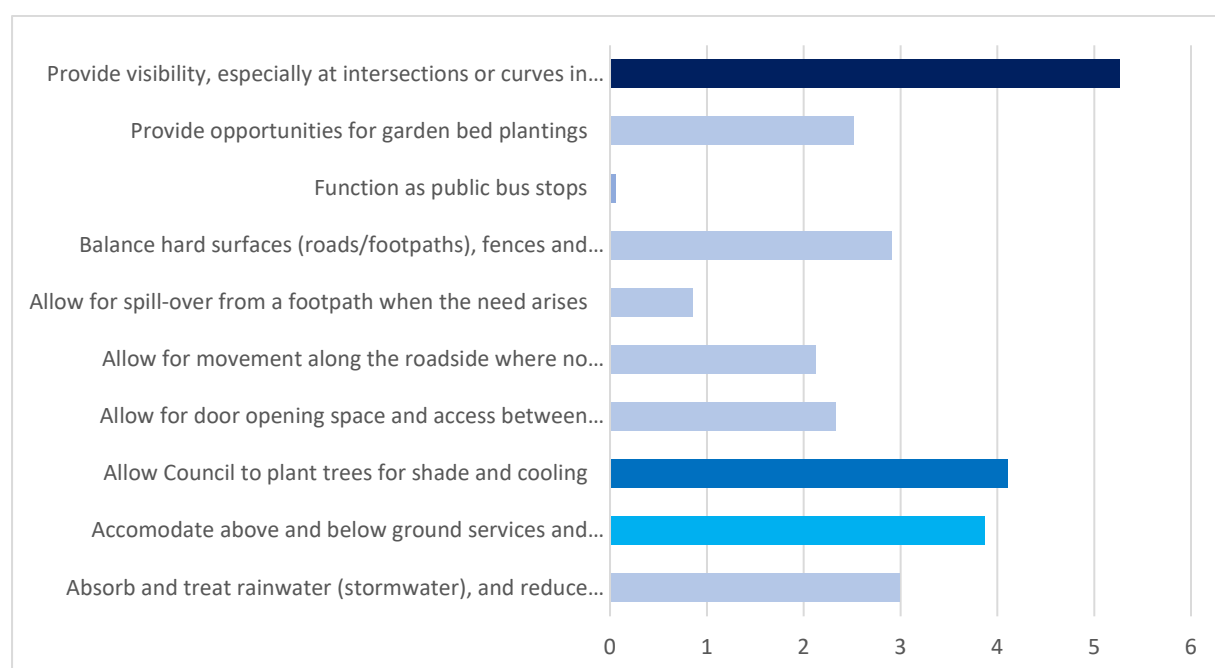
I don't like them/I don't like them at all.

Through digital consultation on the Engage Whittlesea platform the community had the option to respond to an additional series of questions through a survey. The questions posed and responses captured are outlined below.

What do you think the most important function of the nature strips are?

A total of 126 people answered this question and were asked to rank the top three most important functions of the nature strip. The top three ranking functions were determined by a weighted average score** and were as below:

1. Provide visibility especially at intersections and curves on the road and near driveways
2. Trees for shade and cooling
3. Accommodate above and below ground services

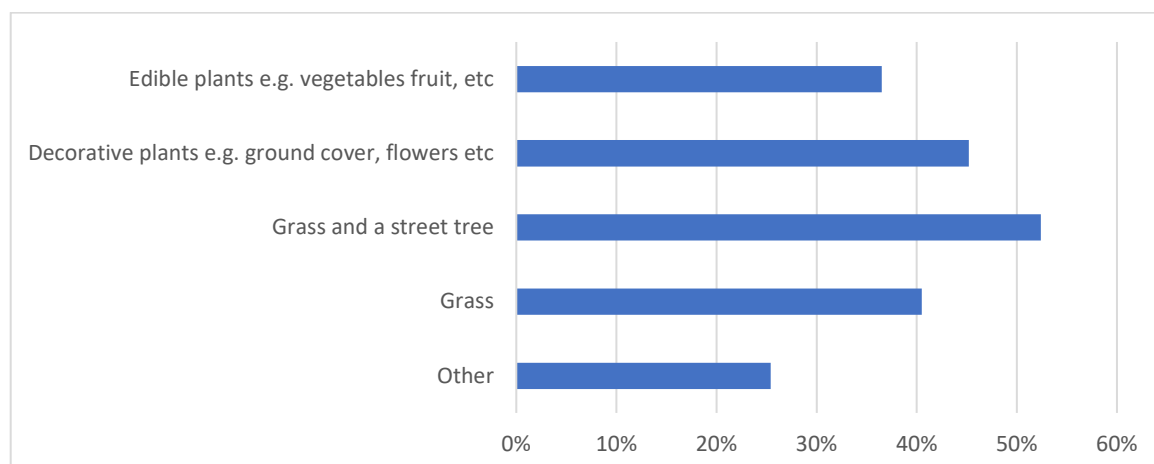


****A weighted average 'score' is calculated by:**

- *summing up the weight of each ranked position.*
- *multiplying the response count for each position choice*
- *dividing by the total responses of the question.*

What do you want the nature strip outside of your home to consist of?

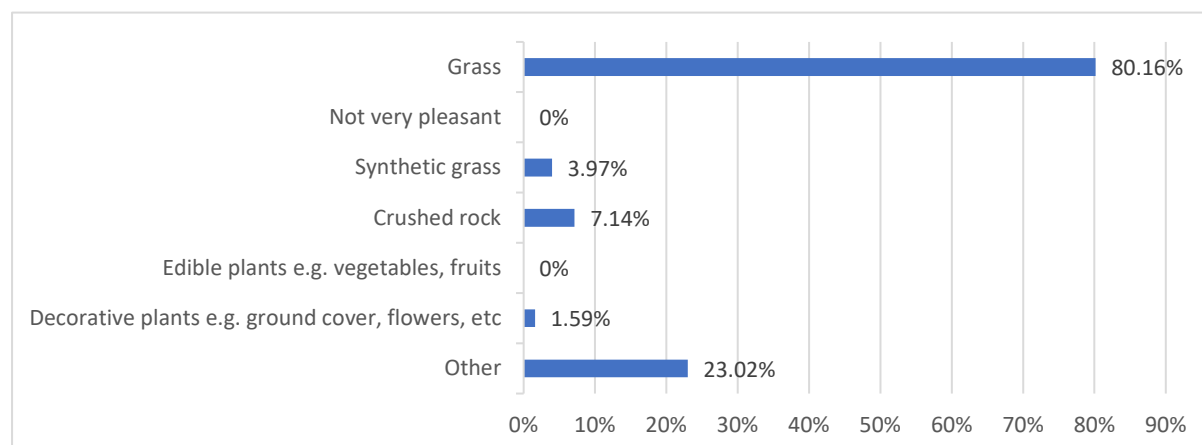
A total of 126 people responded with one or more responses from the available list. The most common thing people wanted on their nature strip is 'Grass and a street tree' with 52% people selecting that option, followed by 'Decorative plants' which was selected by 45% or people.



The 'other' option included Gravel/Rocks (8), Car Parking (7), Native Plants (6), Synthetic grass (4), Tanbark/woodchips (2), NOT Gum trees (2), concrete, granitic sand and a basketball hoop.

Currently, what does the nature strip outside of your home look like?

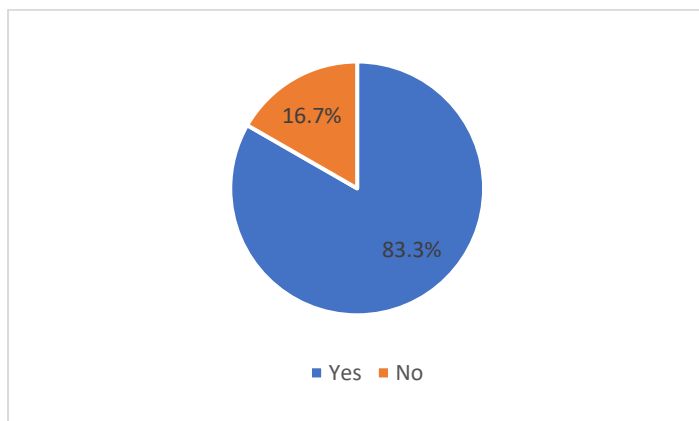
Of the 126 people that responded to this question, most (80%) indicated they had grass on their nature strip. None of the participants had edible plants.



There were 29 responses to the 'other' option, which participants identified as being Tree (23), weeds (3), half concrete half grass (1), and dirt (1).

Does the nature strip outside of your home have at least one tree?

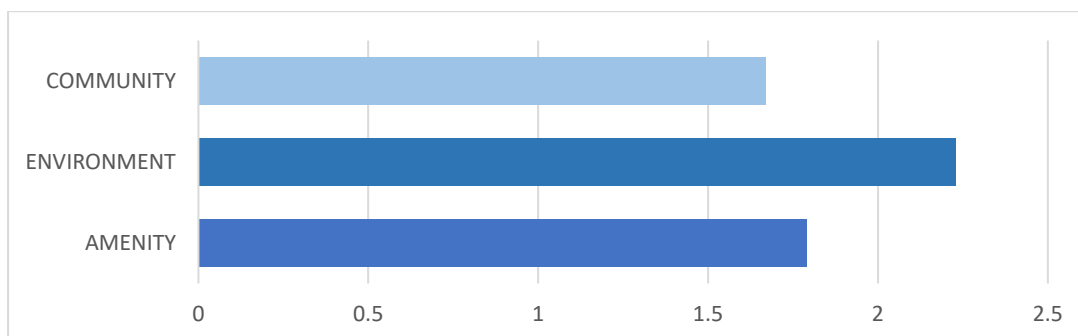
Over 80% (83%) of the 126 people that responded to this question indicated they had at least one tree on the nature strip outside of their home.



Participants who answered that they did not currently have a street tree on the nature strip were asked if they would like Council to plant a street tree. Of the 21 people that were asked this additional question, eight participants requested to have a tree planted.

What are the most important benefits of a landscaped nature strip?

Participants were asked to rank the most important benefits of a landscaped nature strip, with 126 responding. The ranking order is determined by a weighted average score**. Environment was ranked the highest benefit with Amenity second and Community ranked third.



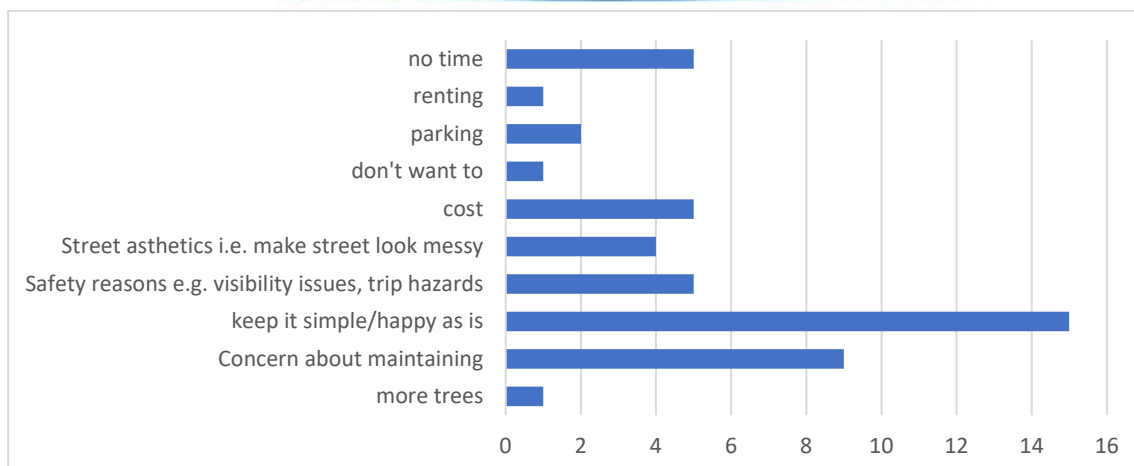
**A weighted average 'score' is calculated by:

- summing up the weight of each ranked position.
- multiplying the response count for each position choice.
- dividing by the total responses of the question.

Are you interested in landscaping the nature strip outside your home? If not, why?

A total of 101 participants responded to this question, with 57 responding yes and 44 responding no.

The 44 participants who responded with no were asked to tell us why they would not be interested. A total of 39 participants commented on why they were not interested in landscaping their home. The most common theme wanted was to keep it simple and were happy with it the way it is (15).



Other themes included concern about maintaining (9), not having the time (5), the additional cost (5), safety reasons (5) and that it would make the street look messy (4).

Below are some of the comments captured:

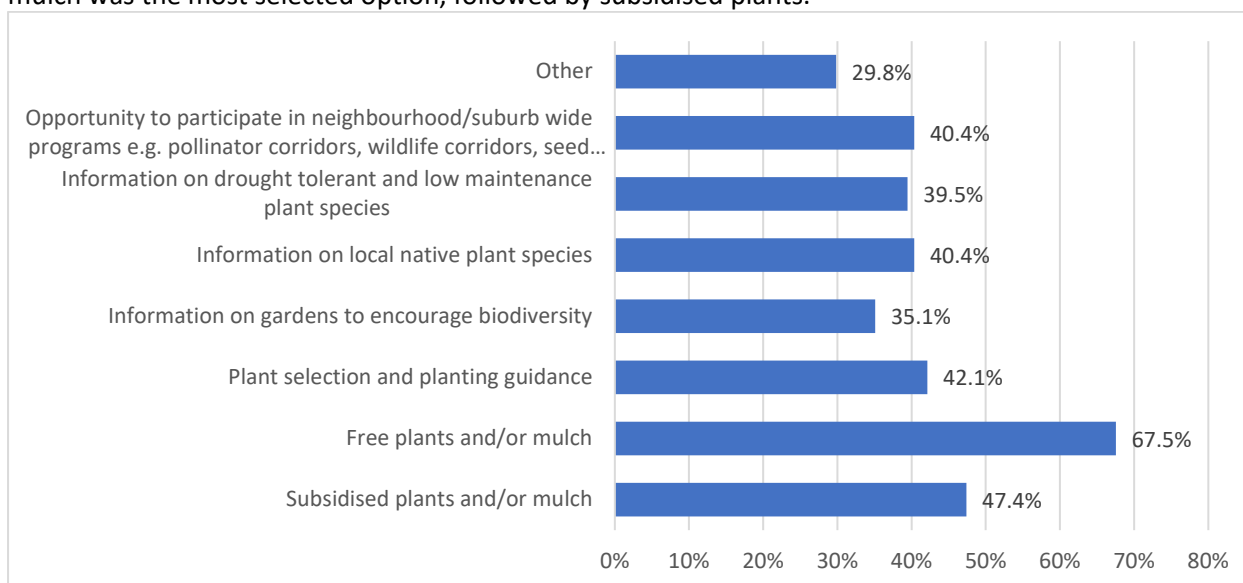
"Prefer to keep it basic and clean...."

"We live opposite a green space currently and really appreciate the view. We are happy with lawn and a tree as it complements the green space."

"We have already landscaped our garden, not interested in investing personal money for public space"

Is there anything Council can do to encourage you or to influence you how you might landscape the nature strip outside your home?

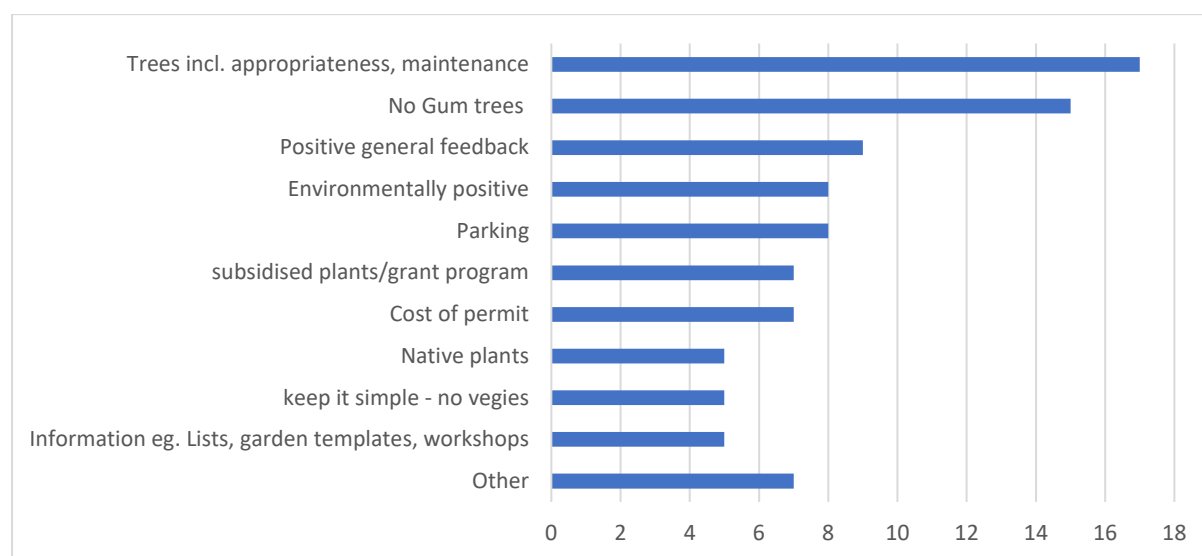
A total of 114 participants responded and were able to select multiple option. Free plants and/or mulch was the most selected option, followed by subsidised plants.



The 'other' option was selected by 34 participants who provided other suggestions including Council funding/maintaining (8), list of suitable options (3), workshops/programs (2), make it easier to get permit (2) and local seed banks (2).

We would like to hear any additional comments or suggestions you might have about the landscaping of nature strips in the urban areas of City of Whittlesea.

A total of 73 participants provided additional comments or suggestions with most relating to trees (17) in general including size, type, quantity, and maintenance. A further 15 participants also mentioned Gum trees specifically and their belief that Council should not be planting them.



Participants that responded with 'Other' provided commentary that has been themed as compliance (3), safety concerns (1), height limit (1), swale options (1) and renting options (1).

Below are some of the comments that were captured:

"I would like to see alternative trees used. I have seen tall banksias used in some areas of our suburb and they look great."

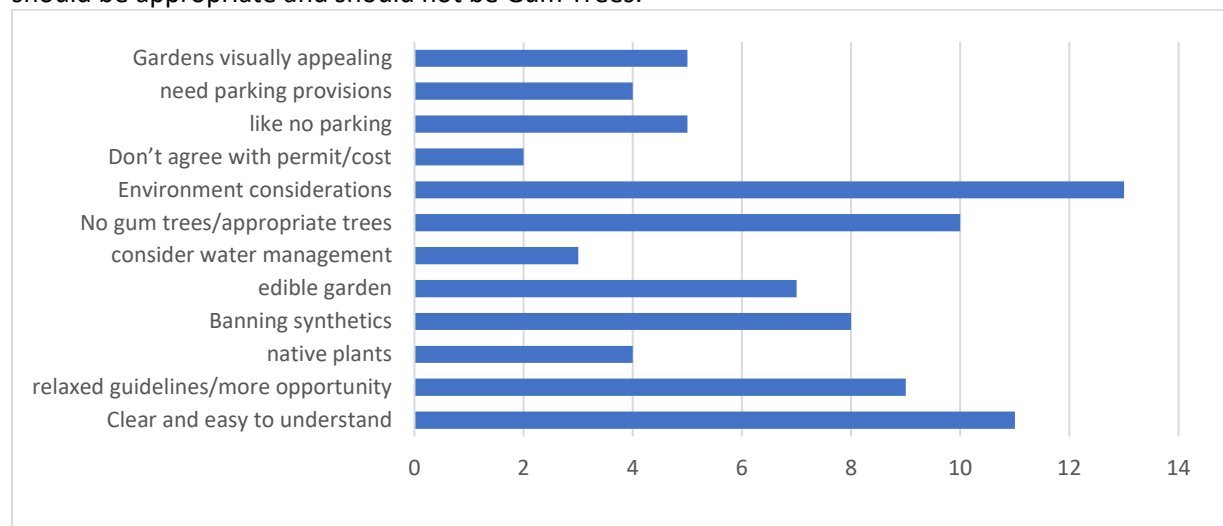
"A comprehensive list of what can be planted (and how) along with subsidised plants"

"It'd be great if City of Whittlesea did some kind of grant program encouraging native nature strips. The permit process and cost would really turn a lot of people away...."

"I'm really fond of the ideas of having edible garden/ biodiverse garden on the nature strip. Not only it feeds the community but at the same time brings people together through food sharing, especially in times of skyrocketing living costs! It teaches kids about their responsibilities with the nature, while give the neighbourhood much needed characters. I'm always impressed at councils where such is allowed, such modernist and progressive thinking should be encouraged"

What specifically do you like about the new guidelines?

The 61 responses provided have been below, with the most common themes being they liked the environment considerations in the new guidelines, and they liked that the guidelines were clear and easy to understand. Ten participants took the opportunity to comments that the trees planted should be appropriate and should not be Gum Trees.



Below are some of the comments that were captured:

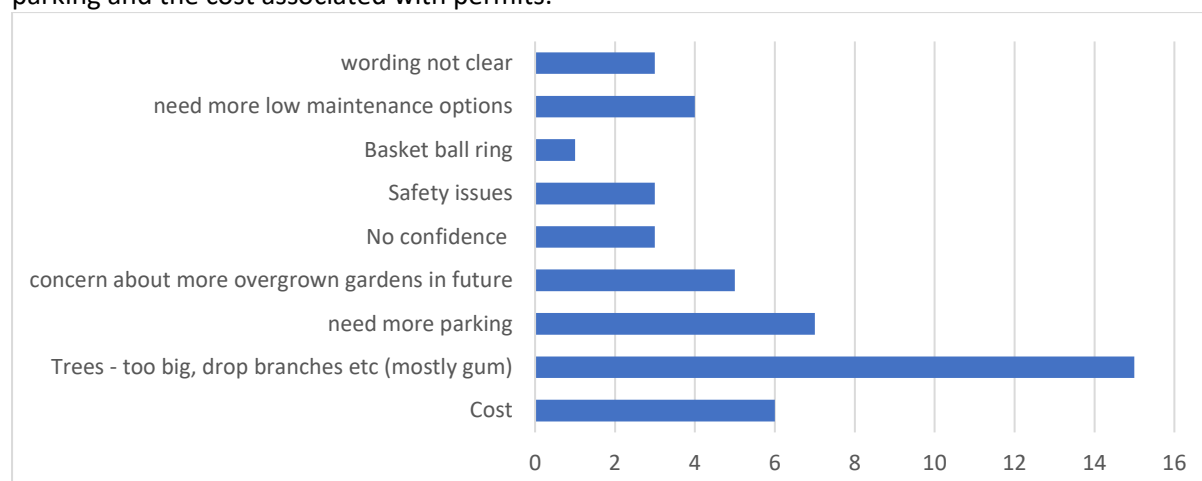
"Prioritise the health of trees, eliminate the use of synthetic grass, prevent cars from parking on nature strip"

"The ability to do more with our nature strips"

"It is nice & looks attractive having a green nature strip & a tree, but in Wollert the streets are so narrow it can be difficult for vehicles to drive safely with so many cars parked in the street....."

What specifically don't you like about the new guidelines?

Thirty-five participants chose to respond to this question and the comments have been themed. The most common theme related to trees on nature strips. Other themes included needing more parking and the cost associated with permits.



Below are some of the comments that were captured:

"The new guidelines do NOT specify how council will maintain street trees! I have gum trees outside my property, and they are not maintained...."

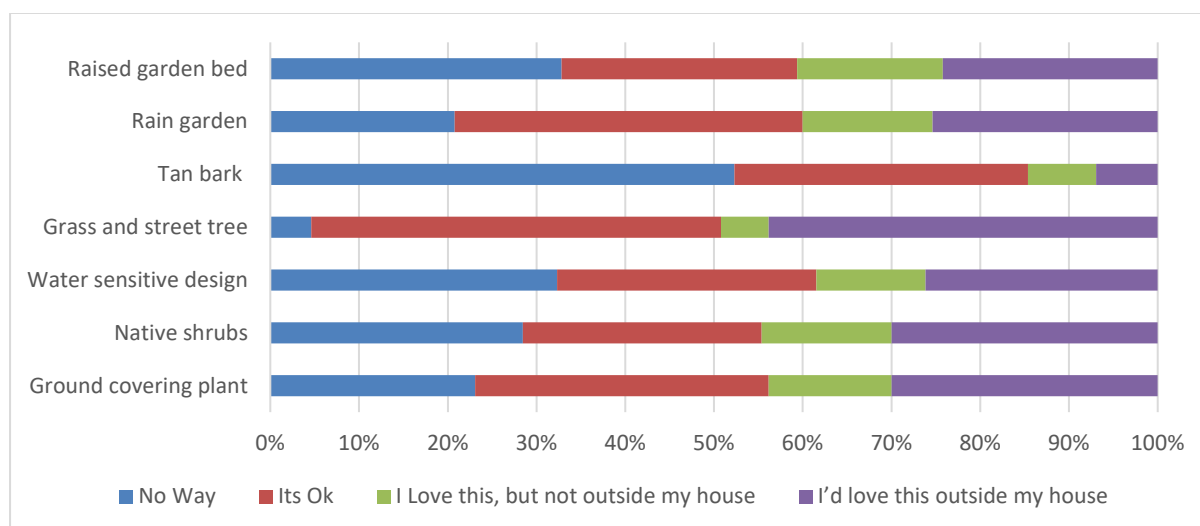
"What about the elderly. They have synthetic grass for maintenance purposes, so they don't have to mow a nature strip."

"...I also think the idea of an edible garden is good in theory, but I can see it attracting kangaroos, (especially homes on the edge of Plenty Gorge, we get roos across the road) possums and foxes and people will then want to protect their gardens with chicken wire etc. I think it would be better to have dedicated areas for voluntary community gardens in estate parks where proper gardens could be established and protected as required. Also, there is a limit of what could be planted to fit in with the guidelines...."

Nature strip ideas

The project page featured a Nature Strip Ideas survey that presented seven nature strip ideas and asked participants to indicate their thoughts on each from four options - no way; its ok; I love this but not outside my house; or I'd love to do this outside my house.

A total of 130 participants provided their thoughts through the nature strip ideas survey. What we heard it outlined below:



Next steps

The draft Nature Strip Garden Guidelines will be presented to Council for endorsement later this year. Once endorsed, the new guidelines will be shared with the community, providing any rationale for refinements made following community consultation. This will be shared through digital communications, direct contact with stakeholders, and updates on the project Engage page.

Appendix 1

Below is the breakdown of the feedback captured at each community-based pop-up and through the project Engage page when participants were asked 'what do you think of the draft nature strip garden guidelines.

Location	I like them a lot	I like them	I can live with them	I don't like them	I don't like them at all	Total
Roadshows	30	22	8	0	2	62
ONLINE	34	12	45	22	13	126
Olivine Shared Cup Café Donnybrook	4	15	3	0	0	22
Mernda Junction Coles	8	1	12	0	0	21
Westfield Plenty Valley (PM)	8	12	3	2	0	25
Westfield Plenty Valley (AM)	10	7	2	2	1	22
Kirrip Community Centre	2	24	3	0	0	29
Church St IGA	4	8	6	0	0	18
Mill Park Village the Lakes Boulevard Coles	10	3	3	0	0	16
Aurora Village Galada Shops inside foyer space	0	11	4	0	0	15
Galada CC Punjabi Men's Group	8		0	0	0	8
JFACC -CitiNorth West African (CALD)	0	31	0	0	0	31
Mill Park Library (CALD group plus public)	5	5	4	0	0	14
Laurimar Shops	1	3	2	0	0	6
Lalor Library	4	2	0	0	0	6
TRAC	14	0	4	0	0	18
Bundoora Square near Coles entrance	0	12	4	0	0	16
Stables shopping centre Mill Park	0	7	0	0	0	7
Mill Park Leisure Somali Swim Group	7	7	0	0	0	14
Total	149	182	103	26	16	476