

Beveridge North West Precinct Structure Plan

Comments by Friends of Merri Creek Inc. October 2019

The Friends of Merri Creek (FoMC) is a volunteer community group, established in 1989 as an Incorporated Association. One of our Purposes is to: “Work with the catchment community and government to protect and regenerate the indigenous ecosystems associated with Merri Creek.” We have an interest in the whole Merri catchment, which includes the Beveridge North West precinct. Our comments below focus on the need for more attention to biodiversity and habitat restoration in the PSP. Regarding another important issue, the sodic dispersive and erosive soils in the precinct, we support the comments submitted by Merri Creek Management Committee.

Biodiversity

PSP Plan 8 (Biodiversity) shows there is very little remaining native vegetation in the precinct. However, our experience with revegetation along the urban reaches of Merri Creek over the past 40 years demonstrates the feasibility as well as ecological and social benefits of revegetation and habitat restoration. Social benefits relate to sense of place, active recreation, and local opportunities for connection with nature with its associated health dividends.

The Requirements and Guidelines for Biodiversity in the PSP are very weak. We consider that **there should be strong guidance towards biodiversity restoration and connectivity, primarily through indigenous revegetation and provision for fauna movement along waterway corridors, on steep slopes and in the ‘Landscape values’ land.** For example, Guideline G42 (p.34) refers to habitat and movement corridors for local fauna, but this needs to be achieved through more than retaining existing vegetation. It should be reworded to also encourage revegetation, habitat restoration and removal/avoidance of obstructions to fauna movement.

Biodiversity habitat corridor network

Victoria Planning Provisions Clause 12 ENVIRONMENTAL AND LANDSCAPE VALUES states: “Planning should help to protect the health of ecological systems and the biodiversity they support (including ecosystems, habitats, species and genetic diversity) and conserve areas with identified environmental and landscape values.”

Clause 12.01-1S Protection of biodiversity has the Objective: To assist the protection and conservation of Victoria’s biodiversity. Strategies include: “Assist in the establishment, protection and re-establishment of links between important areas of biodiversity, including through a network of green spaces and large-scale native vegetation corridor projects.”

Friends of Merri Creek and Merri Creek Management Committee have for many years advocated, via various strategic planning processes, for a network of habitat links throughout the Merri catchment, to provide connections for fauna to move between larger habitat nodes.

The Beveridge North West Precinct Structure Plan has a unique and important opportunity to implement the VPP biodiversity provisions, by **providing a link between important areas of biodiversity to the west and east of the precinct, as well as habitat corridors along Kalkallo Creek and the constructed waterways.** This is particularly important because there are no Conservation Areas (designated via the Melbourne Strategic Assessment under the EPBC Act) in the northwestern sector of the North growth corridor – as illustrated in PSP Plan 1.

The Kalkallo Creek corridor should provide an important north-south link, but PSP only refers to drainage and recreation functions. We consider that the waterway corridor should be at least 200m wide to adequately function in its drainage, recreation and habitat corridor roles.

The need for an east-west habitat link

A habitat corridor provides connectivity for fauna species to move across the landscape, between larger biodiversity nodes. An east-west link would connect the larger nodes, which are the areas of native vegetation to the northwest of the precinct (Old Sydney Road and further west), and Hernes Swamp and the Merri Creek corridor to the east. Fauna needs to move seasonally (e.g. altitudinal and north-south migrants), to find resources for feeding and breeding, and to re-colonise areas after local extinctions. As metropolitan Melbourne continues to expand, the need for links across the suburbs is becoming more critical, especially for fauna species that cannot successfully move through built-up areas. Examples include wallabies, echidnas, turtles, kangaroos, lizards and many small birds.

The land designated as ‘Landscape Values’ provides the obvious opportunity for an east-west habitat link. This is a continuous band of open space extending right across the precinct. (We note that in earlier plans (e.g. *Delivering Melbourne’s Newest Sustainable Communities*, 2010) a broader band of green space was shown as an inter-urban break between northern Melbourne and Wallan. It is still an appropriate location for a substantial break in urban development.)

Requirements of a habitat link

Continuity is essential if habitat links are to function as movement corridors for terrestrial fauna such as Echidna, Eastern Long-necked Turtle, and Swamp Wallaby.

However there are three major issues relating to the potential of the Landscape values land as a link:

1. It is unclear what land uses and tenure will be permitted in the ‘Landscape values’ land, and whether these will interfere with fauna movement. Private land, with associated dwellings, variable vegetation types, fences and domestic animals would make it difficult to establish a functional habitat movement corridor.
2. The two four-lane arterial roads that cross the Landscape values land. **Provision for fauna crossings would be required.**
3. The sports facilities proposed (SR-01 and CI-05) in the centre north of the precinct, which narrow down the potential habitat link to approximately 25 metres in width, across the southern edge of the sporting open space. This is completely inadequate space for a habitat corridor, especially as it is likely to accommodate a shared trail as well. **We recommend that the sports facilities open space be re-aligned or re-shaped to leave a corridor at least 200 m wide to accommodate fauna movement and a shared trail.**

Wallan Regional Park

The PSP makes no reference to the proposed Wallan Regional Park which is currently under investigation by DELWP. We understand this may include the Kalkallo Creek corridor as well as an east-west band including Spring Hill. **We strongly support the inclusion of the east-west corridor Landscape values land as part of the Regional Park, linking Kalkallo and Merri Creeks.**

Wetland restoration

Wetlands are an important natural feature in the basalt plains landscape, and provide significant fauna habitat. Restoration of Hernes Swamp to the east of Beveridge NW precinct is a key part of current proposals for the Regional Park. We note that another drained wetland extends across the northern boundary of the precinct. It is shown as a waterbody in Plan 2 but then 'disappears' except in Plan 5 where it shows as 1:100 year flood extent. It appears that the wetland is destined for residential development. However it drains to the northeast, and should be considered as part of the stormwater management network for the Hernes Swamp – Merri Creek catchment. **The potential of the former swamp for restoration as a wetland and/or utilisation as a retarding basin should be considered as part of a proposed review of the drainage strategy for this area.**