City of STONNINGTON

DRAFT

Biodiverse, Green and Connected Stonnington

Action Plan 2026-2029

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Statement of commitment to Australia's First Peoples

Council acknowledges that the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nations are the Traditional Custodians of the land now known as Stonnington, and that they have strived to retain their identity and cultures through more than two hundred years of dispossession and colonisation.

We recognise and accept our responsibility to learn from, and promote the intrinsic value of, First Peoples cultural values, knowledges, heritage, and contemporary aspirations to the wider Stonnington community. We understand that doing so will enrich our shared heritage, culture, and the health of community and Country.

Council respects the special relationship the people of the Kulin Nations have to Country in Stonnington, and we recognise and commit to protecting sacred sites and significant places.

Why are we planning for a biodiverse, green and connected Stonnington?

Biodiversity, nature and green spaces are fundamental to Stonnington's liveability and our community's wellbeing, but they are under increasing pressure.

Our trees, open spaces, nature strips and private gardens provide habitat for native plants and animals, cool our neighbourhoods, improve air and water quality, reduce flood risk and support physical and mental wellbeing. Together, they form a network of green infrastructure that stores carbon, adds distinctive neighbourhood character, and supports a healthy, resilient and liveable community.

For tens of thousands of years, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples have cared for the Country now known as Stonnington. Their enduring practice of Caring for Country recognises that the health of people and the environment are inseparable, and that we share a responsibility to care for the land, waterways, plants and animals that sustain us.

As our population grows, neighbourhoods become denser and the climate changes, our natural environment is becoming both more important and more vulnerable. Development, habitat fragmentation, vegetation loss, extreme weather, pests and disease all place pressure on local ecosystems, particularly where habitat on public and private land is disconnected.

Protecting what we have, restoring degraded habitat and creating new opportunities for nature to thrive will be essential to keeping Stonnington biodiverse, green and connected for future generations.

Creating a biodiverse, green and connected Stonnington involves more than planting trees. It requires healthy soils and waterways, diverse vegetation, habitat for wildlife and pollinators, connected green spaces, and a community that understands, values and participates in caring for nature.

Sustainable Stonnington 2040 establishes our long-term direction for a biodiverse, green and connected city. This Action Plan sets out the practical steps we will take over the next three years to protect and enhance nature in Stonnington, create and connect habitat across public and private land, and strengthen community connection to nature and care for Country.



Delivering Sustainable Stonnington 2040

This Action Plan is one of five that support delivery of our environment strategy, Sustainable Stonnington 2040.

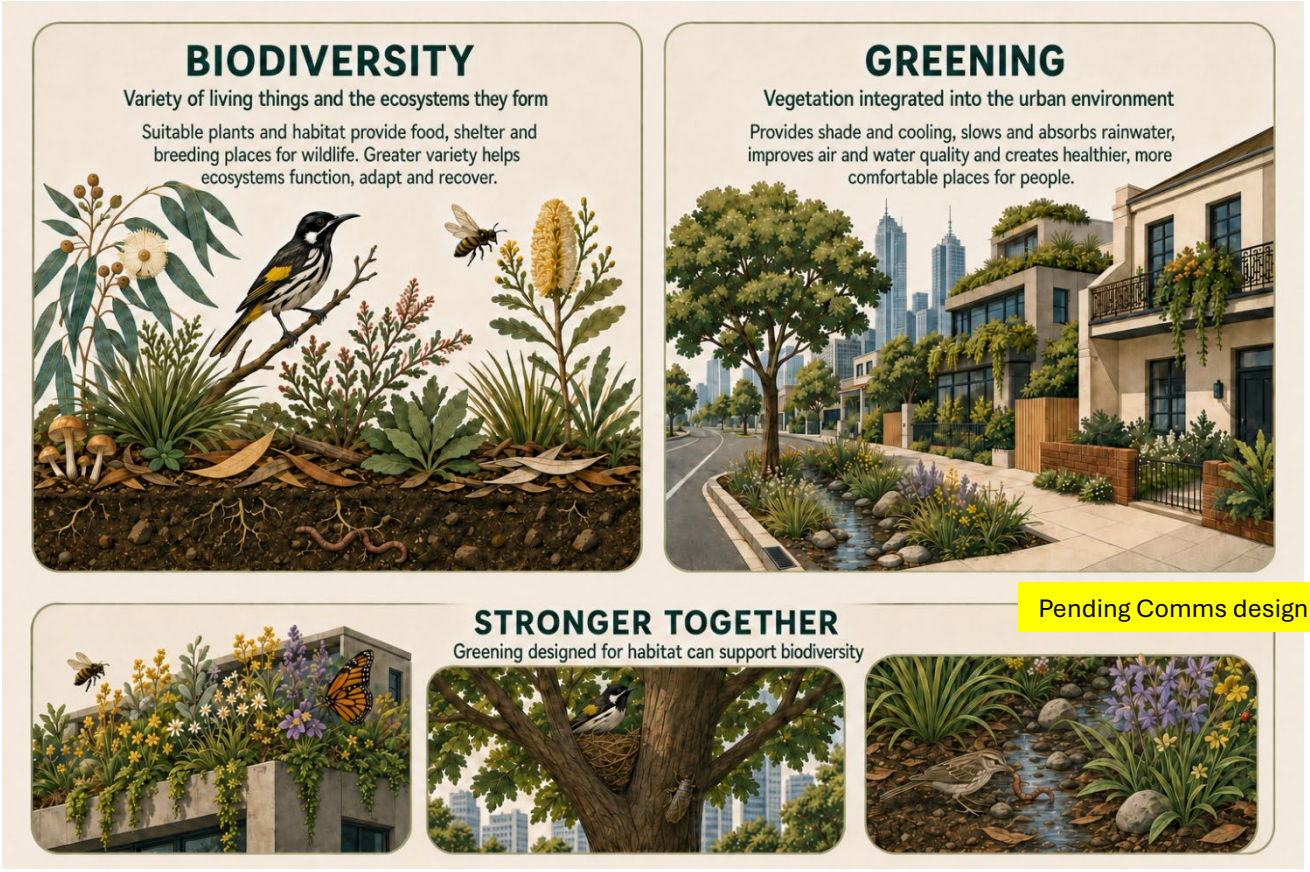
Alongside this Action Plan, the suite includes:

- Resilient, Adaptable & Empowered Stonnington 2026-2029
- Climate Positive Stonnington 2026-2029
- Water Sensitive and Flood Ready Stonnington 2026-2029
- Circular and Resource-Conscious Stonnington 2026-2029

These five action plans are designed to work together – actions delivered through one will often support the outcomes in others.

Biodiversity and greening: What's the difference?

Biodiversity and greening are closely connected, but they are not the same. We need both to create a healthy, resilient natural environment in Stonnington.



Pending Comms design

Greening can support biodiversity, but not all greening provides the same habitat value. For example, a street lined with a single tree species may provide shade and cooling but offer limited food and shelter for wildlife. Some garden plants can also spread beyond where they are planted and displace native species.

The strongest outcomes occur when greening is designed to support biodiversity through varied and locally appropriate trees, shrubs, grasses, groundcovers and flowering plants, supported by healthy soils, water and connections to other habitats.

Planned together, biodiversity and greening create healthier ecosystems, more liveable neighbourhoods and greater benefits for people, wildlife and Country.

Connecting to and caring for Country

People are more likely to care for nature when they feel connected to it, understand it, and see themselves as part of it. In a highly urbanised municipality like Stonnington, however, nature can sometimes feel distant, hidden, or like someone else's responsibility.

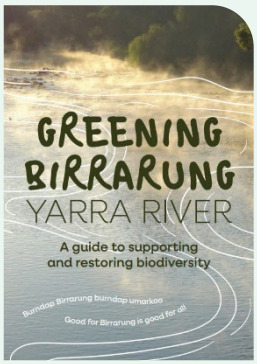
For Stonnington's Traditional Custodians, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples, Caring for Country reflects the interconnected relationship between people, culture and the natural environment. It recognises that healthy communities depend on healthy Country and that caring for land, water, plants and animals carries responsibilities of reciprocity and respect.

There are many ways to build this connection in everyday life in Stonnington. From walking along the Yarra River (Birrarung) and Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) and spending time in local parks, to creating habitat in gardens, on nature strips and balconies, and noticing local birds, insects and seasonal changes.

A growing body of evidence shows that access to nature and green spaces supports physical and mental wellbeing, social connection and a stronger sense of place. Time in nature can reduce stress, improve mood and concentration, encourage physical activity and help people feel more connected to their local environment.

Learning and participation can deepen these connections. Environmental education, guided walks, community events and citizen science help people understand local ecosystems while contributing valuable information about species, habitat condition and environmental change.

SPOTLIGHT ON
Greening Birrarung



The **Greening Birrarung Guide** is a collaborative initiative that brings together Traditional Owners, councils, Melbourne Water, government agencies and community groups to support the restoration of Birrarung as a living entity.

It established a shared approach for improving biodiversity, strengthening habitat connectivity and supporting community stewardship along the river corridor through coordinated action and Caring for Country principles.

The guide showcases restoration projects, partnerships and community-led initiatives already making a difference along the river, while encouraging a landscape-scale approach to protecting and enhancing habitat from source to sea.

It also reinforces the importance of collaboration in delivering a healthier, more resilient and ecologically connected Birrarung for future generations.

Community groups, schools, volunteers and residents already contribute significant time and knowledge to planting, habitat restoration, wildlife monitoring and caring for local green spaces. We can support this work by making nature more visible, sharing practical information and creating inclusive opportunities to learn, connect and participate.

By strengthening connections between people, place and nature, we can foster a community that values biodiversity and actively participates in caring for Country.



Who contributes to biodiversity, greening, and nature connection in Stonnington?

Protecting, creating and caring for nature in Stonnington is a shared responsibility. Different groups influence biodiversity and greening across public and private land, from setting policy and managing major corridors to creating habitat in gardens, buildings and neighbourhoods.

Australian Government

Sets national environmental laws, strategies and targets, funds conservation initiatives and coordinates action on matters of national environmental significance.

Victorian Government

Sets state biodiversity, planning and vegetation policy, manages environmental regulation and establishes requirements that influence development, tree protection, habitat and urban greening.

Local government

Manages open spaces, street trees, waterways and other public land. Councils also influence outcomes through local planning, policies and laws, capital projects, land management, education, partnerships and community support.

Traditional Custodians

Hold enduring cultural, spiritual and custodial responsibilities for Country. Their cultural authority, knowledge and care practices guide how land, water, plants, animals and cultural values are understood, protected and restored. Registered Aboriginal Parties also have formal responsibilities under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* for protecting and managing Aboriginal cultural heritage, including in land-use planning and development.

Developers

Influence whether existing vegetation and habitat are retained and how new buildings and landscapes contribute to canopy, habitat connectivity, water management and access to nature.

Community

Community organisations, groups, households and individuals create and care for habitat on private and community land, participate in planting, monitoring and citizen science, volunteer with local groups and share knowledge that helps others connect with and care for nature.



Where we are now

Stonnington's urban forest

Stonnington's urban forest includes trees and associated vegetation across public and private land, from street trees and parks to vegetation along waterways, nature strips, gardens and green roofs. Tree canopy cover helps us understand how this living network is distributed and changing over time.

Canopy cover

Stonnington has relatively high overall canopy cover compared to other inner metropolitan municipalities, with an average of 21.5% in 2025. This has stayed relatively stable over the last decade, declining by less than 0.1% overall, by in large due to Council's efforts in expanding public canopy cover at a time when much is being lost in the private realm However, this remains well below the Victorian Government's target of 30% canopy coverage across urban areas, set out in Plan for Victoria. This municipality-wide figure also masks significant differences between public and private land and across different parts of Stonnington.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY

Canopy cover

Tree canopy refers to the layer of leaves and branches that covers the ground when viewed from above, providing shade to the area underneath. Larger trees with spreading canopies provide better shade and cooling, reduce more stormwater runoff, filter higher levels of air pollutants and offer more habitat.

Canopy cover, rather than the number of trees, is regularly used as a key indicator of the benefits provided by an urban forest.

According to Victorian Planning Policy, canopy trees are defined as trees that are **more than 5 metres tall**, trunks of a certain thickness, and a canopy diameter of **at least 4 meters**.

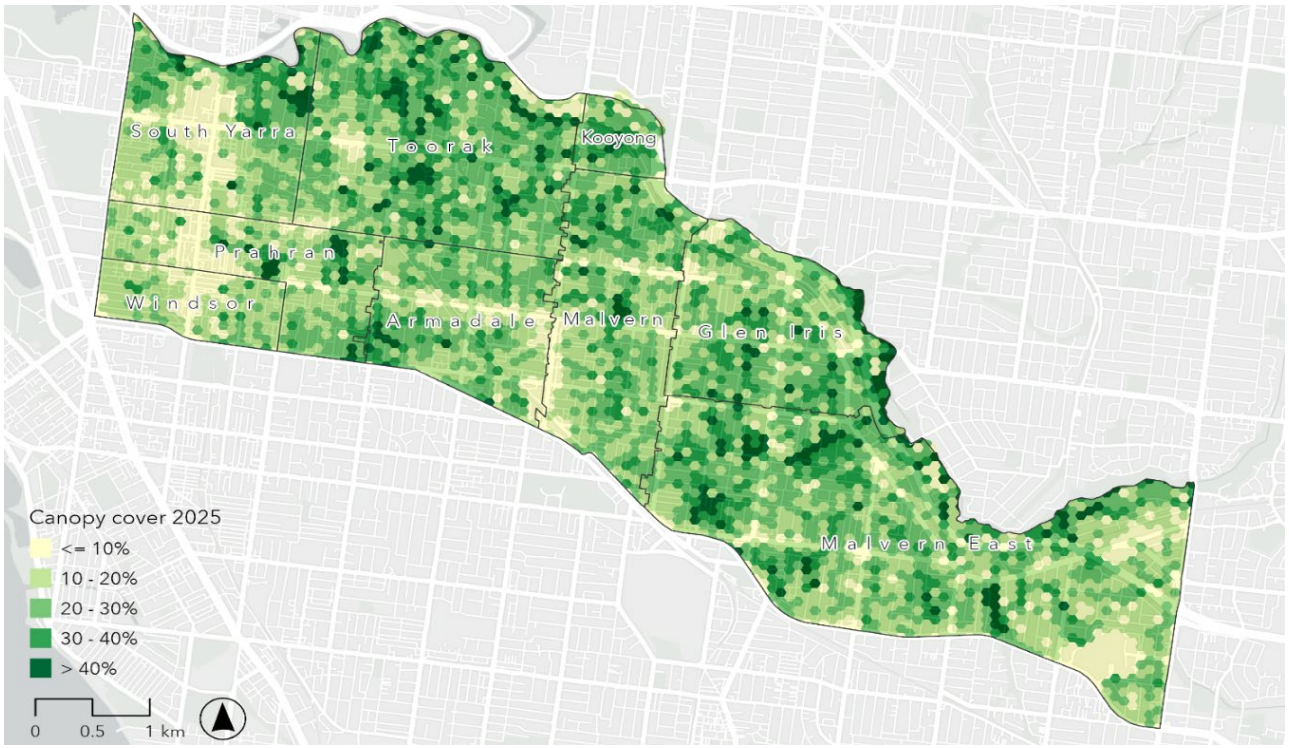
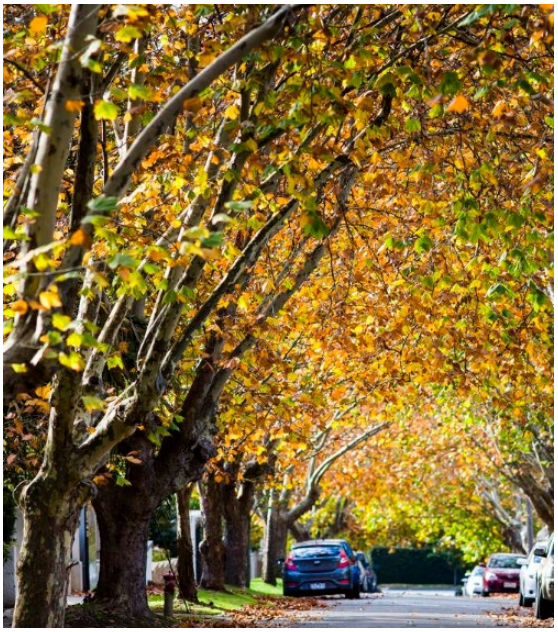


Figure 1. *Stonnington canopy cover, 2025*

Generally, eastern suburbs such as Kooyong, Toorak and Glen Iris have higher canopy cover. Nature strips are larger with increased opportunities for tree plantings and private properties tend to have larger gardens. Some streets in these areas have canopy cover as high as 80%.

Denser, more built-up western suburbs such as Prahran, Windsor and South Yarra have lower canopy cover and less private green space. Commercial areas tend to have the lowest canopy – for example, there are just 12 trees on Chapel Street between Malvern and Dandenong roads.

These western suburbs already have low tree canopy cover, making them more vulnerable to impacts of urban heat and reduced biodiversity. At the same time, they are expected to experience significant population and development growth, increasing the importance of protecting existing trees and creating new opportunities for greening.



A stable total, but a changing picture

Residential land covers around 60% of Stonnington and provides 53% of its canopy. Between 2015 and 2025, residential land lost 18 hectares of canopy (around 4.5 MCGs) with canopy declining across private residential land in eight of Stonnington's nine suburbs. The largest losses occurred in Malvern East, which lost 6.5 hectares, and Toorak, which lost 3.7 hectares.

Over the same period, canopy increased by around 16 hectares across Council-managed open spaces and streets. This has included five hectares in open spaces and 11 hectares in road reserves and nature strips. These gains have largely offset losses from residential land, helping keep Stonnington's overall canopy cover relatively stable. However, public open space is limited. Council cannot continue to offset the continuing loss of canopy on private land with public planting without significant overall decline of canopy cover in Stonnington.

Land type	Share of Stonnington's land	Share of canopy	Canopy change, 2015-2025
Residential land	60%	53%	**-18 hectares**
Parks, open spaces and road reserves	31%	43%	**+16 hectares**

Figure 2. *Where Stonnington's canopy is located and changing*

SPOTLIGHT ON

Victoria's urban canopy targets

In recognition of the critical role trees play in urban cooling, biodiversity, stormwater management and community wellbeing, the Victorian Government has set a tree canopy target of 30% for all urban areas as part of **Plan for Victoria** (2025). The target has been embedded in planning policy by establishing new provisions that require canopy trees and landscaping to be considered in many forms of residential development.

This is an important step forward. However, increasing canopy is challenging in highly urbanised municipalities like Stonnington where more than half of all canopy in Stonnington is on private land.

While the new provisions may slow canopy decline, current planning controls still allow canopy loss as part of private developments. Current and projected urban growth, limited open space and competition for land will make it difficult to offset those losses with new planting in either the public or private realm unless controls are revised.

Age and species diversity

Council manages around 63,000 trees across streets, open spaces and other public land. Many are mature trees that make a significant contribution to shade, cooling, habitat and Stonnington's valued leafy character. Mature trees typically provide greater benefits than newly planted trees, making their protection particularly important.

However, an ageing tree population also requires careful succession planning. Many older trees were planted under cooler, wetter and more consistent climate conditions. As exposure to heat, drought, storms, pests and disease increase, some species may be lost or become more difficult or costly to maintain.

Species diversity is also important. An urban forest that relies too heavily on a small number of species is more vulnerable to changing conditions, pests and disease. While Stonnington is home to a wide variety of tree species, only 10 species make up the top 50% of trees. Selecting a wider range of suitable species can spread this risk and improve the resilience of the urban forest as a whole.

Maintaining a healthy urban forest will require us to protect mature trees, progressively replace ageing trees, diversify the species we plant and provide sufficient soil and water for new trees to establish and thrive.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Electric line clearance

Overhead powerlines often run above or through tree canopy. Victorian safety regulations require vegetation to be kept a minimum distance from powerlines to reduce the risk of fire, power outages and injury.

Council is required to maintain a clearance of 1 metre around powerlines for the street trees we manage. Each year, we prepare and submit an Electric Line Clearance Management Plan to demonstrate how we will achieve this to Energy Safe Victoria.

Meeting these requirements can limit canopy growth and significantly alter the form of some trees.

To support the health of our existing street trees and improvements in canopy over time, Council has been and will continue to advocate for cables to be bundled to minimise canopy loss and enable larger, healthier trees to be retained and established beneath powerline corridors, and for clearance requirements to be reduced where it is safe to do so.

~63,000	~42%	~70%	~15,000	567	121
Trees managed by Council	**Mature street trees**	**Mature park trees**	**Trees planted 2015-2025**	**Total tree species**	**Species vulnerable to climate change**

The future of Stonnington's canopy

Council modelling indicates that, under current Victorian Government planning controls and assuming new developments only meet minimum canopy requirements, canopy on private residential land could fall from 19% to 14.3 % over the next 100 years. This would represent a loss of almost 73 hectares of canopy, equivalent to almost 19 MCGs or approximately 13% of Stonnington's current total canopy.

Planting on Council-managed land has helped offset private canopy loss over the past decade, but opportunities for further planting in streets and open spaces are constrained by available space and competing infrastructure and community needs. Public planting alone will therefore not be enough to maintain and grow Stonnington's overall canopy. This means we need to:

- Strengthen protection for existing trees on private land
- Advocate for increased canopy requirements for new development
- Target public planting in low-canopy and high-growth areas
- Protect mature trees and plan for their eventual replacement

Stonnington's open spaces

Stonnington's open space network plays a defining role in our municipality's identity, resilience, liveability and cultural landscape. Beyond their social and recreational functions, they are home to habitat for native plants and animals and help to cool our city. As naturally 'spongey' or permeable areas, they also play an important role in maintaining a sustainable water cycle and calming floods by allowing infiltration of rain and stormwater into soil and the groundwater table and supporting uptake of water by trees and plants.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY

Open space

Council defines **open space** in Stonnington as all freely accessible public land, waterways and waterbodies that provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, leisure, environmental and cultural benefits, visual amenity, and off-road active transport.

However, Stonnington has one of the lowest levels of public open space per resident in metropolitan Melbourne at only approximately 11 square metres per person.

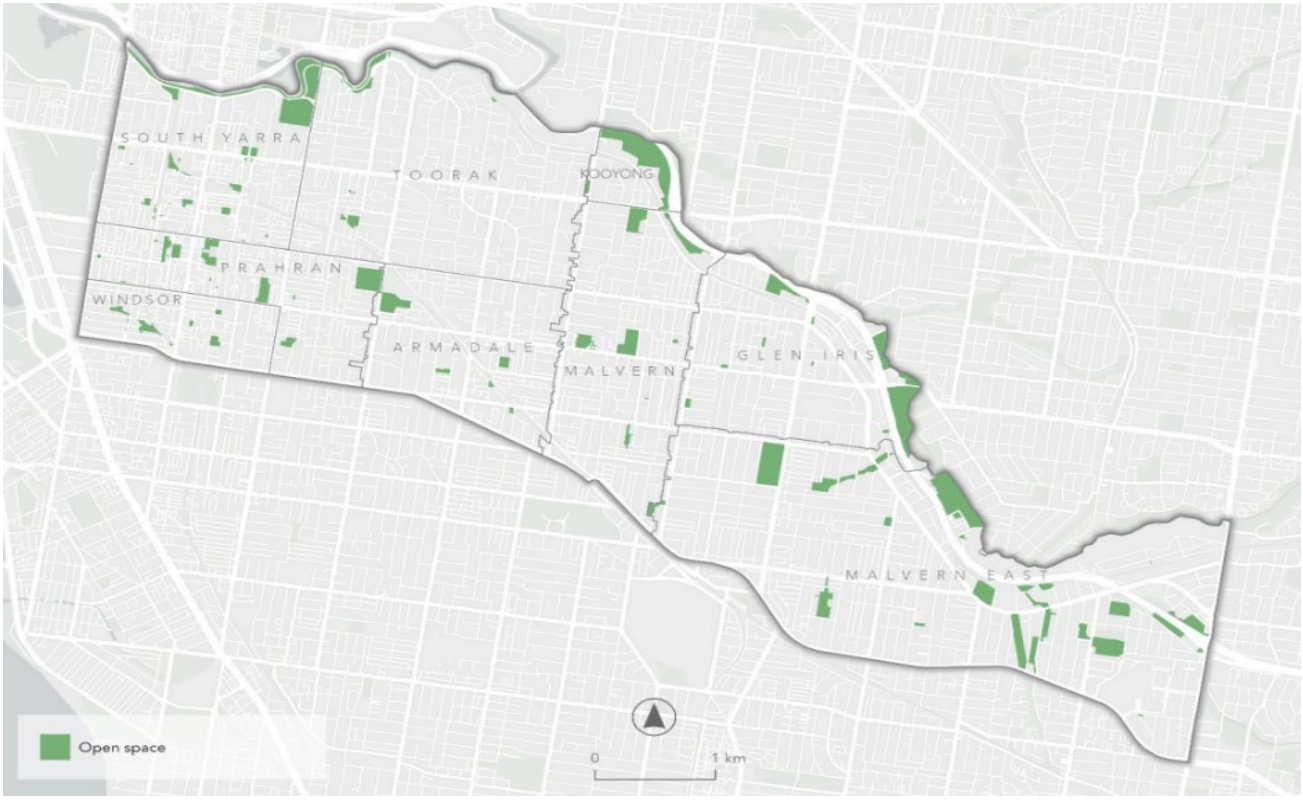


***Figure 3**. Stonnington's open spaces, 2026*

Open space provision is also very uneven throughout the city, with some suburbs having much lower levels of open space than others. For example, Armadale, Toorak and Windsor only have 4.9 hectares, 4.3 hectares and 3.0 hectares of open space respectively. Access to open space is particularly important when private green space is limited in denser areas. Nearly half (45%) of all public open space in Stonnington sits along the KooyongKoot corridor, with the remainder scattered along the Birrarung corridor and throughout other parks, and reserves across the municipality.

Stonnington's open space network is experiencing additional pressure from population growth and climate change, most acutely in our western suburbs.

An Open Space Strategy is being prepared to respond to these challenges by providing direction on planning, improving and expanding the open space network to ensure it is equitable, accessible, inclusive, biodiverse and climate ready.

Stonnington's biodiversity

Biodiversity hotspots

Despite being one of Melbourne's most urbanised municipalities, Stonnington is home to a surprisingly diverse range of plants, animals and ecosystems.

Many of our most significant biodiversity 'hotspots' are concentrated along the KooyongKoot corridor, including Glenburn Bend Park, Muswell Bend Park, Glen Iris Wetlands, Darling Park, Gardiner Park, Kyarra Park, and the Malvern Valley Golf Course.

The Birrarung corridor and Urban Forest Reserve in Malvern East also important habitat areas, as are pockets of Darling Gardens, Kooyong Gardens, OT Flight Reserve, and WM Dane Park. These spaces are home to indigenous trees and shrubs, wetlands, ponds, and areas that have been carefully revegetated with native and indigenous plants. They also provide important habitat features such as tree hollows, flowering plants, dense understorey, fallen timber, rocks and leaf litter.

Together with our wider network of open spaces, street trees, nature strips and private gardens, these places provide food, shelter and movement pathways for native birds, pollinators, reptiles, bats and other wildlife.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY

Citizen science

Citizen science involves community members collecting, recording or sharing observations that contribute to scientific research and environmental monitoring.

In Stonnington, this can include recording plants and wildlife through iNaturalist, taking part in bird and insect counts, monitoring nest boxes or testing water quality through Waterwatch.

These activities build knowledge of local ecosystems while giving people a practical way to learn about and care for nature.

Measuring biodiversity

Biodiversity is more complex to measure than canopy cover. We currently draw on our 2022 Biodiversity Inventory and Corridors study, site-based surveys, environmental DNA testing, planting records and citizen science observations to understand local species and habitat.

These sources provide valuable information but remain snapshots rather than a comprehensive picture of change over time. A more consistent monitoring approach is needed to track habitat condition, identify emerging threats and assess the effectiveness of our interventions. Surveys and community observations have already recorded a wide range of native plants, birds, frogs, reptiles, mammals, fish and insects in Stonnington. The species shown below provide a small snapshot of the flora and fauna found across our city:

- Tawny Frogmouth
- Eastern Banjo Frog
- Little Egret (Endangered in Melbourne)
- Superb Fairy Wren
- Bogong Moth (Endangered)
- Little Forest Bat
- Rakali
- Australian Smelt
- Basalt Peppercress (Endangered)
- Melbourne Yellow Gum (Vulnerable)
- River Red Gum (Endangered in Melbourne)
- Merran's Sun-orchid (Critically endangered)

Biodiversity pressures

Local biodiversity is under increasing pressure from population growth, development, vegetation loss, habitat fragmentation, climate change, invasive species, pests and predators, and polluted stormwater.

Habitat connectivity is a particular challenge. When suitable habitat is isolated, wildlife has fewer opportunities to move between places to find food, shelter and breeding partners or respond to changing conditions. Our 2022 study assessed 54 biodiversity sites:

- 28 had no identified habitat connectivity
- 20 had low connectivity
- Six had moderate connectivity

None had high connectivity, though this is not uncommon in urban contexts.

What makes for good habitat connectivity?

Connectivity refers to connections Habitat connectivity describes how easily wildlife can move between places to find food, shelter and breeding opportunities.

Low connectivity: Isolated habitat patches act as stepping stones. These mostly benefit wildlife like birds, bats and possums that can fly or move across roofs, roads or powerlines.

Moderate connectivity: Habitat patches are linked closely enough to support safer movement, including for some ground-dwelling wildlife.

High connectivity: Continuous or closely connected habitat links allow a wider range of wildlife to move safely between core habitat areas.

However, the study found that more than half of the sites had potential for improved connectivity through strategic revegetation, additional habitat features, better management of weeds, pests and predators, and stronger links between open spaces, waterways and streets.

Public open spaces cannot provide these connections alone. Private gardens, apartment grounds, schools, commercial properties and nature strips can act as valuable habitat stepping stones, particularly when they include diverse, locally appropriate plants and features that provide food and shelter.

Progress since 2022

Since the 2022 study, we have introduced our Nature Strip Planting Policy and permit process, restored the Grange Road and Glen Iris wetlands and planted tens of thousands of indigenous and plants in the surrounding parklands. We have also restored ponds, introduced native fish, planted a native butterfly garden, and upgraded nest boxes at the Urban Forest Reserve, amongst other projects.

These projects are improving habitat at important sites. More consistent monitoring will help us understand their combined impact, target future investment and continue building a stronger and more connected habitat network across Stonnington.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Nature strips: A critical connection

Nature strips form part of Stonnington's extensive road reserve network. Although individually small, collectively they can add greenery and create stepping stones between larger habitat areas, particularly when planted with diverse indigenous and native species.

Our Nature Strip Planting Policy allows residents to apply for a permit to replace conventional grassed nature strips with approved planting. This can provide food, shelter and movement pathways for wildlife while also creating greener, cooler, and more drought-tolerant streets.



Nature connection in Stonnington

Many people across Stonnington already help care for local plants, wildlife and green spaces. Residents participate through native plant giveaways, community planting days, citizen science, environmental workshops, nature strip planting and programs delivered with schools and early learning centres.

These activities provide different ways to participate, from making small changes at home to learning new skills, recording wildlife observations or helping restore important habitat. Since 2022, we have:

7,500	**15,000**	**37**	**9,157**	**19**
Native and indigenous plants adopted via giveaways	**Native and indigenous plants planted at school planting days**	**Citizen science and My Smart Garden events**	**iNaturalist observations recorded in Stonnington**	**Graduates of the Nature Stewards program**
20	**65**	**60**	**6**	**25**
Nest boxes installed	**Species observed during bird count events**	**Species observed during insect spotlighting**	**Species observed during frog census counts**	**Nature Strip Planting permits issued**

Friends' groups, Stationeers and other community organisations also contribute significant local knowledge and volunteer effort. Their work includes caring for habitat, removing weeds, planting indigenous vegetation and helping the community understand and value local places.

However, sustaining this work can be challenging. Some established groups face difficulties attracting new volunteers and managing an ageing membership, while requirements applying to land managed by State Government agencies can affect what volunteers are able to do and what training and qualifications they need to have to participate in community-led planting.

Limited time, lack of confidence or knowledge, renting, apartment living and limited access to private outdoor space can all make it harder for people to take action. This reinforces the need for varied and accessible ways to participate, from one-off activities and citizen science to longer-term volunteering and changes at home.

COMMUNITY ACTION SNAPSHOT

Rewilding Stonnington

Rewilding Stonnington is a volunteer-led community group working to restore indigenous and endemic vegetation across the municipality while reconnecting people with Stonnington's pre-colonial heritage.

Working with Traditional Custodians and land managers including Council and Melbourne Water, Rewilding Stonnington's volunteers are transforming our nature strips, pocket parks and rail corridors into habitat for local wildlife, while also improving climate resilience and stormwater outcomes and providing opportunities for people to connect with nature and each other.

Funding through the Australian Government's Urban Rivers and Catchments Program is supporting Rewilding Stonnington's **Regenerate!** project, which is expanding biodiversity corridors and restoring key sites including Osborne Street, Windsor Siding, WM Dane Park, and at the newly named 'Birrarung Banks'.



What we heard

Through the Sustainable Stonnington 2040 engagement process, community members and local stakeholders shared what they value about Stonnington's natural environment, the actions they are already taking and the support that would help them do more.

Creating greener neighbourhoods, protecting biodiversity and increasing tree canopy were consistently identified as high priorities. Many participants were already planting native species, creating wildlife-friendly gardens, contributing observations through citizen science and caring for local green spaces.

People also identified practical barriers to participating. Limited space, renting or living in an apartment can restrict what people can change at home. A lack of time, knowledge or confidence can make it difficult to know where to start, while the cost of plants and other materials can also limit action. Participants wanted practical information, affordable resources and accessible opportunities to learn, volunteer and connect with others.

Common priorities and action ideas



Protect and care for existing trees and increase canopy



Create resilient, native, wildlife-friendly gardens, balconies and shared spaces



Plant nature strips that contribute to local habitat connections



Prevent cats and dogs from roaming, hunting or disturbing local wildlife and habitat



Participate in citizen science, community planting, volunteering and habitat restoration



Learn from Traditional Custodians about Caring for Country principles and practices

Barriers	How Council can help
Unsure where to start or find information	▶ Provide clear, practical and accessible information, including step-by-step advice and simple actions, through channels people are already using.
Affordability	▶ Provide free or low-cost programs, resources and incentives. ▶ Promote existing financial support pathways. ▶ Advocate for increased rebates and subsidies from other levels of government.
Lack of time, inconvenience and competing priorities	▶ Provide simple, practical education programs and resources that are easy to fit into everyday life. ▶ Offer flexible programs and event times and resources that can be accessed online at any time.
Limited awareness of opportunities	▶ Promote local opportunities to volunteer, participate in community planting and citizen science, join community groups and care for local green spaces.
Limited space or ability to make changes at home	▶ Tailor information and support for different audiences, including renters, apartment residents and people with balconies, courtyards or shared outdoor spaces. ▶ Promote actions that do not depend on owning or controlling private land.
Lack of confidence that actions will make a difference	▶ Share local success stories and practical examples of community action. ▶ Monitor and report on the outcomes of Council action and community efforts.

Where we're headed

A biodiverse, green and connected Stonnington is one where nature is woven through our streets, open spaces, waterways, homes and developments. Existing trees and habitat are protected, canopy and diverse vegetation continue to grow, and connected green spaces help wildlife move through the city.

It is also a place where people can experience, understand and care for nature in their everyday lives, and where Traditional Custodian knowledge and Caring for Country help shape how we care for land, water, plants and animals.

Sustainable Stonnington 2040 sets our long-term direction for how we will care for our environment and support a sustainable, resilient Stonnington. Over the next three years, we will focus on improving biodiversity, canopy and habitat connections across public and private land, while creating more opportunities for people to connect with and care for nature. We will also advocate for the policies, investment and collaboration needed to protect biodiversity and canopy across Stonnington and beyond.

Some initiatives in this Action Plan are expected to provide direct benefits within its three-year timeframe. Others will strengthen the evidence, planning, processes and partnerships needed to guide future investment and ensure our response becomes more targeted and effective over time. Both are important.

Part of a bigger picture

A biodiverse, green and connected Stonnington relies on work being delivered through the wider Sustainable Stonnington 2040 suite.

- Our **Resilient, Adaptable and Empowered Action Plan** strengthens the ability of our community, places and natural environment to respond to changing climate conditions.
- Our **Climate Positive Action Plan** tackles the emissions and energy use at the root of a changing climate.
- Our **Water Sensitive and Flood Ready Action Plan** sets out how we will better integrate water into our landscapes, support healthy waterways and create conditions in which trees and habitat can thrive.
- Our **Circular and Resource-Conscious Action Plan** addresses litter, pollution and resource consumption that can harm wildlife, waterways and habitat.

These plans reinforce one another and deliver shared benefits for our environment and community.

Our approach

Our approach is guided by Australia's **Strategy for Nature 2024-2030**. It brings together three connected goals – connecting people with nature, caring for nature in all its diversity, and sharing and building knowledge.

The three focus areas in this Action Plan apply this thinking by enhancing biodiversity and greening across public and private land, helping more people connect with and care for nature, and building our local and shared understanding of nature in Stonnington.



Figure 3. *The goals of Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030 (Source: Commonwealth of Australia, 2024).*

Our ongoing activities

Protecting and enhancing biodiversity, growing green infrastructure and caring for and creating connections with nature are already embedded across a range of Council services, plans, partnerships and programs. The activities below reflect work we already deliver as part of our core business. They provide an important foundation for the new actions in this Action plan and will continue alongside them.



Sustainable and resilient urban forest

We monitor, renew and grow our urban forest by replacing around 1,000 trees and planting approximately 1,000 new trees each year.

Our planting programs are informed by community consultation and prioritise areas with lower canopy cover and higher vulnerability to urban heat. We select species that are suited to future climate conditions while also supporting habitat, species diversity and long-term resilience.

We also manage the health, safety and longevity of our urban forest through ongoing maintenance, succession and precinct planning, and risk management.



Biodiversity preservation and enhancement

We are continually supporting nature conservation and habitat enhancement through the stewardship of biodiversity zones in open spaces, revegetation programs, infill planting, habitat creation, weed and pest species management, and the installation of nest boxes and other habitat features.

Our work focuses on protecting and strengthening local ecosystems by improving habitat quality and connectivity, climate resilience, and greening and cooling outcomes.



Encouraging biodiverse greening in development

We consider urban greening, biodiversity and tree protection outcomes when making decisions about the use and development of land.
This includes promoting building and precinct design that retains and expands canopy, protects habitat, and incorporates biodiverse greening as part of landscape plans.

Through participation in collaborations such as Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment (CASBE) we share knowledge and resources and collectively advocate for stronger planning and building requirements where controls sit with the Victorian Government.



Working with partners to extend our influence

We are active members of the Yarra Collaboration Committee (YCC) Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Regional Collaboration (GCRC), My Smart Garden, and a range of regional citizen science initiatives.

We also work closely with Traditional Custodians. Together, we collaborate to share knowledge and data, respond to urban biodiversity and greening challenges, and to deliver projects, events and programs that protect and enhance nature and connect people to Country.



Supporting our community

We support residents, households, businesses, schools, early learning centres, Friends' groups, and other community organisations to care for, enhance and connect with nature in Stonnington through educational events, resources and programs.

This includes supporting community-led citizen science and planting initiatives, delivering plant giveaways, our Nature Strip Planting program, and promoting learning from Traditional Custodians about caring for Country.



Understanding our impact through data

We monitor the health, age, diversity and extend of our urban forest through periodic canopy mapping and regular inspections, across both the public and private realms.

We also work across internal teams and with community and Friends' groups, residents, educational and research organisations, regional partners and state government agencies to monitor biodiversity in Stonnington and contribute to citizen science.

What you can do

Alongside the work of governments and organisations, there are practical actions people can take in their homes, neighbourhoods and communities.

We recognise that not every action is possible for every person, household or group, but everyone can play a part in ways that work for their circumstances.



In your home

Gardens, balconies, courtyards and shared spaces can provide food and shelter for wildlife and contribute to Stonnington's wider green network. You can:

- Protect and care for existing trees and vegetation
- Plant a diverse mix of indigenous and native species, using pots or planters where space is limited
- Include habitat features such as dense planting, rocks, logs, leaf litter or water where safe and suitable
- Find natural alternatives for pesticides and herbicides
- Keep cats contained and dogs under effective control so they do not roam, hunt or disturb wildlife and habitat.



In your neighbourhood

Small green spaces can help connect larger areas of habitat. You can:

- Apply for a permit to create a planted nature strip using suitable indigenous and native species
- Help care for local street trees, nature strips and other neighbourhood greenery
- Spend time in local parks and along the Birrarung and KooyongKoot and notice seasonal changes, plants and wildlife
- Record local wildlife observations through citizen-science platforms such as iNaturalist
- Share plants, knowledge and wildlife-friendly gardening ideas with neighbours.



In your community

Community groups and collective action create opportunities to learn, restore habitat, share knowledge and care for important local places. You can:

- Join or support a Friends group, Station Volunteer group or other local environmental organisation
- Take part in community planting, weeding, habitat restoration, nature walks or citizen-science activities
- Learn from Traditional Custodians about Caring for Country and local plants, animals, seasons and places
- Invite others to participate and help make activities welcoming and accessible to people with different needs and circumstances
- Share your knowledge of local places and ideas for improving biodiversity and greening through Council engagement opportunities
- Advocate for the protection of mature trees, stronger habitat connections and greener, more biodiverse neighbourhoods

Our focus for the next three years

Building biodiverse, green and connected Stonnington requires action across our organisation and community. This Action Plan is organised around three connected focus areas that together protect and strengthen nature across Council-managed and private land, while creating more opportunities for people to connect with and care for the natural environment.



Reading the action tables

Each focus area includes an action table setting out what we will deliver over the next three years. For each action:

TIMING shows when an action is expected to begin, progress or be completed during the Action Plan. Key:

- ● Active years
- ○ Years where the action is not yet underway or has been completed

Note: Years refers to financial years, with 'Year 1' of this plan being financial year 2026-27.

COST provides a high-level indication of the likely scale of investment required. Key:

- Deliverable within existing staff resources
- **$** Low - less than $50,000 per year
- **$$** Medium - approximately $50,000 to $250,000 per year
- **$$$** High - greater than $250,000 per year, generally associated with capital works or multi-site delivery programs

Note: Cost estimates are indicative and intended to guide planning. Funding decisions are considered through Council's annual budget process and actual costs may vary depending on scope, design, delivery timing and opportunities to secure external funding.

CO-BENEFITS identify where an action is expected to also contribute to another priority of Sustainable Stonnington 2040. Actions have been assigned to the Action Plan where they are most directly delivered; however, environmental outcomes are interconnected, and many actions will support more than one priority at the same time. Key:

Resilient, Adaptable & Empowered | Climate Positive | Water Sensitive & Flood Ready

Circular & Resource Conscious

Focus Area 01: Greener public places and stronger habitat

Protecting and strengthening urban forest, vegetation and habitat across Council-managed land and assets.

Council-managed streets, open spaces, waterways, and buildings form an important backbone for Stonnington's canopy and habitat network. They provide some of our strongest opportunities to protect established nature, improve ecological connections and demonstrate different approaches to urban greening.

Over the next three years, we will strengthen the evidence, policies and planning that guide this work while progressing practical improvements across Council-managed land. This includes planning for our ageing tree population, diversifying vegetation, restoring habitat along our waterways and testing new approaches where their suitability or effectiveness needs to be better understood.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Domestic Animal Management Plan

Our Domestic Animal Management Plan 2026-2029 guides how Council manages cats and dogs and supports responsible pet ownership. It recognises the impact dogs and cats can have on wildlife, habitat and planted areas, and includes responses to help prevent these through education and enforcement.

The Plan commits Council to engaging the community on potential cat containment measures, such as a night-time curfew or restrictions in areas of high biodiversity value. Any future measures will be informed by this engagement.

Action		Timing	Cost	Co-benefits
1.1	**Develop an Urban Greening Framework** Analyse canopy and vegetation trends across public and private land, identify the causes of change and develop an Urban Greening Framework as Council's technical evidence base and source of longer-term recommendations.	●○○	$$$	
1.2	**Establish consistent biodiversity monitoring** Develop a biodiversity monitoring framework for key sites and commence implementation at priority locations. Bring together site surveys, appropriate technology, Traditional Custodian indicators of Healthy Country and citizen-science observations to improve our understanding of habitat condition and change over time.	○●●	$	
1.3	**Update our policy for Council-managed trees** Expand Council's Street Tree Policy to cover all Council-managed trees, incorporating a formal asset valuation method that represents their full amenity value. The updated policy will strengthen how trees are protected and improve alignment between the management of trees on public and private land.	●○○	$	
1.4	**Strengthen tree selection and succession planning** Develop updated species-selection guidance and a succession planting plan for ageing Council-managed trees. Together, these will support a biodiverse, climate resilient tree population while reducing future impacts on canopy and habitat as mature trees reach the end of their lives.	●●○		

Action		Timing	Cost	Co-benefits
1.5	**Plan greening in priority precincts** Deliver a staged program of Precinct Green Infrastructure Plans, prioritising low-canopy, heat-vulnerable and growth areas and progressively extending planning across Stonnington. Integrate greening with major infrastructure and establish monitoring for delivery.	●●●	$$$	
1.6	**Diversify vegetation across Council-managed land** Develop and commence a program to replace suitable areas of conventional turf, nature strips and road reserve vegetation with more diverse landscape treatments. These may include native grasslands, wildflower and woody meadows and indigenous or native gardens. This will help to increase habitat, vegetation diversity, water sensitive outcomes and climate resilience across Council-managed land.	●●●	$	
1.7	**Develop demonstration native gardens** Identify suitable Council-managed sites and install demonstration gardens that show how highly aesthetic and formal planting schemes can be delivered by climate resilient, indigenous and high biodiversity plants. Use the gardens to build community awareness and encourage similar approaches at home and in other urban spaces, by providing native and biodiverse planting guidelines, resources, and educational events.	●●●	$	
1.8	**Strengthen habitat along Birrarung and KooyongKoot** Work with Traditional Custodians and regional partners to strengthen habitat and ecological connections along the Birrarung and KooyongKoot corridors. Work with the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Regional Collaboration and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to adapt the Greening Birrarung Guide to be suitable for the KooyongKoot and incorporate recommended planting palettes into future delivery of KooyongKoot Masterplan projects and staged revegetation program. Begin priority works including renewal and monitoring of habitat features such as nest boxes.	●●●	$$	
1.9	**Trial alternatives to chemical weed and pest management** Review Council's use of herbicides and pesticides and trial suitable natural or lower-impact management methods at Glen Iris Wetlands and the Urban Forest Reserve. Use the findings to guide future management practices.	○●●	$	
1.10	**Investigate green roofs and walls on Council buildings** Identify suitable Council buildings for green roofs, walls or facades and progress designs for viable opportunities aligned with planned building upgrades.	●●●	$	
1.11	**Improve our understanding of invasive species and predators** Assess how invasive species, pests and predators including foxes, roaming cats and uncontrolled dogs affect native plants, wildlife and habitat in Stonnington. Use the findings to identify priorities for future management, education and advocacy.	○○●	$	

Focus Area 02: Protecting and growing nature on private land

Strengthening tree protection and supporting better greening and habitat across private land and new development.

Private land makes a major contribution to Stonnington's canopy, vegetation and habitat network. Gardens, apartment grounds, institutional land and new developments can provide important food, shelter and connections for wildlife, while established trees deliver benefits that can take decades to replace.

Council does not control every decision made on private land. However, we can use the planning system, local permits, compliance, practical guidance and community programs to strengthen protection and encourage better greening outcomes. Over the next three years, we will improve our understanding of private-land canopy change, progress stronger protections, lift expectations for new development and help residents create greener, more biodiverse spaces at home.

Action		Timing	Cost	Co-benefits
2.1	**Strengthen planning protections for trees and vegetation** Use the Urban Greening Framework findings and a comprehensive method for valuing trees to develop and progress amendments to the Stonnington Planning Scheme and Local Law that better protect existing trees and vegetation.	○●●	$	
2.2	**Support better greening and biodiversity outcomes in new developments** Introduce stronger tools, guidance and assessment processes to increase tree retention, canopy, vegetation diversity and habitat in new development. This will include an urban greening assessment tool, enhanced review of Landscape Plans submitted through planning processes, and practical design guidance for planners, applicants and developers.	●●●	$	
2.3	**Strengthen tree protection, compliance and incentives** Strengthen how tree protection and urban greening requirements are reviewed, referred and enforced across relevant permits. Trial follow-up compliance monitoring and investigate bonds, financial and non-financial consequences for unauthorised tree and vegetation removal.	●●○	$$	
2.4	**Investigate incentives for better urban greening outcomes** Investigate planning, financial and recognition-based incentives that could encourage measurable urban greening outcomes beyond minimum requirements, and work with the development industry to assess their feasibility and likely effectiveness.	○●○		
2.5	**Advocate for stronger urban greening requirements** Develop an endorsed urban greening advocacy position and work with the Victorian Government, service authorities, other councils, sector networks and community partners to strengthen planning controls, canopy and vegetation monitoring, and other policy settings affecting urban greening and biodiversity outcomes, including Electric Line Clearance regulations. *This action will be coordinated with related advocacy actions across the companion Action Plans, providing an integrated approach to a sustainable built environment in Stonnington.*	●●●		

Action		Timing	Cost	Co-benefits
2.6	**Develop new approaches to greening activity centres** Work with the Victorian Government and service authorities to explore new ways of securing canopy, vegetation and green infrastructure in growing activity centres. Prepare an Urban Greening in Activity Centres pilot proposal and assess options for precinct-scale developer contributions to public-realm greening.	●●●	$$	
2.7	**Support climate-resilient and biodiverse gardening** Help residents create climate resilient, wildlife-friendly gardens in backyards, balconies, courtyards and shared spaces, by providing practical education through the My Smart Garden program, locally relevant resources and access to suitable indigenous and native plants. Partner with garden designers to showcase attractive and achievable approaches through garden tours, case studies, interviews and opportunities to learn from local examples.	●●●	$	

Focus Area 03: Connecting with and caring for nature

Working with Traditional Custodians and our community to build knowledge, connection and active care for Country.

Protecting Stonnington's natural environment depends on people having opportunities to experience it, understand it and contribute to its care. Community members, schools, volunteers and local organisations already bring valuable knowledge, energy and commitment to this work.

Traditional Custodians hold enduring knowledge of and responsibility for Country. Over the next three years, we will strengthen our partnerships with Traditional Custodians, expand practical ways for people to participate and support community-led stewardship. We will also create more opportunities for children, young people and groups not usually involved in environmental programs to connect with local nature.

Action		Timing	Cost	Co-benefits
3.1	**Build shared understanding and support for urban greening** Develop a clear and consistent urban greening narrative and coordinated communications approach that builds understanding of the benefits and challenges of urban greening and tree and habitat protection, explains the roles of Council and the community, and strengthens connections between government, industry, community and regional partners.	●●●	$	
3.2	**Expand opportunities to connect with and care for nature** Expand our program of opportunities for people to experience, learn about and actively care for nature and our open spaces through guided activities, environmental events, citizen science and practical stewardship. Continue the annual Nature Stewards program and create targeted opportunities for groups that may not usually participate.	●●●	$	
3.3	**Seek interest for a Stonnington Gardens for Wildlife program** Work with the community and the wider Gardens for Wildlife network to test interest in a Stonnington program. Explore how a local program could support peer-to-peer learning and capacity building, community participation and a connected network of wildlife-friendly gardens.	○○●	$	
3.4	**Strengthen our partnership with Traditional Custodians in caring for Country** Work with Traditional Custodians to improve consideration and understanding of caring for Country principles and practices into relevant Council planning, projects, communications and environmental programs. Develop shared priorities and guidance, strengthen staff capability and create opportunities for practical knowledge exchange. This work will be guided by self-determined participation and cultural authority.	●●●	$	
3.5	**Pilot Cultural Gardens and guide future Cultural spaces** Work with Traditional Custodians to identify suitable locations and commence delivery of two pilot Cultural Gardens featuring indigenous and endemic plants with cultural values and uses. Develop principles to guide the inclusion of Cultural spaces and planting in future open-space projects. This work will be guided by self-determined participation and cultural authority.	○●●	$	

Action		Timing	Cost	Co-benefits
3.6	**Strengthen community environmental volunteering** Support existing Friends and Station Volunteer groups to attract and retain members, promote opportunities to participate and build volunteer skills. Test community interest in establishing new Friends groups in priority areas along Birrarung and KooyongKoot.	●●●	$	
3.7	**Build nature connection for children and young people** Develop place-based biodiversity learning and engagement for schools, early learning centres and other groups that helps children connect with nature, understand local plants and wildlife and learn about caring for Country. Update supporting resources for educators, families and community organisations.	●●●	$	

How we'll measure progress

We will track progress at two levels, monitoring both the delivery of actions and the longer-term outcomes they are intended to influence.

Strategic indicators

This Action Plan contributes to the strategic biodiversity, greening and nature-connection outcomes established in Sustainable Stonnington 2040. These indicators will help us understand whether Stonnington is becoming greener, supporting healthier and better-connected habitat and strengthening people's connection with nature over time.

Some of these outcomes are influenced by many factors, including some outside Council's direct control. Change may also take time, with variable progress year to year, so we will consider the indicators together and monitor longer-term trends.

Strategic indicator	Baseline	2040 Target	Data source
Canopy cover in Council-managed parks Percentage of Council-managed land covered by tree canopy	***Awaiting data***	Increase	Council data
Canopy cover on Council-managed road reserves Percentage of Council-managed land covered by tree canopy	***Awaiting data***	Increase	Council data
Canopy cover on residential land Percentage of private land covered by tree canopy	19%	Increase	Council data
Biodiversity value at priority sites *A monitoring framework and methodology to measure biodiversity value at key sites will be established through the delivery of this Action Plan.*	To be established (2027-28)	Increase	Council data (framework to be established)
Habitat connectivity Number of assessed biodiversity sites with connectivity rated moderate or greater	6 of 54 sites	Increase	Council data (every 3-5 years)
Community connection with nature Percentage of residents who report feeling connected to nature in Stonnington	To be established (2028/29)	Increase	Sustainable Stonnington community survey (every three years)

Delivery indicators

The following delivery indicators align with the broader outcomes set in Sustainable Stonnington 2040 but translate them into specific targets for 2026-2029 that are relevant to the actions outlined in this Action Plan.

Delivery indicator	Target (2029)
Actions delivered on schedule	≥85%
Note: additional delivery indicators will be confirmed based on final list of actions adopted	

Evaluating programs and trials: *Community programs, trials and training delivered through this Action Plan will be evaluated as they are developed and implemented. Evaluation will be proportionate to the scale and purpose of each initiative and may include participation and uptake, reach among different parts of the community, participant feedback or changes in knowledge or confidence following participation.*

Monitoring, review and reporting

Delivery will be monitored through an internal implementation plan, which will track progress against each action and capture relevant program outcomes. Progress will be reviewed internally each quarter to support accountability, identify barriers early and adjust delivery where required.

Progress against this Action Plan, along with progress across the other four companion Action Plans, will be reported publicly through an annual Sustainable Stonnington 2040 update.

This Action Plan reflects our priorities and commitments at the time of adoption. As delivery progresses, new evidence, partnerships, funding opportunities or emerging environmental risks may require us to adjust our approach. Any material additions or changes will be tracked through the internal implementation plan and reported through annual updates.

This Action Plan will be formally reviewed and updated in the final year of its three-year term, or sooner if circumstances require it.

