

Response to the Draft ‘Urban Greening Strategy for Metro Adelaide’ by the Urban Greening Network

FORMATION OF THE URBAN GREEN NETWORK

In late 2023 the Environment Institute of the University of Adelaide, Dynamic State and NHMRC-funded HEAL Network developed and co-hosted a three-part workshop series on the topic of urban green space in greater Adelaide. The Quality Urban Green Spaces workshop series aimed to:

1. Identify driving challenges and barriers to implementing quality urban green spaces.
2. Describe actionable approaches to alleviating these challenges and barriers.
3. Detail a locally relevant implementation plan.

To meet its aims, the series included an interdisciplinary cohort of over 30 experts spanning academia, industry, non-government organisations, and local and state government, forming the Urban Greening Network. Expertise covered diverse fields such as health and medical science, public health, economics, architecture, community engagement, urban design, and environmental sciences. Based on the findings of this workshop series, we have prepared a response to the draft ‘Urban Greening Strategy for Metro Adelaide’. A full copy of the report from the workshop series is currently being prepared. A draft of the report is being included in the current submission and a final version will be provided on completion to Green Adelaide.

GREEN ADELAIDE’S ‘URBAN GREENING STRATEGY FOR METRO ADELAIDE’

The priorities and actions identified within the strategy document prepared by Green Adelaide are consistent with the findings and priorities identified by the Urban Greening Network. The identification and amplification of current strategies which are working, tapping into privately held land for green development and improved cross-sectional and cross department collaborations, were all strongly advocated for during our workshop series. Improving knowledge and capacity within communities, government and the private sectors were also considered to be important steps in improved green infrastructure. Addressing inequity in distribution and green resources, which is addressed in this strategy, are important to improve long term community and population health outcomes. However, we would advocate high levels of public consultation in a site-specific way in delivering on such urban greening projects. Particularly in communities which have historically experienced poor quality green space, which can be associated with anti-social behaviour. Considering specific functions for different communities is central to ensuring green infrastructure is utilised, valued and cared for by the community.

The following is a review of each priority area based on the findings of the Urban Greening Network, workshop series and subsequent communications and consultations from within the network.

PRIORITY AREA 1: COOLER AND GREENER INFILL DEVELOPMENTS

There is a strong need for better planning and regulation around urban development and urban infill. The Urban Greening Network support greater measures for preserving mature trees in development sites; reviewing Urban Green Cover targets as part of the new Greater Adelaide Regional Plan to ensure compatible outcomes can be identified to meet housing and green infrastructure needs; improving planning regulations, monitoring and implementation to include urban greening in new developments both residential and commercial; and working with the development sector to identify practical solutions to improve design and implementation of developments.

This priority area also identifies an opportunity to improve greening on commercial sites. Tree planting in carparks such as the Fig Plaza Car Park at Adelaide Oval is a great example of integrating green assets which could be emulated on a broad variety of commercial and retail sites. The Urban Greening Network strongly advocated the need to engage owners of commercial properties to encourage more greening on privately held land. Canopy mapping reveals that around 17% of urban Adelaide is company owned, thus tapping into such areas is important particularly in areas with high levels of light industrial and retail activity. Educating commercial developers and business owners of the benefit of increasing greenery to their employees, the community and brand reputation, as well as working example of incorporated green spaces could encourage greater greening in commercial precincts. Many commercial car parks lack sufficient tree canopy and WSUD, indicating that the current Planning and Design Code policies are not effective in achieving this outcome. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the existing performance parameters in these policies to achieve increased greening in car parks.

We note that the strategy has a focus on urban infill, and though we acknowledge a high priority to protect green assets in established areas, we also recognise the opportunities to ensure new greenfield developed are sustainable. Large-scale greenfield development continues to dominate our peri-urban areas of Adelaide, as well as an increased number of our semi-rural communities. The acquisition of rural land, for the delivery of medium density housing, often with narrow street verges, limited garden space and limited open green areas, has an extensive impact on the aesthetic and environmental profile of these areas. As of 2020 there was reported to be 22400 greenfield lots ready for development across greater Adelaide, and a total of 126000 potential blocks within the urban growth area (https://plan.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/830984/Land_Supply_Report_for_Greater_Adelaide_-_Greenfield.pdf). Historically greenfield developments have accounted for 80% of new housing stock. These developments provide important opportunities to deliver the best planning and design outcome with the future communities and the environment in mind. Appropriate planning and regulations around these sites are, therefore, imperative for the next generation of suburbs and house stock. We acknowledge that the outlined actions should improve regulation across the board, however large-scale greenfield developments require additional scrutiny as they set the foundations for future green amenities.

PRIORITY AREA 2: GOVERNMENT LEADING BY EXAMPLES

Prioritising greening on government investments and projects helps to elevate the status of green infrastructure in our communities. The ability to observe, access and interact with functional green assets, in a range of contexts, helps communities experience their benefits and increases their desire to see these assets emulated in multiple setting in their community. Restrictive rules and regulation around infrastructure was also identified as a barrier and engineering a solution which remove infrastructure from

the equation would open a large number of street scapes for redevelopment. How such solutions would be implemented and funded could be of concern in established areas, thus working with infrastructure provides to better understand and expand on current permitted species lists is also imperative. Providing case studies on specific solutions to improve BSUD and WSUD should provide government agencies with easy-to-follow guideline for their implantation of green infrastructure during all public infrastructure projects. We also identified assigning economic value to green spaces as an imperative step in improving the status of green assets and accounting from them as assets, rather than expenses.

PRIORITY AREA 3: BUILDING NATURE BACK IN

Education and capacity building will need to be at the core of this priority as is identified in the strategy. This will need to cover government agencies, the private sector and the community. Guidelines and exemplars could be useful tools. It is important to identify the mechanisms for implement, but these must also be coupled with identifying any barriers to implementation. Availability of suitable diversity in plants was identified as a major limitation during large scale landscaping project. Most large suppliers are interstate and provide a limited selections, with limited genetic variation (as identified in Priority Area 4). A state-based nursery may offer a solution to cater for large scale landscaping project and provide a diverse range of endemic and well adapted.

Workshop participants also highlighted that successful greening projects can often come from community driven programs, supporting individuals and community groups is therefore imperative. Developing a strategy to identify and promote these endeavours can be difficult. Government supported grassroots initiative and funding models were criticised for being short sighted and often failing to provide adequate support to see projects to fruition. Therefore, efforts which involve supporting individuals or community groups need to be well assessed and forecasted to ensure appropriate long-term support is invested for programs to achieve long term outcomes.

PRIORITY AREA 4: FUTURE-PROOFING THE URBAN FOREST

Actions identified in this priority area will support priority area 3, which focuses more on the implementation step on increasing biodiversity which will contribute to greater resilience of our urban environments. These two priorities need to be taken together with each supporting and guiding the actions of the other. For priorities 3 and 4 to be delivered appropriate regulations and guidelines will be imperative as is highlighted in point 3.1. These should include legislation and guidelines on private and public development.

PRIORITY AREA 5: IMPROVING GREENING EQUITY.

Improving equity was also a topic of high priority identified by workshop participants. Using the tools outlined in the strategy to identified areas of priority for urban green is of high importance. Once identified providing funding strategies for equitable distribution may also be of important. This will ensure that local governments, who often bare the greatest cost in greening projects, are appropriately supported to deliver outcomes.

Public consultation in relation to urban greening and equity was also highlighted as an important step by workshop participants. Ensuring that green infrastructure is accepted, utilised and appreciated as an improvement in areas may be more difficult in communities where green space have historically been seen as unsafe, dirty and unattractive. Work with communities to ensure green infrastructure delivers local improvements will require dedicated time and resource to pursue appropriate community input. Agencies may need to go outside of standard consultations processes to ensure community voices are represented.

PRIORITY AREA 6: SCALING UP IMPACT BY WORKING TOGETHER.

Working in collaboration across community groups, government jurisdictions and departments, as well as the private sector will be key to large scale improvement in design, maintenance and implementation in urban greening. Mechanisms for cross departmental collaboration was a barrier highlighted in our workshops. Providing a coordinated implementation plan with more specific details around urban greening would be useful for this type of collaboration. However, specific mechanisms for government agencies to formalise and ensure collaboration across government departments, was also suggested by our workshop participants.

Identifying knowledge gaps through an applied research pipeline will ensure that researchers will be able to provide stakeholders with the appropriate information to drive improvement in urban green space planning and implementation. Local councils and government agencies should be turning to research institutions to drive collaborative, directed, problem solving around green infrastructure and urban planning. More opportunities for information sharing between sectors would also help facilitate and support these efforts. However, current research models do not often support researchers in addressing location specific investigation. Thus, other models may need to be considered to facilitate end user driven research in this area.

The Urban Green Network also supports the establishment of applied research hubs which facilitate stronger collaboration between government agencies and researchers, such as the proposed Future Trees Hub, at the new Adelaide University. Such facilities could provide expertise and research into critical knowledge gaps in urban greening, with end users in mind. The current strategy has already identified a number of significant knowledge gaps which will need to be addressed in order to achieve desirable outcomes. These include:

2.6 Determine and apply an agreed method for applying economic valuations to trees and other green infrastructure

4.1 Develop up to date guidance to drive appropriate and climate-resilience species selection in a variety of contexts

4.2 Undertake trials to identify appropriate trees for Adelaide's projected future climate

4.4 Identify and solve threats to the health of the urban forest from pests and diseases

4.5 Model future water demands for meeting greening targets and support greater use of WSUD and recycled water

Local experts in urban environments and ecology are concerned that addressing these vital gaps is beyond current research capacity and will require a significant investment to facilitate these research activities. Therefore, how identified knowledge gaps will be investigated should be addressed as part of the current strategic plan.

SHARED MONITORING AND TARGETING

The tree canopy mapping and heat mapping has certainly improved data collection and monitoring capability. Common methods for monitoring biodiversity will also be useful in identify successfully project and initiatives, as well as identifying areas for protection and investment. On ground surveillance is being undertaken by some council areas, and through not as efficient as large-scale satellite surveillance, may be necessary to understand the nuances of greening. Furthermore, monitoring use and activity within active corridors and open green spaces may be necessary for periods to achieve insight into the on-ground impact of new, planned or existing areas. Online platforms for data sharing will become important resources for local and state government authorities for planning and implementation. Data sharing of this nature should be encouraged and facilitated to avoid additional expenditure on data collection.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The six priority areas identified in the strategy align with areas of need identified by our network. A strong focus on collaborative efforts is presented in this strategy. This is a sensible approach given that urban green infrastructure is governed across multiple portfolios and jurisdictions. However, strong government leadership and planning, supported by robust regulator frameworks will be central to improved outcomes. Green Adelaide could provide leadership at a government level and should be supported in doing so. We hope to see the continued support for such an organisation to continue advocating and advising on urban greening in Adelaide. And if implemented the strategy could deliver valuable improvements in the ecological diversity and resilience of our urban forests and green spaces, resulting in extensive benefits for health and liability of our communities.

The Quality Urban Green Spaces workshop series was supported by

