

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

URBAN FOREST STRATEGY: HEALTHY COUNTRY

2026-2036

Contents

Executive summary	3	context: Embed trees and greening into City systems, development frameworks and asset management.....	20
Why? The strategy in summary	4	Strategic Objectives	20
Community Context	4	Targets	20
Wadawurrung values	4	Objective Four: Monitoring, capability and long-term stewardship	21
Challenges.....	5	context: Track progress, measure performance and support evidence-based planning	21
Benefits	6	Strategic Objectives	21
Policy Context.....	8	Targets	21
Forest structure: Canopy + Understory	10	Action Plan to Stepped Implementation.....	22
What is an Urban Forest?	10	context: The graphic below provides the strategic stepped response for broad-scale canopy coverage target success	22
Canopy	10	Action Plan.....	23
Understory	10		
Integrating Urban Forests with Integrated Water Management.....	11		
Where are we up to?.....	13		
Keeping it local: where does the Urban Forest Strategy fit?	14		
Moving forward – Our future forest	16		
Objective One: Urban greening and canopy expansion.....	17		
Context: Increase canopy, biodiversity and vegetation across available public and private space.....	17		
Strategic objectives.....	17		
Targets	18		
Objective Two: Urban innovation and green infrastructure integration	19		
context: Integration of vegetation and habit into the built environment to reduce heat, increase biodiversity and enhance amenity	19		
Strategic objectives.....	19		
Targets	19		
Objective Three: Planning, policy and asset integration	20		

Executive summary

GROWTH, EQUITY, RESILIENCE

Trees are on the job for us, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, working to improve our local neighbourhoods, our wellbeing and helping mitigate impacts of our changing climate. Our vision is for an expanding urban forest that not only grows canopy cover but also nurtures the full character of a forest – a whole system that provides shade, habitat, and connection to nature. Cities all over, are looking to nature-based solutions to strengthen the resilience of the environment and our neighbourhoods. Trees and plants are no longer just a nice to have – they're essential urban infrastructure making our city a great place to live. They keep us cool in the summer heat, mitigate flooding, and support our health and wellbeing every day.

In 2015 we adopted our first urban forest strategy, which established a framework for strategic management of our urban trees and set ambitious targets to increase canopy cover. Since then, we have seen canopy cover increase across our region from 14 per cent to 17 per cent planting more than 50,000 new trees. While these achievements lay a strong foundation, it's not the finish line. As the City changes and develops, our urban forest must change with it and evolve to meet our future needs and challenges. An urban forest is not only its trees, but the spaces between them, the understory that shelters birds and insects, the green verges that link streets, the drainage corridors that become habitat pathways, and the canopy that cools entire neighbourhoods. By weaving these elements together, the strategy creates a continuous green network that links open spaces and nature reserves into a functioning urban ecosystem. This network supports biodiversity, encourages movement of wildlife, improves walkability, reduces heat stress, and enhances the health and wellbeing of residents.

The *Urban Forest Strategy: Healthy Country* continues the direction of, and updates to, our priorities and actions. The revised strategy introduces three key shifts in approach.



First, it moves toward a more strategic and evidence-based expansion of the urban forest by prioritising planting in low-canopy and high-heat areas, including underutilised public land and streetscapes.



Second, it strengthens the integration of green infrastructure into planning, infrastructure, and urban development to ensure trees and vegetation are treated as essential city infrastructure.



Third, it expands the focus from canopy alone to a broader urban forest system that supports biodiversity, water sensitive urban design, cooling, habitat connectivity, and community wellbeing.

It forms a key component of the City of Greater Geelong's response to a changing climate and integrates with our other City plans to deliver the Victorian Government direction and the Victorian Planning Authority's ambition for 30 per cent canopy cover. Together, these actions will help create a greener, cooler, more resilient and liveable Greater Geelong.

Why? The strategy – from seed to shade

The *Urban Forest Strategy: Healthy Country* focuses on the growth and long-term care of trees and plants across both public and private land. Its goal is to expand canopy cover and strengthen the understory throughout Greater Geelong, creating a healthier, cooler and more resilient landscape. More trees help lower temperatures, retain moisture in soils, improve air and water quality and reduce flood risk. Shaded, greener places and corridors are also far more inviting - people are more likely to walk, ride, rest and spend time in cool, comfortable open spaces.

Urban forests provide strong economic and social returns as well: for every \$1 invested in trees, communities receive around \$4 in benefits through improved mental health, productivity and local amenity ([Priority Urban Greening Analysis - Mosaic Insights](#)). By delivering the actions outlined in this strategy, our whole community can help build a more resilient landscape to the impacts of a changing climate while enhancing the liveability of our neighbourhoods, supporting our wellbeing and sustaining Greater Geelong's diverse plant and animal life.

This update of the *Urban Forest Strategy: Healthy Country* is driven by three key factors: growing community demand for greener neighbourhoods, the needs and pressures of Greater Geelong's future growth, and strengthened expectations set by state policy and City's own strategic commitments.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The community has played a big part in shaping Geelong's vision for a greener city. From the first *Urban Forest Strategy 2015–2025* to the *Climate Change Response Plan 2021–2030*, the *Environment Strategy 2020–30*, and the *Plan for Nature*, as well as discussions about trees on private property, people have consistently told us they want more trees, more shade, and more green spaces across Greater Geelong.

Our *Council Plan 2025–29* builds on this message with a clear objective: *to protect and enhance our unique and beautiful natural environment* while helping our community adapt to a changing climate. This shared ambition is already being recognised with Greater Geelong named a [Tree City of the World](#) for the third year in a row to 2025, one of only 11 cities in Australia named. To earn this recognition, we meet five international standards of taking clear responsibility for our trees, having a strong management policy and up-to-date tree inventory, dedicating an annual tree budget, and celebrating trees with the community each year.

While this is something to be proud of, creating a cooler, greener, and more connected Geelong can't be done by the City alone. The success of our urban forest depends on all of us, residents, schools, community groups, and businesses, working together to plant, protect, and care for the trees and plants that make our city a healthier, more beautiful place to live.

WADAWURRUNG VALUES

Wadawurrung people are the Traditional Owners of this region and are today represented by the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC). For thousands of generations, Wadawurrung people have cared for Country. In Wadawurrung knowledge, the coast, wetlands, grassy and volcanic plains of the **Dja** (Country) were formed by Bundjil the Eagle, the Ancestor Creator. The name "Geelong" comes from the Wadawurrung word for the region "Djilang" which means "tongue of land"^[1].

Wadawurrung culture and livelihoods are deeply connected to the region's biodiversity, with dja (land) and warre (sea) Country seen as one. The inland plains, waterways, coast and warre Country provided abundant food, shelter, medicine and clothing to sustain thousands of generations of Wadawurrung people.

^[1] City of Greater Geelong (2025) Reconciliation Action Plan - Wadawurrung Aboriginal history. URL: (<https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/>) (Accessed 18 December 2025).

The Statewide Treaty Bill was introduced in October 2025. Victorian traditional owners and the State have worked together to ensure traditional owners play a lead role in managing and protecting land, natural resources and cultural heritage. The Urban Forest Strategy aims to support the intentions of Treaty by recognising the role and authority of Wadawurrung Traditional Owners. The City recognises the State Government's responsibilities under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 and the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 and will endeavour to maintain open dialogue and consultation with Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to established cultural stewardship and appropriate action throughout the life of the strategy.

CHALLENGES

The City of Greater Geelong is defined by its remarkable variety of landscapes. Greater Geelong is home to dense city streets, established neighbourhoods, fast growing peri-urban corridors, productive farmland, rural and seaside towns, world renown wetlands and a coastline that stretches from Avalon to Barwon Heads. We are one of the most unique local governments in the country.

Although we have room to grow, increasing competition for space requires balancing canopy and understory growth with urban development pressures. In 2025, our population stands at 299,735 and is projected to grow to about 442,000 by 2047.

Space to accommodate planting is in competition with limited publicly available land underground infrastructure such as electricity, water and the National Broadband Network. Adequate maintenance funding that's in lockstep with acquired land also constrains greening outcomes.

Images (c) and (d) illustrate that higher residential density and single-dwelling renovation (or construction of new dwellings) can reduce backyard space, vegetation and canopy. This results in larger areas covered by impervious surfaces, and less potential habitat for flora and fauna (source: Nearmap).



(c) 2009



(d) 2018

Images (e) and (f) show a redevelopment of four allotments with four detached dwellings to yield 12 dwellings – a gain of eight dwellings. However, there is a corresponding loss of significant vegetation cover, an almost complete loss of canopy and potential habitat, and a gain in impervious surfaces (source: Nearmap).



(e) 2010



(f) 2018

Figure 1. Change in green space over time

Additionally, inequitable canopy distribution means vulnerable communities often experience higher heat stress and reduced access to green space. Addressing these challenges requires integrated planning and stronger cross-team collaboration, as well as, and most critically, improved community participation in plantings.



Figure 2. Known urban heat spots due to lack of canopy

BENEFITS

Urban forests deliver multiple benefits; reducing that debilitating and prolonged heat in summer, decreasing the impacts of intense rainfall, improving habitat for smaller mammals, insects, and birds, and helps us mentally through connections into nature.

Canopy cover reduces street-level temperatures by up to 8°C in heavily concreted urban areas. Through its shade, it can lower air conditioner use in summer by 12-15 per cent and can increase property values by up to 10 per cent.

An urban forest improves the enjoyment and accessibility for all of us to better use our open spaces, parks and gardens, which in turn, helps our health and wellbeing, all while supporting our wildlife.

The Urban Forest Strategy strongly aligns with Wadawurrung's *Healthy Country*: a holistic concept reflecting the deep, spiritual connection between Wadawurrung and Country, where the land's health is directly linked to people's health, community strength, and spirit. For Wadawurrung caring for country is fundamental to the duty of life linking beginning of creation to infinite future, alive with ancestors and descendants. It embodies the idea that by caring for Country, its lands and waters, the Wadawurrung and all peoples will in turn be cared for, fostering wellbeing and resilience.



Image 1. Culturally significant Wadawurrung scarred tree

The Benefits of Urban Greening

How greenery in urban areas boosts city livability



Figure 3. Benefits of Urban Greening

Trees have been shown to intercept between 14 and 72 per cent of rainfall (Alivio et al., 2023). They also reduce erosion and sediment into our stormwater system.

Trees protect biodiversity by providing habitat.

Two medium sized healthy trees produce oxygen required for a single person for one year.

Trees can increase property value through improved street appeal, energy savings, and environmental benefits, with some studies showing a direct monetary increase of 5-15 per cent.

One tree can absorb up-to 15kg of CO₂ per year.

Properly placed trees can cut air conditioning costs by up to 30 per cent and reduce heating energy consumption by 20-50 per cent.

Evidence for associations between nature exposure and improved cognitive function, brain activity, blood pressure, mental health, physical activity, and sleep (Jimenez et al., 2021).

POLICY CONTEXT

The Urban Forest Strategy builds on the foundation established through the *Urban Forest Strategy 2015–2025*, which coordinated tree planting and canopy growth across Greater Geelong. Since its adoption, state, regional and national policy settings have evolved, placing stronger emphasis on urban cooling, climate resilience and nature-based solutions.

The strategy aligns with Victorian Government direction and the Victorian Planning Authority's ambition for 30 per cent urban canopy cover and embedding green infrastructure within urban development while also aligning with the City's *Council Plan 2025-29*.

Legislative and Strategic Framework

The Strategy aligns with:

- **Local Government Act 2020** – requiring long-term planning and sustainable service delivery
- **Climate Change Act 2017 (Vic)** – embedding climate adaptation and emissions reduction in decision-making
- **National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy 2021–2025**
- **Nature Positive Plan (2022)**
- **Trees for Cooler and Greener Streetscapes (DELWP 2019)**

These frameworks establish canopy expansion and ecological restoration as core components of climate adaptation and liveability.

State and Regional Policy Alignment

State planning policy now explicitly supports the Planning Scheme for increased urban canopy and climate-responsive design. Key policy drivers include:

- **Clause 12.06-1(S) (Urban Tree Canopy)** – establishes a strategic direction toward achieving an overall 30 per cent tree canopy target in urban areas, encouraging retention of existing trees and planting of new canopy trees in both public and private realms.
- **Clause 52.37 (Canopy Trees)** – protects significant canopy trees in residential zones, requiring a planning permit for removal and strengthening retention outcomes on private land.
- **Clause 15.01-2L (Environmentally Sustainable Development)** – supports urban cooling, integrated water management and climate resilience through sustainable settlement planning.
- **Clause 15.01-3 (Subdivision Design)** – promotes subdivision layouts and infrastructure that enable long-term tree establishment and adequate soil volumes.
- **Clause 15.01-4S (Healthy Neighbourhoods)** – reinforces the role of canopy in shade, walkability, thermal comfort and community wellbeing.
- **Clause 56.07 (Stormwater Management)** – supports water-sensitive urban design outcomes that contribute to cooling and habitat enhancement.

These provisions collectively reinforce the requirement to protect mature canopy, increase new tree planting, and embed green infrastructure within development and infrastructure delivery.

Water and Integrated Infrastructure Policy

Urban canopy expansion is supported by integrated water management and stormwater policy, including:

- EPA Urban Stormwater Guidelines (2021)
- Northern and Western Growth Areas Integrated Water Management Strategy (2021)

These documents promote stormwater retention, reuse and 'harvest-ready' infrastructure, creating opportunities to support passive irrigation, green infrastructure and urban cooling.

Local Policy Integration

This strategy ensures alignment with the City's internal policy framework, including:

- *Council Plan 2025–2029*
- *Environment Strategy 2020–2030*
- *Climate Change Response Plan 2021–2030*
- *Asset Plan 2022–2035*
- Plan for Nature (draft)
- Integrated Transport Strategy (draft)
- Open Space Strategy (draft)
- Climate Change Adaptation Policy for Stormwater Hydrology (draft)

Embedding these policies across the organisation ensures that precinct structure plans, open space strategies, capital works and planting programs consistently support achievement of the 30 per cent canopy target.

Forest structure: Canopy + Understory

WHAT IS AN URBAN FOREST?

An urban forest includes all vegetation across public and private land — trees, shrubs, groundcovers, climbers, wetlands, green roofs and green walls. Together, these layers create a living infrastructure network that cools the city, helps to manage stormwater, improves biodiversity, supports walkability, and strengthens climate resilience.

A water-sensitive approach underpins the entire urban forest: a healthy long-lived urban forest relies on maximising stormwater capture and reuse and passive irrigation and healthy sub- surface environments and enhanced soil volumes. This ensures the urban forest grows not only in quantity, but in quality and is resilient to sudden or gradual changes in the environment.

CANOPY

Canopy is the upper layer of our urban forest—the broad sweep of leaves and branches that shades our streets, cools hard surfaces, intercepts rainfall and creates habitat for birds and other wildlife. As Geelong grows and our climate continues to warm, expanding this leafy layer is one of the most cost-effective ways the City can improve comfort, resilience and liveability across neighbourhoods.

To strengthen and expand the canopy, the City will focus on planting trees where they are needed most particularly in heat-vulnerable suburbs, busy activity centres and rapidly developing growth areas. Each year, 2,400 advanced trees will continue to be planted to improve shade and cooling benefits from the outset, with increased funding recommended to meet 30 per cent canopy coverage targets by 2047.

Supporting canopy growth also means shaping the conditions beneath the ground. Updated engineering standards and stormwater strategies will increase soil volumes, improve root space and make greater use of passive irrigation, allowing trees to capture stormwater naturally and better withstand periods of drought.



Image 2. Example of canopy coverage

Planning controls at the state level, particularly Clause 52.37 in the Victoria Planning Provisions under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, will embed stronger requirements for tree protection and the use of large-growing species in new developments, ensuring that as Geelong expands the canopy grows with it. Priority planting sites within drainage corridors and road reserves will further enhance water access for trees, making our urban forest healthier, more resilient, and better connected across the city.

UNDERSTORY

Beneath the canopy, the understory brings richness and texture to the urban forest. Shrubs, grasses, groundcovers and climbers add layers of habitat that support insects, pollinators, small birds and other wildlife. These plantings stabilise soil, retain moisture, reduce erosion and contribute to the visual character of streets and open spaces. A thriving understory strengthens the entire ecosystem helping trees establish, which in turn improves soil conditions and enhances the resilience of the landscape.

To grow this vital layer, the City will expand biodiversity-rich plantings across parks, reserves, waterway corridors and key streetscapes. Through community led programs, nature strips will increasingly transition from simple turf to biodiverse planting. Many of these plantings will be located within natural stormwater infiltration zones, allowing understory vegetation to make use of available moisture and thrive through hotter, drier periods.



Image 4. Nature Strip Blitz, Rotary Highton



Image 3. Native road verge

Community participation is central to this transformation. Education programs, social media campaigns, and partnerships with community organisations renowned for their conservation and planting projects will help residents understand, adopt and care for understory plantings in their own neighbourhoods.

Together, a healthy canopy and understory create a layered, water-responsive urban ecosystem; one that provides shade, habitat, cooling, and enduring climate resilience for a growing, Greater Geelong.

INTEGRATING URBAN FORESTS WITH INTEGRATED WATER MANAGEMENT

As Greater Geelong grows, the health of our urban forest increasingly depends on how well we manage water across the city. A resilient canopy and thriving understory don't exist in isolation, they are shaped by the landscapes that support them and by the way water moves through our streets, reserves, and neighbourhoods. For this reason, the City's approach to canopy expansion and understory enrichment is deliberately aligned with the principles of Integrated Water Management (IWM). This ensures that every new tree, shrub, or groundcover is supported not only by soil and space, but by thoughtful water availability across its lifespan.

Healthy canopy trees require consistent moisture to establish strong roots, while understory plants play a vital role in stabilising soil, improving infiltration and filtering stormwater. Together, they form living green infrastructure that cools neighbourhoods, protects our



Image 5. Native nature strip garden

waterways and bay, and contributes to a more climate-resilient city. By embedding water-sensitive urban design into planting practice, the City strengthens both the ecological function and long-term survival of its green assets.

Across Greater Geelong, this approach is becoming visible in a range of interventions that subtly reshape the way water is captured and used in the landscape. Passive irrigation systems redirect rainfall from roads and footpaths into the root zones of canopy trees. These systems can reduce the need for active irrigation by up to 70 per cent, making them particularly valuable for large shade trees in high-heat suburbs.



Image 6. Johnstone Park rain garden

Along key walking and cycling corridors, rain gardens and vegetated swales slow and capture runoff helping young trees and shrubs establish during hotter, drier months. In larger landscapes, our world-renowned wetlands, as well as retarding basins and creek corridors play an important role in enhancing biodiversity, extending habitat networks, and contribute to broader cooling across suburbs.

This integration of canopy and water systems is already being demonstrated in Greater Geelong's emerging precincts. In Armstrong Creek, for example, stormwater is first managed through wetlands and retarding basins to reduce flood risk and improve water quality. Increasing infiltration in the landscape through good design and use of swales and other passive irrigation designs, stormwater and also recycled water can be increasingly used to irrigate sports reserves, parks and linear open spaces. Over the longer term, precinct-scale water harvesting and recycled-water networks are planned to provide more reliable irrigation across the landscape, supporting the establishment of canopy trees, understory plantings and climate-resilient public spaces.

By aligning tree planting with the way water is captured, stored, and reused, the City is building an urban forest that is not only larger, but designed smarter to thrive under a changing climate and to deliver multiple community benefits. This foundation sets the scene for the next chapter in our strategy: moving forward, how we grow, connect, and care for Greater Geelong's urban forest in the decades ahead.

Since the adoption of the current strategy, the City has made measurable progress towards its goals. Prior to 2015, the City managed around 120,000 urban trees across streetscapes, rural roads, waterways, parks and reserves. Since the establishment of the *Urban Forest Strategy* in 2015, the City has increased our tree population to over 190,000 trees to deliver a 3 per cent increase of canopy with more than 70,000 new trees across streets, parks and reserves. A key challenge identified through the previous strategy has been the limited ability to capture and coordinate the full extent of urban greening activities occurring across the municipality, including planting undertaken in nature reserves, by community groups, other agencies, organisations and residents. This Urban Forest Strategy update responds to that challenge by strengthening the strategic coordination, monitoring and reporting of urban forest outcomes across Greater Geelong.



KEEPING IT LOCAL: WHERE DOES THE URBAN FOREST STRATEGY FIT?

Greater Geelong's nature reserves and open spaces currently form a patchwork of green space. The Urban Forest Strategy aims to link these spaces and create an interconnected green network. Whether it be the *Plan for Nature*, *Public Realm Strategy* or *Open Space Strategy*, each plays a distinctive role, but neither achieves its full potential without the other. The *Open Space Strategy* provides the structure: the parks, reserves, play spaces, sporting fields, linear corridors and waterfront areas that shape how people move, recreate, gather and experience Greater Geelong. It defines the hierarchy of spaces, establishes accessibility and quality standards, and ensures every community has access to well-designed, functional and welcoming places.

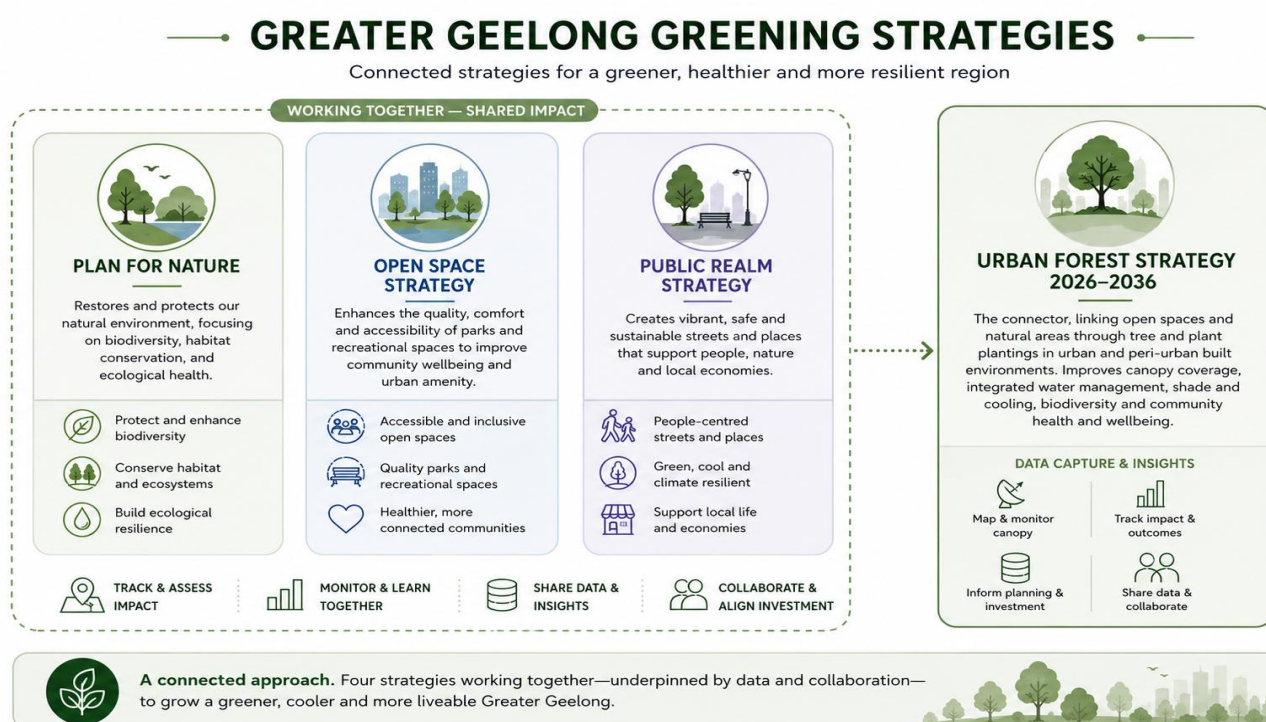


Figure 5. Urban Forest Strategy working with other strategies

The *Urban Forest Strategy*, by contrast, provides the life within that structure. It shapes the trees, understory, groundcovers, cooling corridors, habitat systems, water-sensitive landscapes and street-level greening that make these open spaces thrive. Where the *Open Space Strategy* asks, ‘*what does this place do for people?*’, the *Urban Forest Strategy* asks, ‘*how can nature make this place healthier, cooler and more resilient?*’

Together, they form a mutually reinforcing system. Importantly, the *Urban Forest Strategy* is not limited to parks alone. It is a whole-of-community strategy, connecting the public realm, private gardens, nature reserves, biodiversity corridors, drainage networks, streetscapes, new growth areas and established suburbs into one coherent green system. In doing so, it helps the ambitions of the *Plan for Nature*, which emphasises the importance of ecological connectivity, habitat health, Indigenous knowledge and community stewardship across Greater Geelong. Where *Plan for Nature* identifies the ecological values and conservation priorities of Greater Geelong, the *Urban Forest Strategy* operationalises these values across everyday places in front yards, nature strips, local parks, stormwater corridors, school grounds, commercial centres and neighbourhood streets.

In this way, the *Urban Forest Strategy* sits alongside and interlocks with the *Open Space Strategy* and the *Plan for Nature*, each playing a distinct and complementary role in shaping the city's landscape. The *Open Space Strategy*

focuses on the provision, accessibility and function of public open spaces where people gather, play, rest and connect. The *Plan for Nature* prioritises biodiversity outcomes, including habitat creation, ecological and social connectivity and the protection and enhancement of native flora and fauna across natural environments. The *Urban Forest Strategy* integrates these objectives by prioritising tree canopy and understory across streets, verges, car parks, drainage reserves and other under-utilised urban spaces that sit outside the primary scope of open space and conservation planning, but delivers shade, cooling, habitat and climate resilience. Together, these strategies create a Greater Geelong landscape that is greener, healthier, more inclusive and more resilient to climate and weather stressors—where open spaces are not only functional but flourishing, streets function as green corridors, and communities are supported to care for a thriving urban ecosystem.

Moving forward – Our future forest

As Greater Geelong continues to grow and adapt to a changing climate, it has become increasingly clear that our urban forest is far more than the sum of its trees. While canopy cover remains a critical component providing shade, cooling, carbon sequestration, and iconic character, focusing solely on canopy trees provides only a partial picture of the living systems that support a healthy, resilient city. For this reason, the updated strategy broadens the definition of the urban forest to recognise all layers of vegetation, including understory plants, shrubs, groundcovers, climbers, and the diverse forms of living green infrastructure found across both public and private land.

Expanding this definition reflects how natural ecosystems function. Healthy forests are multi-layered, from tall canopy to low shrubs and grasses contributing in unique and interconnected ways. This complexity builds resilience, supports biodiversity, enriches habitat, enhances soil health, and creates microclimates that people and wildlife rely on. By adopting a more ecological understanding of the urban forest, the strategy acknowledges the full range of vegetation that cools neighbourhoods, absorbs stormwater, and supports bees, insects and birds.

The broadened definition strengthens our ability to respond to climate change. While large canopy trees are irreplaceable in their cooling benefits, many parts of Greater Geelong particularly established, or heavily serviced urban areas are physically constrained and cannot always accommodate large canopy trees where new housing estates and contemporary homes can take up an entire lot. In these places, the public realm and canopy trees, understory planting, verge gardens, raingardens, green roofs, and other forms of green infrastructure become vital tools. They reduce radiant heat at street level, improve water infiltration, slow stormwater flows, and create greener, more appealing streetscapes. Recognising these contributions expands the range of interventions available to the City and the community and ensures every suburb has options to increase its greenery, even in tight or complex settings.

Importantly, this shift also brings Greater Geelong into alignment with contemporary best practice. Leading cities and global urban forest frameworks increasingly define urban forests as integrated systems rather than as isolated tree assets. By embracing this expanded definition, the strategy connects more naturally with City's work in biodiversity, water-sensitive urban design, open space planning, and climate adaptation. It also positions Greater Geelong to draw more effectively on state, federal, and philanthropic funding streams that prioritise holistic, nature-based solutions.

Equally significant is the recognition that most of Greater Geelong's green cover exists on private land. The broadened definition allows the strategy to better acknowledge and support the role of household gardens, nature strips, community-led plantings, and developer-led landscaping as essential components of the region's natural infrastructure. Residents increasingly plant native shrubs, pollinator gardens, edible landscapes, and groundcovers that collectively contribute meaningfully to local microclimates and ecological networks. By formally including these plantings in the urban forest, the strategy affirms community efforts and strengthens pathways for participation, partnership, and stewardship. Together, this richer, more inclusive vision of the urban forest gives Greater Geelong a more practical and powerful framework for building resilience. It captures everything that contributes to a thriving green city, from the tallest canopy trees to the smallest groundcover, and recognises that a truly healthy, climate-adapted urban environment relies on the diversity and interplay of all living layers.

The 30 per cent canopy coverage target aligns with the City's long-term *Clever and Creative Vision for 2047*, providing an appropriate timescale to measure canopy growth, while also providing interim targets toward 2047. Progress will be transparently tracked through Geelong Data Exchange with rolling updates, supported by a formal strategy review every five years in line with Council election cycles. Within the first five years of the strategy, our aim is to identify priority planting areas to support strategic approaches for planting to occur. This approach ensures that urban greening is not only more effective, but also more equitable, achievable, and reflective of the way people and nature interact across the city's landscapes.

Objective One: Urban greening and canopy expansion

CONTEXT: INCREASE CANOPY, BIODIVERSITY AND VEGETATION ACROSS AVAILABLE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACE

Objective one aims to accelerate the transformation of Geelong's urban landscape by increasing tree canopy and low-and-mid storey planting cover across all available public and private land. This objective recognises that urban greening is not just about planting more trees; it is about strategically activating overlooked, under-utilised, hard-surface, or perceived low-value sites and transitioning them into high-performing green infrastructure assets. These sites hold immense, often untapped potential to mitigate heat, improve amenity, manage stormwater, and strengthen climate resilience at the street, neighbourhood, city, and regional scale.

This objective seeks to integrate canopy and vegetation expansion into urban development, renewal, and maintenance. Embedding trees and understory planting into streetscapes, car parks, nature strips, drainage corridors, and community spaces, leveraging stormwater as a resource and enabling green infrastructure to actively support urban cooling, walkability, ecological connectivity, and long-term community wellbeing is key to unlocking the urban forest's potential. Through this approach, greening Greater Geelong strengthens the City's capacity to adapt to a changing climate while demonstrating the value of nature as essential infrastructure.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Achieve 30 per cent urban canopy cover across Greater Geelong by 2036.

- A sustained increase in total urban canopy cover across both public and private land, progressing toward 30 per cent by 2036
- Mature trees are retained, where appropriate, with structured succession planning ensuring generational canopy continuity.
- Urban canopy is systematically integrated into capital works, asset renewal programs, infrastructure upgrades and planning decisions.

Improve canopy distribution in heat-vulnerable suburbs and towns.

- Canopy cover is measurably increased in existing suburbs with low existing tree cover and high surface heat exposure.
- Pedestrian routes, activity centres, school precincts and transport corridors provide continuous and functional shade networks.
- Urban heat island intensity is reduced in priority locations, identified by *Action 1*, through coordinated canopy expansion and cooling interventions, and are transparently monitored using spatial mapping, remote sensing and surface temperature data to inform adaptive management.

Growth areas are designed to achieve long-term canopy resilience.

- Precinct Structure Plans and subdivision designs embed canopy requirements that support long-term tree establishment and survival.
- Streetscapes and open space reserves provide adequate soil volumes, deep soil zones and water access to enable large-canopy species to reach maturity.
- New neighbourhoods are structurally capable of achieving substantial canopy cover within one to two generations.
- Remnant vegetation is protected and biodiversity corridors strengthened, contributing to ecological connectivity and climate resilience.

Support sustained annual establishment of trees and understory vegetation across public and private land.

- Annual tree planting, including low-mid storey shrubbery, across public and private land consistently exceeds 15,000 trees, contributing to long-term canopy targets.
- Community, institutional and private landholders are active partners in urban greening programs.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Developers deliver canopy outcomes aligned with municipal targets in new growth areas.
- Species selection reflects diversity, climate suitability and long-term resilience, reducing vulnerability to pests, disease and climate stress.

TARGETS

- Increase overall municipal urban canopy cover to 30 per cent by 2036, with interim milestones set for 2030 and 2035.
- Increase canopy cover in identified heat-vulnerable suburbs by a minimum of 20 per cent above their 2024 baseline by 2035.
- New growth areas are planned and designed to support achievement of minimum 30 per cent canopy cover at projected tree maturity.
- More than 15,000 trees and low-mid storey plants are established annually across public and private land.
- No single species represents more than 10 per cent of the municipal tree population, to support long-term climate resilience and biodiversity.
- Net canopy loss from public land tree removals is offset through replacement planting and succession planning; with a minimum 2:1 ratio where appropriate.

Objective Two: Urban innovation and green infrastructure integration

CONTEXT: INTEGRATION OF VEGETATION AND HABIT INTO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT TO REDUCE HEAT, INCREASE BIODIVERSITY AND ENHANCE AMENITY

Objective two aims to embed vegetation, habitat and nature-positive design into the built environment, ensuring that buildings, streetscapes and public spaces actively contribute to cooling, biodiversity and urban amenity. As Greater Geelong densifies and experiences more frequent extreme heat and intense rainfalls, nature must become a core component of urban form, not an afterthought. This objective integrates canopy trees, habitat features and climate-responsive design into streets, activity centres and growth areas to improve ecological performance, reduce heat and enhance liveability. Large tree lined active transport corridors, minimum standards for new developments to ensure large canopy trees and 30 per cent canopy cover target is designed for more opportunities for vertical greening, water-sensitive design, habitat-rich façades, integrated passive irrigation, and climate-responsive materials all form part of a forward-looking approach that elevates ecological function and human comfort in urban places.

By empowering residents, schools, businesses, developers and community groups to participate in helping the City reach its target of 15,000 additional trees and plants each year to 2047, this objective strengthens local ownership, builds everyday capacity for urban greening, and ensures long-term maintenance and resilience of public and semi-public green spaces. Through collaboration, demonstration projects and accessible design tools, urban innovation and green infrastructure accelerates the shift from isolated plantings to a region network of living systems that support biodiversity, reduce heat and enhance the liveability of Geelong.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Embed improved soil quality, adequate tree spacing and deep soil standards in the built environment to support canopy coverage of at least 30 per cent.
- Deliver tree-lined active transport corridors that provide continuous shade and habitat connectivity, where appropriate and practical.
- Integrate passive irrigation, water-sensitive urban design and structural soil systems into streetscapes and public spaces.
- Explore vertical greening and habitat-rich façades in activity centres and commercial precincts.
- Support broad participation in urban greening across community, institutional and private land.

TARGETS

- Growth areas and major redevelopment precincts are designed to support long-term achievement of minimum 30 per cent canopy cover at projected tree maturity.
- Establish shaded active transport corridors by 2035 especially in new growth areas and road entry points into Geelong, in line with and in collaboration with the development of the Integrated Transport Strategy.
- Passive irrigation and integrated water-sensitive urban design solutions are progressively incorporated into priority streets, precincts and public realm upgrades.
- Achieve measurable surface temperature reductions in priority urban heat hotspots.
- Vertical greening and habitat-rich design elements are increasingly integrated into activity centres and urban renewal areas, where possible.
- Maintain ≥85 per cent three-year survival rate for trees planted within built-up urban environments.

Objective Three: Planning, policy and asset integration

CONTEXT: EMBED TREES AND GREENING INTO CITY SYSTEMS, DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORKS AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

Objective three aims to ensure that trees, vegetation and green infrastructure are embedded as core elements of City's planning, design, construction and asset management systems. This objective recognises that lasting urban greening outcomes depend on strong governance frameworks where greening is treated as essential infrastructure, protected through policy, and consistently prioritised across all stages of the development lifecycle. By integrating canopy and habitat requirements into planning controls, assessment, engineering standards and public realm and open space design guidelines, the City can secure long-term gains in shade, cooling, biodiversity and community amenity.

The purpose of this focus area is to create a seamless, organisation-wide approach to urban greening, one that aligns strategic intent with operational delivery. This includes maintaining existing tree protections, improving coordination across departments, embedding passive irrigation and nature-based solutions into capital works, and ensuring that green assets are valued, monitored and maintained over time. Through clear policy direction, consistent standards, and integrated asset systems, Planning, Policy and Asset Integration provides the enabling architecture that allows the whole organisation to deliver, protect and grow Greater Geelong's urban forest at scale.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Embed canopy, habitat and green infrastructure requirements into precinct structure plans and development assessment.
- Maintain tree protection mechanisms to reduce avoidable canopy loss.
- Integrate green infrastructure and passive irrigation into capital works and infrastructure upgrades.
- Align planning, engineering, open space and asset management systems to support long-term canopy viability.
- Recognise trees and green infrastructure as essential assets within asset management frameworks.
- Improve internal coordination, monitoring and lifecycle management of green assets.

TARGETS

- Best practice urban forest and landscape design principles are consistently integrated into Council guidelines and standards to support long-term canopy outcomes.
- Integrated Water Management guidelines are embedded within all new Precinct Structure Plans and growth area planning, as well as their application in existing areas.
- Green infrastructure is increasingly incorporated into major capital works and urban renewal projects across the municipality.
- Net canopy loss associated with development is minimised over time.
- Tree protection measures are maintained and consistently applied across municipal operations and management frameworks.
- Green infrastructure assets are progressively integrated into corporate asset management systems, including lifecycle planning and valuation approaches.
- Urban forest performance measures are integrated into organisational monitoring and reporting frameworks.

Objective Four: Monitoring, capability and long-term stewardship

CONTEXT: TRACK PROGRESS, MEASURE PERFORMANCE AND SUPPORT EVIDENCE-BASED PLANNING

Objective 4 ensures that urban forest performance is measured, reported and actively managed to support evidence-based planning and long-term canopy resilience. Achieving and sustaining 30 per cent canopy requires ongoing measurement, adaptation and skilled stewardship. Without accurate data, transparent reporting and strong maintenance systems, canopy gains may be temporary or unevenly distributed.

This objective builds a robust evidence base that guides investment, tracks canopy health and biodiversity outcomes, measures heat mitigation and carbon sequestration, and strengthens staff and community capability. Through integrated monitoring systems and clear reporting, the City can ensure Greening Geelong delivers long-term climate resilience and liveability outcomes.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Urban forest performance is measured, monitored and publicly reported.
- Data informs adaptive canopy investment and prioritisation.
- Integrated urban greening data systems support coordinated monitoring and reporting.
- Staff and volunteers are equipped to support long-term canopy health.
- Maintenance systems align with biodiversity, water efficiency and emissions reduction goals.
- Carbon sequestration from canopy expansion is accurately tracked and reported.

TARGETS

- Municipal canopy data updated and reported publicly at least every two years.
- A central urban greening database captures all City-delivered planting activity and progressively integrates community and development contributions.
- Public-facing urban forest dashboard operational within three years.
- Tree establishment and survival rates are monitored across municipal planting programs.
- Demonstrated reduction in turf maintenance area and associated operational emissions.
- Annual reporting of estimated carbon sequestration from canopy expansion.

Action Plan to Stepped Implementation

CONTEXT: THE GRAPHIC BELOW PROVIDES THE STRATEGIC STEPPED RESPONSE FOR BROAD-SCALE CANOPY COVERAGE TARGET SUCCESS

The implementation recipe provides a practical and scalable framework for how Greater Geelong can progressively achieve its long-term urban canopy and greening targets, while also helping communicate the sequencing and delivery logic across the Action Plan. While the Action Plan identifies the broad suite of strategic, operational and enabling actions required to support urban forest outcomes, the implementation recipe demonstrates how these actions work together as a coordinated delivery pathway rather than as isolated initiatives.

The recipe begins with foundational actions focused on mapping, data integration and strategic prioritisation, including canopy baseline mapping, urban heat mapping, identifying underutilised planting opportunities and improving planting data systems (Actions 1, 2, 10, 27 and 29). These actions establish the evidence base required to prioritise investment within low-canopy and high-heat areas. The next stage focuses on embedding urban greening into planning, infrastructure and development processes through canopy requirements, green infrastructure guidance, passive irrigation opportunities and integrated capital works planning (Actions 14–18 and 22–25). This provides the enabling framework required to support long-term canopy growth and reduce future retrofit costs.

The framework then progresses to coordinated delivery, stewardship and monitoring through municipal planting, community participation, succession planting, maintenance, canopy monitoring, tree asset integration and carbon reporting (Actions 3–9, 13, 16, 26, 28, 30–32). Together, the implementation recipe demonstrates that achieving broad-scale urban greening relies on a connected system that integrates trees, understory and green infrastructure into planning, infrastructure delivery, and community participation for a greener and resilient Greater Geelong.

URBAN FOREST STRATEGY Implementation Recipe

Turning overlooked space into strategic urban greening outcomes



Figure 6. Implementation Recipe to improve Greening Greater Geelong

Action Plan

This section of the plan presents the actions that the City will deliver to help achieve the ten-year strategic objectives and targets for each of the four objectives goals. The actions are short-term, intending to be delivered over the next one to two years, after which the action plan will be reviewed and updated to reflect long-term goal achievement. These short-term actions are outlined in the table below. Strategic reallocation of funding across the organisation informed from this strategy to better target urban canopy expansion. Each action has corresponding funding expectations are denoted by 'Business as Usual (BAU)', 'Grant Funding (GF)' and/ or 'Resourcing Required (RR)'. Of the 34 actions, 23 per cent require either grant funding or resourcing over-time.

Objective	Strategic Objective (10 years)	Targets / Desired Outcomes (10 years)	Actions (2 years)	Indicators	Impacts (10 years)
Urban greening and canopy expansion	Increase municipal canopy cover toward 30 per cent by 2047 (supports Obj 4).	Increase canopy from 17 per cent (2024 baseline) to: Interim targets of 22 per cent by 2030; 25 per cent by 2035; 30 per cent by 2047.	1. Update canopy baseline mapping and integrate into tree asset systems (BAU). 2. Map underutilised sites to identify planting opportunities (BAU). 3. Scale annual community-led planting program through increased funding opportunities via community, state and federal grants (GF:RR). 4. Implement succession planting strategy (BAU). 5. Develop and pilot a Rural Agroforestry Support Program to enable tree establishment on private rural land through incentives, technical guidance and partnership delivery, where appropriate (BAU).	% canopy cover (biennial GIS); annual net canopy gain	Reduced urban heat; increased biodiversity; improved liveability
	Deliver sustained annual planting (supports Obj 4).	15,000+ trees and plants annually across all departments	6. Expand municipal planting to include more community and corporate participation (GF:RR). 7. Expand volunteer led planting and maintenance programs including nature strips (GF:RR). 8. Prioritise climate-suitable species (BAU). 9. Investigate incentives to support increased private-land tree planting (BAU:RR)	Trees planted/year; # of community participants	Long-term canopy establishment and resilience

	Improve canopy equity in heat-vulnerable suburbs (supports Obj 4)	≥20 per cent canopy uplift in identified priority suburbs by 2036.	10. Update heat hotspots mapping and at street level (BAU). 11. Prioritise planting in capital works and community programs (BAU).	Canopy percentage in priority areas; surface temperature change.	More equitable cooling; improved public health outcomes.
	Achieve net positive canopy annually.	Net canopy gain recorded each year.	12. Embed a “retain first” approach across Council policies, design standards, and project approvals, prioritising protection of mature trees in Council operations and supporting retention on private land through guidance (BAU). 13. Monitor and report on tree removals, replacements for net canopy outcomes across Council-managed landscapes to support transparency, adaptive management and long-term urban forest planning (BAU).	Annual net canopy change; removal vs replacement ratio	Sustained canopy growth trajectory.
Urban innovation and green infrastructure integration	Embed improved soil quality, adequate spacing and deep soil standards in the built environment to support canopy coverage (supports Obj 3).	All new subdivision and building and works applications are designed to achieve 30 per cent canopy at maturity as required by the Greater Geelong Planning Scheme.	14. Update environmentally sustainable design provisions within new precinct structure plans to include canopy percentage calculation methodologies (BAU). 15. Integrate canopy requirements and conditions into development referrals as required by the Greater Geelong Planning Scheme (BAU).	Percent developments meeting canopy standard; soil volume compliance.	Mature canopy sustained in the municipality.
	Deliver shaded active transport corridors (supports Obj 1).	Deliver staged shaded corridor network to 2035	16. Identify and prioritise transport corridors for staged urban greening, canopy expansion and integrated landscape outcomes, and embed canopy planting, understory and green infrastructure into transport, streetscape and public realm upgrades through coordinated environmental capital works investment, including municipal entrance corridors and community planting initiatives (BAU).	km shaded corridor delivered; canopy coverage along routes.	Reduced pedestrian heat exposure; increased active transport.

	Integrate passive irrigation and water-sensitive design (supports Obj 3 and 4).	Passive irrigation integrated into priority streets and precincts.	17. Map stormwater diversion sites (BAU). 18. Deliver pilot passive irrigation projects (BAU:RR).	# sites installed; tree health metrics.	Improved establishment success; reduced flood pressure.
	Expand vertical greening and habitat-rich design (supports Obj 1).	Increase vertical greening coverage across activity areas and industrial areas.	19. Develop Green Factor score for new builds (BAU). 20. Develop incentives for demonstration buildings in industrial areas to better integrate green infrastructure (GF:RR).	m² vertical greening installed; local surface temperature change	Reduced heat load; enhanced biodiversity complexity
	Explore Green My Street AI tool.	Increase participation in tool usage	21. Develop or partner with phone application(s) providers that illustrate greening potential for neighbourhood streets (BAU:RR).	# of users; # of follow-up applications; engagement metrics.	Behavioural shift towards greener streetscapes.
Planning, policy and asset integration	Embed canopy targets into precinct structure planning.	Deliver canopy coverage in growth areas	22. Ensure planning controls developed for Growth Areas deliver the 30 percent target (BAU).	Adoption of appropriate planning scheme provisions	Reduced development-related canopy loss.
	Collaborate with Asset Planners, Capital Works, Assets and Engineering teams to embed green infrastructure and canopy opportunities into infrastructure upgrades and public realm projects (supports Obj 2).	Increase incorporation of canopy, soil volume and passive irrigation opportunities in eligible streetscape, drainage and public realm projects.	23. Establish a collaborative review process between Urban Forest team, and Capital Works and Asset Planners at early project stages to improve consistent tree handover data capture across Council projects (BAU). 24. Develop practical green infrastructure guidance for infrastructure upgrades (BAU). 25. Identify priority corridors where capital works can accelerate canopy growth (BAU:RR).	# of capital works projects incorporating green infrastructure elements; Soil volume increases delivered through infrastructure projects; Passive irrigation opportunities integrated.	Improved tree establishment and canopy growth aligned with infrastructure renewal, reducing retrofit costs and increasing climate resilience.
	Recognise trees and green infrastructure as essential infrastructure assets (supports Obj 4).	Green assets incorporated into asset register with lifecycle costing	26. Update asset management framework, including canopy valuation (BAU).	Asset register updated; lifecycle budgets allocated.	Long-term funding certainty and maintenance stability.

Monitoring, capability and long-term stewardship	Publicly monitor and report urban forest performance (supports Obj 1).	Canopy data updated and reported publicly at least every two years	27. Develop integrated canopy database (BAU). 28. Launch public dashboard to inform community of canopy target progress (BAU).	Dashboard operational; reporting frequency that tracks progress, distribution equity, and heat reduction outcomes in-line with election cycles.	Evidence-based planning; increased transparency.
	Capture and report all greening and carbon data (supports Obj 1).	100 per cent City plantings recorded; annual carbon sequestration reporting.	29. Standardise planting data capture (BAU). 30. Integrate carbon sequestration and storage modelling within Council's urban forest and tree asset data systems to support long-term monitoring, reporting and evidence-based urban greening outcomes (BAU).	Percentage data completeness; estimated tCO ₂ /year.	Accurate carbon accounting; improved investment targeting.
	Strengthen maintenance systems and capability (supports Obj 1 and 2).	≥85 per cent survival rate maintained; reduction in turf-dominated maintenance.	31. Deliver staff and volunteer training to improve planting quality, establishment success and long-term survival rates (BAU). 32. Update biodiversity-focused maintenance protocols (BAU).	Survival rate; turf reduction; operational emissions.	Resilient urban forest; reduced operational emissions.
	Embed the principles and knowledge of the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation Healthy Country Plan into urban forest site planning and stewardship to support Healing Country outcomes (supports Obj 1 and Obj 3).	Integrate culturally informed species selection, landscape management and ecological indicators into urban forest programs. Incorporate Healthy Country principles into priority planting, habitat restoration and stewardship initiatives.	33. Develop Memorandum of Understanding with Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation to inform, guide and participate in proposed urban plantings (BAU). 34. Identify pilot projects that demonstrate Healing Country outcomes within urban landscapes (GF:RR).	Partnership agreement established and active; Inclusion of cultural and ecological indicators within biennial canopy reporting; # of projects co-designed or informed by Wadawurrung knowledge.	Deepened and sustained partnership between Council and Wadawurrung; Contribution to broader Healing Country outcomes across Greater Geelong; Urban Forest management reflects Caring for Country principles; Strengthened biodiversity outcomes informed by Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

CITY OF GREATER GEELONG

WADAWURRUNG COUNTRY

PO Box 104, Geelong VIC 3220

P: 5272 5272

E: contactus@geelongcity.vic.gov.au

www.geelongcity.vic.gov.au

CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

Wurriki Nyal

137-149 Mercer Street, Geelong

8.00am – 5.00pm

LATEST NEWS:

 [@CityofGreaterGeelong](#)

 [@CityofGreaterGeelong](#)

 [CityofGreaterGeelong](#)