

Response to Residential Nature Strip Policy

Friends of Lorne, September 2022

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Context for this response.

Surf Coast Shire Council, Nature Strips Policy principles¹

SCSC's draft policy is based on the following principles. That nature strips:

1. Provide a public space which contributes to sense of place and community.
2. Should be safe and accessible spaces.
3. Contribute to healthy environment for people, plants and animals.
4. Can play an active role in supporting Council's Climate Change response.
5. Play a role for location of essential services.

The draft document contains the following caveat:

The townships within Surf Coast Shire are not all the same and implementing this Policy and its supporting guidelines may not be achievable within some townships, particular Lorne and Aireys Inlet, where the terrain is more challenging

Schedule 2 of the planning document Neighbourhood Character for Lorne² states that

In summary the preferred character may be described as hillsides with a continuous tree canopy within which sit discrete, low scale buildings that are reflective of the town's origins as a popular seaside destination'

Friends of Lorne Response

Problems

The principles as stated are not inconsistent with the policies of FoL, but the associated guidelines for each principle sometimes are. For example,

Nature strips must offer safety for pedestrians and prevent them from having to walk on the road. This may take the form of a constructed pathway or simply a smooth unobstructed path of travel (Principle 2)

Preferred position

In Lorne, we should have '**nature conservation strips**', in recognition of their importance in retaining the neighbourhood character of Lorne. Nature strips, combined with an absence of restrictive fencing, allow people in many parts of Lorne to closely observe the range of animals that choose to visit or inhabit the town. These include threatened species.³

The treed appearance of Lorne is being eroded by loss of space for large trees associated with subdivision and the ever-expanding size of dwellings. Increasingly, the Lorne canopy depends upon trees in nature strips.

Most nature strips in Lorne do not have formed (or unformed) footpaths. People choose to walk along the quiet roads, even in the presence of footpaths or the mown grass nature strips preferred by the SCSC. Statistics suggest the risk to pedestrians on Lorne roads is very low.⁴

¹ <https://www.surfcoast.vic.gov.au/About-us/Your-Say/Draft-Residential-Nature-Strip-Policy-Guidelines>

² http://s3.dpcd.vic.gov.au/planning_scheme_history/2c1614a356366308517afb5f9db8b368.pdf

³ Eg arboreal animals such as the yellow-bellied glider and gang gang cockatoo, and ground dwellers such as the bristle bird

⁴ Between 2020 and 2022 only two accidents involving the hospitalisation of pedestrians were recorded in the entire Surf Coast (from TAC searchable database, <https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/road-safety/statistics>)

Footpath construction would result in removal of some trees and damage to others. It would be inconsistent with the neighbourhood character of Lorne and the values of the Friends of Lorne.

Friends of Lorne suggests that:

- Most ‘carriageways’, although conventionally defined as being for motor vehicles, should in Lorne continue to accommodate the needs of all forms of traffic (pedestrian, bicycle and motor vehicle) without separation. Evidence suggests this is low risk. Risk could be further lowered by measures to slow motor vehicles.
- Major roads, with their high traffic volumes, may warrant somewhat different treatment. Footpaths are present and appropriate along the GOR, although even here people sometimes choose to walk on the road. In some instances, people may use the road because they are not aware that there is a pedestrian route (eg parts of the Deans Marsh Road). Should maps of Lorne indicate walking routes? The need for separate footpaths to serve parts of the Deans Marsh Road should be investigated.
- Nature conservation strips should not prevent people stepping off the road.
- Vegetation in nature conservation strips should not obscure close vision of other road users in a manner that is dangerous. But FoL suggests that vegetation over the 0.5 metres prescribed in the guidelines will often be acceptable.
- Native vegetation in nature conservation strips should be managed in a manner consistent with SCSC policy on ‘Native Vegetation Planning and Protection’,⁵ and the document ‘Landscaping your Surf Coast Garden for Bushfire’.⁶
- Where native trees and shrubs already exist in nature conservation strips, FoL’s preferred position is that they be left in place.
 - Assessment of the existing trees in nature conservation strips should be based on the risk they pose to human life and property, balanced against their roles in moderating urban climate, biodiversity conservation and carbon storage. FoL notes that Council has approved applications to remove trees on the basis of risk even where the application contains no risk assessment (eg 22-0098. FoL notes that tree ‘health’ may be a component of risk, but is not a measure of it).
 - Trees in nature conservation strips should be protected from the activities of builders by enforcement of the Australian AS 4970-2000 (tree protection).⁷ Ideally the standard should also apply to service construction and maintenance, but FoL accepts that this will not always be possible
- Where native shrubs and trees are absent, owners and residents should be encouraged to plant them. In the case of long-lived species, the SCSC guidelines should take into account the suitability of genotypes and species under climate change scenarios.

⁵ <https://www.surfcoast.vic.gov.au/Environment/Natural-environment/Native-Vegetation-Planning-and-Protection#:~:text=If%20you%20are%20within%20a,%20house%20for%20bushfire%20protection.>

⁶ file:///C:/Users/wlush/Downloads/Landscaping_your_Surf_Coast_garden_for_bushfire_-_updated_1_July_2015.pdf

⁷ https://treenet.org/resource/tree-protection-australian-standards-and-the-law-getting-it-right/#elementor-toc__heading-anchor-0