The Draft Sunshine Coast Street Tree Master Plan:

What the community said and how council responded

**The Draft Sunshine Coast Street Tree Master Plan was made available for public display as a part of a program of community engagement for a four week period during November and December of 2017.**

All feedback (community, industry and stakeholder) was carefully reviewed and considered in the closing revision of the plan, endorsed at Council Ordinary Meeting, June 2018.

The community response was generally very positive with over 90% of survey respondents supportive or mostly supportive of the principles and strategies presented in the draft plan, and 87% supportive or mostly supportive of local street tree strategies devised for their localities.

There was unquestionable support for increased street tree numbers with over 97% of respondents attesting to the need for more street tree planting on the Sunshine Coast.

When asked what council was doing well in regard to street tree planting the top three community responses were; master planning 28%, the predominate use of native species 12%, and diversification of the current street tree palette 9%.

When asked where council could improve, top responses identified specific locations in need of new street trees (15%), a preference for the use or discontinued use of specific species (14%), allowance for edible street tree plantings (9%), planting enough trees in the priority locations identified in the plan (9%), planting enough trees in general (9%) and council not doing enough to avoid tree clearing as a part of approved development (8%).

More than 70% of survey respondents said that they believe the most important street tree benefits are environmental (shade, cooling, carbon sequestration, storm water load reduction and food and shelter for wildlife) and footpath shade plantings were rated the highest priority for proactive street tree plantings.

*Council has responded to this feedback by focusing roll-out of the new proactive street tree planting program on the high-use footpath networks identified in the plan’s priority planting mapping. Since commencement of this program council has proactively planted approximately 2200 new trees in streets of the Sunshine Coast.*

Residents of Buderim, Caloundra, Coolum, Kawana Waters and Nambour had the most to say about street trees on the Sunshine Coast and showed the most support for the local street tree planting strategies developed for their locality. There were mixed community responses to questions regarding the types of trees council should be planting, highlighting the fact that opinions and tree species preferences vary.

*As an outcome of the variety of comments received in regard to preference for specific species, council will continue to plant a variety of street tree species in streets of the Sunshine Coast, in consultation with local communities.*

*Good general knowledge of tree types was shown in feedback and suggestions concerning inappropriate species types in particular were incorporated wherever possible.*

*Also in response to the strong community voice on street tree selection, council looked to areas of the plan needing to be clearer about responsible tree selection, remembering the plan was specifically developed to be non-prescriptive in its approach.*

*The* [*species selection guidelines and palettes*](file:///O%3A%5CGraphic%20Design%5CStreet%20Tree%20Master%20Plan%5CTO%20PRINT%5CFiles%20for%20web%20page%20links%5CSpecies%20selection%20guidelines.pdf) *of the plan have been expanded to provide further guidance for users, with greater emphasis on the need for proper site assessment to match the right species to the subject location and the need to avoid species over-use.*

*Similarly, to provide clarity, the plan further details* [*where exotic tree plantings might be appropriate*](file:///O%3A%5CGraphic%20Design%5CStreet%20Tree%20Master%20Plan%5CTO%20PRINT%5CFiles%20for%20web%20page%20links%5Cwhere%20exotic%20tree%20plantings%20might%20be%20appropriate.pdf)*, with a more diverse palette recommended where already existing successfully. A more diverse palette may also be introduced where colour and accent may be beneficial for a variety of reasons, generally in denser urban areas.*

*A description of* [*the need for council to ‘future proof’ its street tree population*](file:///O%3A%5CGraphic%20Design%5CStreet%20Tree%20Master%20Plan%5CTO%20PRINT%5CFiles%20for%20web%20page%20links%5CTrees%20climate%20change.pdf) *by diversifying the existing palette of street trees has been added to the plan’s web page to better explain this key strategy of the plan.*

*Clarity arlound the fact that the palettes are effectively ‘live’ and can be amended over-time has also been made.*

Food streets were strongly supported in feedback and this was the subject of the greatest amount of community criticism of the plan with its stated preference for food trees to be established within community gardens instead of road verges.

*Council will continue to make equitable and responsible tree selection choices in public spaces. In response to community feedback, specific discussions around food or fruit tree plantings in road verges have been removed from the plan, leaving this open to future design.*

Over 87% of respondents supported more street tree planting in landmark locations.

*Since introduction of the street tree program funding, council has planted 120 feature or landmark trees in high impact low conflict potential\* locations across the region as identified in the plan. Roundabouts recently planted with feature trees for example include Yandina to Coolum Road, Yandina; Nambour to Bli Bli Road, Nambour; Coolum Esplanade and Peregian Springs Drive Coolum and Mons and Owen Creek Road, Forest Glen.*

*\*High impact low conflict potential locations consist of highly visible planting sites (roundabouts, intersections, wide verges on busy throughfares for example) that contain enough space for the planting of a single specimen or group of large growing trees without causing any conflicts with surrounding infrastructure.*

Over 177 respondents nominated additional vacant roadside sites for the establishment of landmark trees and 168 respondents suggested specific streets where they would like to see additional street trees planted. Numerous respondents also acknowledged the need for succession plantings in specific foreshore areas of the Sunshine Coast.

*Council has commenced investigation of these sites for future street tree planting potential.*

There was some confusion surrounding the intent of the *Priority planting plans* as the starting point for the proactive street tree planting program by mapping ‘high impact, low conflict’ potential sites in the first instance. Several respondents reported there were not enough trees shown in mapping.

*The where to from here section of the plan’s web page provides an update on how we are tracking with street tree plantings according to the five year timeframe for delivery of sites shown in plan mapping. It also describes how further mapping is to be undertaken and new maps produced by 2023 (five years from the plan’s endorsement date).*

Other feedback received related to the need for better promotion of street trees and more educational opportunities relating to street trees.

*Council has responded by drawing attention, as well as providing quick links to, sections of the plan where popular and critical information can be found on the plan web page.*

*Suggestions for improving plan functionality and use have been addressed with the plan’s web page designed to allow the user to quickly access required information including quick links to the key directions and guidelines for users seeking a ‘speedier reference tool’. Links providing quick access to educational content within the plan also been created including information on* [*the value of trees*](file:///O%3A%5CGraphic%20Design%5CStreet%20Tree%20Master%20Plan%5CTO%20PRINT%5CFiles%20for%20web%20page%20links%5CBenefits%20of%20trees.pdf) *and* [*how trees can cool a warming climate*](file:///O%3A%5CGraphic%20Design%5CStreet%20Tree%20Master%20Plan%5CTO%20PRINT%5CFiles%20for%20web%20page%20links%5CTrees%20and%20temperature.pdf)*.*

Ideas contributed by the Sunshine Coast community to help council promote trees included partnerships with schools, clubs and community groups, competitions and celebrations. In the first of these newly developed tree care partnership projects to start, 136 survey respondents volunteered to partner with council and help care for new street trees as a part of council’s Adopt a Street Tree Program.

*Council has commenced the Adopt a Street Tree Program with several community planting days held already (in addition to planting partnerships with local schools and community planting events such as National Tree Planting Day).*

*The opportunity to register interest in the program will be ongoing and a promotional video has been added to council’s website.*

*Opportunity for businesses and community members to register interest in other tree care partnerships with council are also welcomed. Ideas for future extension of council’s Adopt a Street Tree Program could include Adopt a Fruit Tree, Shade My Sports Ground and Mulch a Mature Tree.*

Industry feedback was included in the final draft of the plan where possible, considering the wider implications and benefits of its inclusion to the Sunshine Coast’s streetscapes as well as the Sunshine Coast community. Most notably, there was a demonstrated misunderstanding of the fundamental aims of reactivation of council’s internal nursery, with feedback expressing concern over perceived competition with local industry and potential loss of business.

*Council looks to lead by example and set the bar higher in relation to the quality and types of street trees available for planting in Sunshine Coast streetscapes.*

*There isn’t capacity (space or resources) for council’s internal nursery to compete against local tree growers and their agents. Council wishes to partner, rather than compete with, local industry to enhance the beauty, functionality, diversity and resilience of Sunshine Coast street tree plantings.*

*Council’s internal nursery reactivation program is now allowing for propagation of local provenance material for numerous tree species, propagation and growing from tube stock species that cannot be externally sourced in larger sizes, and propagation and/or growing on of underutilised species or those new to cultivation for trials (that are once again unavailable for sourcing through local supply networks).*

*Council intends to share results from trials and has effectively created a species wish list in development of species palettes within the plan for local industry and for internal use. Minor revisions to text within the relative sections of the plan have been made to help clarify.*

*In the case of managing planting in new estates via developer contributions, another subject of criticism in the feedback, council does not propose to supply the trees (but will remain open to supplying trees that others cannot).*

*Council is exploring options and pathways for coordinating and overseeing works in this space to ensure the desired street tree aesthetic, canopy cover and health and vitality of its street tree population is achieved in the shortest amount of time possible.*