

Cr Phillip Healey
Mayor
City of Boroondara

Have Your Say: City of Boroondara's Draft Revised Council Plan for 2017-21 and Proposed Budget for 2018-19

Lighter Footprints welcomes the opportunity to comment on the City of Boroondara's draft revised Council Plan for 2017-21 and proposed Budget for 2018-19. These two documents together with other strategic, planning and action documents give important insights into the priorities and operations of our Council. We see the invitation for the community to have their say as a significant contribution to democracy in local government.

What are our concerns?

The revised plan and proposed budget papers state they have been developed to reflect the requirements of the various policy and strategy documents that the City of Boroondara uses to guide its priority setting, decision making and resource allocation. The link with the Community Plan is described in the Proposed Budget Papers as follows¹:

"... the Boroondara Community Plan directly informs the Council Plan including the Long Term Financial Strategy, annual commitments and strategic indicators, and the Municipal Strategic Statement and Council strategies, plans and actions"

Quite a number of the strategies, policy documents and plans that Boroondara has adopted make reference to the Council's commitments and obligations with respect to the environment and climate change. We are disappointed that the Council has not responded to many of these requirements in ways that reflect the urgency of the challenge we are facing on this front. We believe these commitments and obligations should be treated as much more than symbolic demonstrations of the Council's good intentions; they should be integral to all of its decision making.

We are also concerned that the large, showcase projects in the proposed budget come at the expense of smaller scale, community focused measures that could be used to bring about important behavioural change that would give all residents a role to play in managing the risks of climate change.

We recommend that:

The Council use the proposed budget and plan to strengthen its response to climate change. This could involve adapting proposed initiatives or new initiatives that provide greater opportunities for all the community to contribute to the solution. Our submission outlines some specific ways in which this might occur.

We set out below some of the existing Council policies that should be driving actions, and then offer our suggestions on how to better reflect this rhetoric in the proposed actions under this Council Plan and Budget.

¹ <https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-04/proposed-budget-2018-19.pdf>

Strategy and policy commitments that require action on climate change

The strategies, policy documents and plans listed here should be given greater prominence in the formulation of the Budget and council Plan:

The Boroondara Community Plan for 2017 to 2027²

The environment was identified in the Community Plan as a priority theme for Council action over the ten years to 2027. Strategy 3.7 of the plan states that the Council will

“Lead our community through advocacy and action to mitigate against and adapt to impacts of climate change to minimise adverse impacts on community health and wellbeing, our natural environment and facilities and services.”

The Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan which has been incorporated into the Community Plan³

Each municipal council is required to produce a Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan under the provisions of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008⁴. The Climate Change Act 2017⁵ states that Council must have regard to the potential impacts of climate change through any decision made or action taken under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act.

Our Low Carbon Future Strategy and Our Low Carbon Future Strategy – Action Plan Update 2017 to 2020⁶

Under this strategy, Council aims to reduce its corporate greenhouse gas emissions by 30 to 40% below 2007/08 levels by 2020 and to support community emissions abatement through support for community programs and projects.

The strategy lists five principles to guide the selection of the strategy’s targets and priority actions. These include leadership by Council with the community; assuming a moral obligation to act; pursuit of multiple benefits and a 'no regrets' approach to action; action prioritised by impact; and equity in both strategy and action.

Integrated Water Management Strategy 2014 to 2024⁷

The aim of this Integrated Water Management Strategy (IWMS) is to “...set the strategic direction and implementation approach for improving water cycle management across the municipality over the next decade”. The strategy identifies six guiding principles including consideration of the impacts of climate change.

The updated Sustainable Council Buildings Policy⁸

This policy which was published in 2016 “...sets out clear commitments for achieving improved sustainability standards in the way Council’s buildings are planned, designed, built, used and maintained”.

² <https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-03/2017-27-BoroondaraCommunityPlan.pdf>

³ *ibid*

⁴ http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/phawa2008222/

⁵ http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/cca2017109/

⁶ <https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-09/Our-Low-Carbon-Future-Strategy-Action-Plan-Update-2017-2020.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Integrated-water-management-strategy.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Sustainable-Council-Buildings-Policy.pdf>

We note that the Sustainable Council Buildings Policy is developed around the Green Building Council of Australia's definition of what is a sustainable building and makes reference to the GBCA's holistic design framework and assessment tool 'Green Star - Design and As Built'⁹. This tool includes the Green Star rating and certification scheme whereby 4 Star Green Star represents Best Practice; 5 Star Green Star is Australian Excellence and 6 Star Green Star equals World Leadership.

The policy states:

Council buildings will be built, expanded or upgraded to an agreed minimum Sustainability Standard dependent on the nature of the project. For the majority of building projects, the aspiration reflects a minimum Green Star 5-Star (or equivalent) standard. This does not preclude Council deciding to seek a higher standard (e.g. 6 star) on particular projects if supported by a positive feasibility assessment.

The Urban Biodiversity Strategy for Boroondara 2013-2023¹⁰.

The Urban Biodiversity Strategy for Boroondara (UBS) was adopted by Council in June 2013 to "... set the strategic direction for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity in Boroondara". One of the challenges identified was climate change which "...poses very serious threats to biodiversity and ecosystem health both globally and locally. Impacts in urban environments over the next decade are likely to be more subtle and will interact with and may compound other threats to biodiversity conservation."

Sport and Recreation Strategy 2016¹¹

As part of this Strategy, Council has identified 13 principles to guide decision making and allocation of resources including environmental sustainability whereby the Council supports "...the development of sport and recreation initiatives that preserve natural resources and achieve sustainable environmental outcomes".

This is an impressive array of strategies and commitments for ensuring the City of Boroondara undertakes actions that are environmentally sustainable and aimed at addressing climate change. We welcome these stances and encourage the Council to back these sentiments with a strong suite of initiatives that are adequately funded and monitored.

Addressing emissions reduction

We commend the Council on the initiatives it has already taken to reduce carbon emissions and to adapt to the impact of climate change. These include but are not limited to:

- Council support for Victorian Energy Efficiency Target (VEET) upgrades through regional partnership via the Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA) partnership with 'Live Green with Less'
- Completion of the Sustainable Street Lighting bulk changeover which has delivered annual greenhouse savings estimated to be 3700 tonnes CO₂-e

⁹ <https://www.gbca.org.au/green-star/>

¹⁰ <https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Urban-Biodiversity-Strategy-2013-2023.pdf>

¹¹ https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Sport-and-Recreation-Strategy_0.pdf

- Support for community engagement and local grassroots action through workshops and other educational activities

We are concerned, however that there continues to be a shortfall in the Council's achievements with respect to reducing its carbon emissions. The Our Low Carbon Future Strategy (OLCFS) Action Plan Update comments that:

*Regardless of emissions savings achieved from implementing the actions in this plan, there may be a 'savings gap' between Council's actual net emissions in 2020 and the OLCFS target of 30-40% emission reduction. Additional action may be required to close the gap and achieve the target.*¹²

Opportunities for addressing emissions reduction

We note the observation made in the OLCFS Action Plan Update that:

*While energy efficiency works have significantly reduced emissions, this has largely been offset by energy demand from new and upgraded facilities with bigger building footprints providing enhanced services.*¹³

We see this as a significant opportunity in light of the number of major infrastructure projects that are listed in the Council's proposed Budget for 2018-2019.

The major infrastructure projects budgeted for in 2018-2019

The proposed Budget 2018-2019 states that the Council will commence a number of major projects in 2018-2019 for completion in the next few years. These include:

- Kew Recreation Centre redevelopment costing \$58.1 million over four years
- Canterbury Community Hub at \$10.65m over three years
- Camberwell Community Centre at \$7.01m over two years
- Ashburton Seniors Centre at \$7.97m over two years

Each of these projects offers opportunities through their design, construction and operation to reduce carbon emissions and address the impact of climate change.

The Kew Recreation Centre

This project involves both renewal and new construction at the existing recreation Centre and is expected to cost \$58.1 million over four years. It is a huge project representing around 56 per cent of the Council's budgeted and foreshadowed capital works expenditure over the four years from 2018-2019. The cost in the first year is \$150,000. It ramps up to \$2.2 million in the second year (12 per cent of foreshadowed capital works expenditure for that year); \$27.5 million in the third year (83 per cent of foreshadowed capital works expenditure for that year) and for the fourth year \$58.1 million or 73 per cent of foreshadowed capital works expenditure for that year.

How was the decision taken to undertake this project?

We are surprised that so little information is available about such a major project apart from a brief announcement on the Boroondara website¹⁴. There is no mention

¹² <https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-09/Our-Low-Carbon-Future-Strategy-Action-Plan-Update-2017-2020.pdf> pp17

¹³ Ibid pp11

¹⁴ <https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/about-council/council-administration/council-plan-and-budget/revised-council-plan-2017-21-and-proposed-budget-2018-19/new-kew-recreation-centre>

of the project in the Draft Revised Council Plan 2017-2021 and the only information given in the Proposed Budget is the cost associated with the renewal and new construction costs. We have not found any information about what will be done or whether there has been any community consultation about the need for such a large facility and what it will comprise. We are unaware as to whether it has been considered by Councillors at an open Council meeting or how the decision was made to spend such a significant sum of money.

An apparent lack of community consultation

We are extremely concerned by the apparent lack of community consultation on such a significant project. The Budget suggest that funds are coming out of Council funds including rates income and cash reserves. The Borrowing Strategy mentions borrowings to cover other projects but not this particular one. This would suggest that the whole of the municipality is paying for a very high quality facility in an area where the need may not be so great as in less advantaged areas of Boroondara.

An opportunity to meet the Council's carbon emissions reduction targets

As an environment advocacy group, Lighter Footprints is particularly interested in the opportunities that such a project offers to adapt to or mitigate the effects of climate change. These include measures to reduce emissions, increase energy efficiency, manage water usage and provide a demonstration of the commitment that our municipality has to addressing the impact of climate change and contributing to solutions.

We hope that this project will avoid the downsides associated with other recent projects where their carbon footprint has increased over what previously existed either because of the size of the facility or increased energy usage and patronage.

The size of the budget for this project suggests that it will be a very substantial and high-quality facility.

We recommend that:

- The Council aim to achieve a 6 star Green Star Rating (World Standard) for this building in compliance with the City's Sustainable Council Building Policy.
- As part of the design and construction, the Council investigate the use of environmentally sensitive and sustainable construction materials, particularly zero emissions cement and the use of natural refrigerants in the heating and cooling of the building.

Zero Emissions Cement

Modern construction techniques suggest that a facility such as the Kew Recreation Centre is likely to use large volumes of cement.

The environmental impact of cement manufacturing has been widely recognised around the world for many years. We refer you to the 2017 report by Beyond Zero Emissions (BZE) entitled *Rethinking Cement*¹⁵ which sets out the issues around cement production and the degree to which it contributes to increased carbon emissions and other negative environmental effects. Estimates by reliable sources

¹⁵ <http://bze.org.au/rethinking-cement-plan/>

such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development ¹⁶ indicate that cement manufacture is the single biggest industrial producer of emissions and that it causes up to 8 per cent of all global carbon emissions. The industry is rapidly changing as it addresses this problem through new technologies and manufacturing processes.

The use of zero emissions cement offers a number of advantages for this and other construction projects that Boroondara plans to undertake in coming years. These include:

- A major contributor to Boroondara meeting its emissions reduction target
- An opportunity to create an iconic project that attracts visitors interested in the architecture and construction of public buildings that are environmentally sustainable.
- A means to demonstrate the environmental credentials of Boroondara and to attract businesses to the area that share these values and can contribute to the local economy.

For more information on the use of natural refrigerants which can be used instead of the environmentally destructive but commonly used fluorocarbon refrigerant, we suggest you consult the case study report by The Australian Institute of Refrigeration, Air Conditioning and Heating.¹⁷

The issues that we have raised with respect to the Kew Recreation Centre apply equally well to the other major projects that Boroondara is planning over the next few years. We believe that this approach can bring not only environmental benefits but also considerable economic, commercial and social benefits to our community.

We feel a degree of unease with the approach to the provision of sporting facilities that the Kew Recreation Centre epitomises. Such large facilities represent a greater formalisation of physical activity in the form of competitive sport or exercise as an activity done inside. This comes at the expense of less organised activities such as walking, running, cycling or relaxed play in informal surroundings such as a public park or garden.

Other Initiatives the Council should undertake to fulfil its climate change commitments

We note that the Council already has initiatives in the budget to reduce its own emissions and manage its impact on the environment as well as encouraging the community to act in ways that are more environmentally sustainable. We encourage the Council to build on these initiatives and extend its ambition and to investigate what more it can do to help residents to manage the risk and adapt to the impact of climate change.

Measures to reduce carbon emissions in the transport sector

Private transport and especially petrol driven cars are major contributors to carbon emissions that lead to climate change. Accordingly, we welcome the initiatives in the Proposed Budget that pick up the priorities expressed in the Community Plan around

¹⁶ <http://csiprogress2012.org/>

¹⁷ <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/38b4f6fc-9232-49d0-9550-68558bd26978/files/refrigerants-guide.pdf>

travel options that are environmentally sustainable, reduce road congestion and encourage public transport, cycling and walking.

We recommend that:

The Council examine what more can be done to encourage residents to shift to more environmentally sustainable modes of transport.

Initiatives to encourage the uptake of electric vehicles

The role that local government can play in encouraging the uptake of electric vehicles is a question being considered by members of The Climate Action Roundtable, a loose grouping of state governments and local councils who “... *have a common commitment to ambitious climate change action to meet the climate goals laid out in the Paris Agreement, and to a just transition to low carbon societies.*” This issue was also covered in a recent report by the consultancy firm PTC to a Sydney Council¹⁸ which demonstrated that local governments are well placed to assist in the phasing out of petrol and diesel road vehicles. The report points out that one of the major barriers to the uptake of electric vehicles is anxiety over the vehicle’s driving range.

It needs to be recognised that, while electric vehicles will play a major role in reducing carbon emissions in the transport sector, they still suffer from other environmental disadvantages associated with private cars, such as the need for large amounts of land for car parking and a reduced focus on public transport. This is one of the aspects that should be covered by an Electric Vehicles Strategy.

We recommend that:

The Council implement a range of initiatives to encourage the uptake of electric vehicles:

- electrification of City’s car and service fleet vehicles;
- preferential parking for electric vehicles;
- mandating provision of battery recharging points in new public buildings;
- provision of funding to develop an Electric Vehicles Strategy

Alternative modes of transport

Walking and bicycle riding are important ways to shift people out of their cars into more environmentally sustainable modes of transport. The goal of the Boroondara Bicycle Strategy 2008¹⁹ is to “...*increase the number of cyclists using Boroondara’s bicycle network and facilities*”.

An important but often unacknowledged group of cyclists are disabled riders who cycle regularly to commute and to maintain their health and fitness.

We recommend that:

The Council make provision in the Budget to examine the bicycle network in Boroondara to identify barriers to participation by disabled riders or hazards that make their journeys more difficult.

The Bicycle Strategy notes that:

¹⁸ <https://www.parking.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/White-Paper-Electric-vehicles-in-Australia.pdf>

¹⁹ https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-11/Boroondara_Bicycle_Strategy_Sept_2008_FINAL.pdf

Gaps in infrastructure also form a high infrastructure priority. Cycling counts indicate that off-road cycling routes attract much higher numbers of cyclists than onroad routes. Furthermore, off road routes tend to attract novice cyclists, and may therefore encourage more people to ride. Accordingly, off-road infrastructure has been prioritised under the Strategy as this provides the greatest potential to attract new cyclists.

We recommend that:

The Council respond to this identified infrastructure priority by making budgetary provision for an off road 'trail' from Box Hill to Hawthorn.

The environmental importance of tree cover to Boroondara

Trees are an essential element of this municipality not only because they retain the traditional nature of the area but also because they contribute to the health and wellbeing of our community and play a significant role in combatting climate change. Amongst their many environmental benefits, they are a major force in reducing carbon emissions and easing the 'heat island' effect of cities.

Strong community concern continues to be expressed about the decline in the tree cover in Boroondara. Anecdotal evidence indicates that canopy tree cover has fallen since the Tree Protection Local Law was first introduced in 2006 and that this decline appears to have continued since the current local law was introduced in 2016.

We currently have no accurate measure of tree cover in municipality on either private or public land nor is there any reliable record of the decline over time. It is essential that we establish a baseline and a means to measure change over time.

We recommend that:

- The Council make budgetary provision so that the existing tree cover can be documented and an investigation undertaken into the effect of climate change on the health and diversity of the vegetation cover throughout the municipality. This would include the identification of ways to preserve the existing trees and other plant life, establishing regimes to protect immature trees and choosing plant and tree species best suited to the changing environment.
- The Council ensure that existing funding for maintenance of parks and gardens is made available to increase the planting of trees that can withstand the impacts of climate change such as drought and heat stress better than many of the species currently growing in the area.
- The Council investigate the potential for 'green roofs' either within existing funding or through an additional allowance.

Staffing levels

The Draft Plan indicates that the Environment and Sustainability Section of the Council will have 246.3 FTE employees in 2018-2019 and slightly more in later years. No indication is given as to how these resources are allocated over the tasks undertaken by this area of responsibility.

We recommend that:

The Council expand the number of employees working on matters such as the enforcement of the Tree Protection Local Law to ensure that all breaches of this regulation are identified and policed.

Omissions in the Draft Revised Council Plan

The Draft Revised Plan notes that it was created amidst a number of external challenges. However, the Plan fails to acknowledge the challenge that will have the most significant effect on Council operations over the long term. No longer a distant threat, climate change is already influencing our immediate surroundings and without immediate intervention will lead to significant dislocation in the way we live our lives and conduct our economic and social activities.

Extreme weather events with torrential downpours and flooding, extended periods of high temperatures and changes to our weather patterns are becoming more apparent. As a first responder in times of emergency, local government will need to make increased provision in its budgets and resource allocations to ensure local infrastructure is capable of dealing with these effects. Broken street and path surfaces, overloaded stormwater systems, damaged bridges, flooding of buildings and drought affected parks and gardens are only some of the damage that will accompany such extreme events.

Reporting on progress and performance

We support the inclusion of Outcome Indicators that measure community satisfaction with environmental sustainability and the Council's achievements in reducing carbon emissions with respect to Council owned and Council related activities. We note that the indicators for Outputs measure only waste management and biodiversity.

We recommend that:

- The outcome indicators be expanded to measure satisfaction with initiatives that the Council has taken to assist the community to respond to climate change.
- Other output measures be included such as:
 - changes in the City's car fleet (numbers, emissions level);
 - uptake of electric vehicles and development of related infrastructure;
 - increases in planting of more appropriate vegetation – resilient to extremes;
 - number of large trees removed and prevented from being removed across the community;
 - uptake of solar panels, both on council buildings and within the community;
 - number of 6 + star homes and commercial buildings being built in the community;
 - number of developments of medium to high density around transport nodes;
 - the number of new or improved bike paths

Recommendations

Throughout our submission, we have made recommendations regarding budgetary funding and other issues. These recommendations are brought together here:

1. Overview
 - a. The Council use the proposed budget and plan to strengthen its response to climate change. This could involve adapting proposed initiatives or new initiatives that provide greater opportunities for all the community to contribute to the solution.
2. Major infrastructure projects - building design and construction
 - a. The Council aim to achieve a 6 star Green Star Rating (World Standard) for Kew Recreation Centre in compliance with the City's Sustainable Council Building Policy.
 - b. As part of the design and construction, the Council investigate the use of environmentally sensitive and sustainable construction materials, particularly zero emissions cement and the use of natural refrigerants in the heating and cooling of the building.
3. Emissions reduction in the transport sector
 - a. The Council examine additional ways to encourage residents to switch to more environmentally sustainable modes of transport
 - b. The Council implement a range of initiatives to encourage the uptake of electric vehicles including electrification of City's car and service fleet vehicles; preferential parking for electric vehicles; mandating provision of battery recharging points in new public buildings; and provision of funding to develop an Electric Vehicles Strategy
4. Alternative modes of transport
 - a. The Council make provision in the Budget to examine the bicycle network in Boroondara to identify barriers to participation by disabled riders or hazards that make their journeys more difficult.
 - b. The Council make budgetary provision for an off road 'trail' from Box Hill to Hawthorn.
5. Environmental importance of trees
 - a. The Council make budgetary provision so that the existing tree cover can be documented and an investigation undertaken into the effect of climate change on the health and diversity of the vegetation cover throughout the municipality. This would include the identification of ways to preserve the existing trees and other plant life, establishing regimes to protect immature trees and choosing plant and tree species best suited to the changing environment.
 - b. The Council ensure that existing funding for maintenance of parks and gardens is made available to increase the planting of trees that can withstand the impacts of climate change such as drought and heat stress better than many of the species currently growing in the area.
 - c. The Council investigate the potential for 'green roofs' either within existing funding or through an additional allowance.
 - d. The Council expand the number of employees working on matters such as the enforcement of the Tree Protection Local Law to ensure that all breaches of this regulation are identified and policed.

6. Measurement of Outcomes and Outputs

- a. The outcome indicators be expanded to measure satisfaction with initiatives that the Council has taken to assist the community to respond to climate change.
- b. Other output measures be included such as:
 - changes in the City's car fleet (numbers, emissions level);
 - the uptake of electric vehicles and the development of related infrastructure;
 - increases in planting of more appropriate vegetation – resilient to extremes;
 - the number of large trees removed and prevented from being removed across the community;
 - the uptake of solar panels, both on council buildings and within the community;
 - the number of 6 + star homes and commercial buildings being built in the community;
 - the number of developments of medium to high density around transport nodes;
 - the number of new or improved bike paths

We thank you for facilitating community consultation on the Plan and Budget and would welcome the opportunity to further discuss these matters with Councillors and Council officers.

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