CM13.7. Revised Draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan

DATE	15 November 2023	**FIL REFERENCE**	FIL18/02617
CONFIDENTIAL	No		
FURTHER ENQUIRIES	David Costello City Landscapes	**PHONE**	6023 8111
AUTHOR	Nerilee Kerslake		

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a summary of the feedback and recommendations received on the Draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan from the Community Advisory Panel, and to present to Council the final version of the Draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan for endorsement (see Attachment 1).

Background

Eastern Hill Reserve, including Devils Glen and Doctors Point Reserve, is a 77-hectare reserve that is zoned both C2 (Environmental Conservation) and RE1 (Public Recreation). It is located to the east of Central Albury, adjacent to the localities of East Albury, Mungabareena Reserve, Doctors Point and Eastern View Estate. It is currently accessed by residents and visitors for predominantly passive recreational purposes such as bushwalking. The Eastern Hill Rotary Lookout is a well-known vantage point to take in the views of Albury and its surrounding landscapes, including Mungabareena Reserve which has significant cultural value, being declared an 'Aboriginal Place' in 2016.

Eastern Hill does not currently have an endorsed master plan to guide the future use, management and proposed activation of the site. The need for a master plan has become a priority following feedback from the community and the Albury Rotary Club requesting improvement to the facilities and offerings. There is also interest in the addition of a small mountain bike network at Eastern Hill, which was identified as a key recommendation within the 2021 Albury Mountain Bike Strategy. Consequently, it was proposed to prepare a master plan for the site with the following objectives:

- to improve the existing user experience through sensitive activation within the Reserve and on Eastern Hill, which is in direct response to community feedback regarding the poor state of facilities in the area;
- to give effect to the Albury Mountain Bike Strategy, which included a recommendation to consider the establishment of a trail network at Eastern Hill as a short-term priority; and
- to improve the interface with the Hume and Hovell Walking Track and improve linkages with Mungabareena Reserve.

A Request for Quotation to develop the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan was advertised in February 2022 with local landscape architecture firm, Yonder Landscape Architecture, awarded the project.

To ensure the community had input into the development of some preliminary concepts for the draft Master Plan, an initial 'Have your Say' process was undertaken in early 2022 to ask the community how they use Eastern Hill Reserve and what they see as the key opportunities and issues of using Eastern Hill. The campaign received 1,269 visits to the page, and 554 contributions from 519 contributors.

A summary of the key messages from the community during the initial 'Have your Say' were as follows:

- most people use Eastern Hill for walking (311 users), and to a lesser extent bike riding (301 users);
- many people found uneven trail quality that is poorly marked and overgrown with plants (vegetation) as the biggest barriers to accessing Eastern Hill;
- the scenic views, the walking trails, bushland setting, and the Lookout were identified as the best things about Eastern Hill;
- trails and amenities were identified as the areas that most needed improvement;
- many people were keen to see additional tree planting and revegetation;
- 73.31% of respondents were in support of the development of mountain bike trails; and
- 36.46% of respondents lived in East Albury.

In addition to the initial 'Have your Say' process, some additional community and stakeholder engagement was undertaken. This included informal meetings with the Albury Rotary Club (who originally established the Eastern Hill Rotary Lookout), Aboriginal Elders from the Mungabareena Aboriginal Place Management Group, the Albury Wodonga Mountain Bikers Club (AWMTB), as well as inviting feedback from some adjoining landowners.

The resulting feedback from the 'Have your Say' process and stakeholder engagement was then used to develop preliminary concepts that were included within the initial draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan. The Draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan was presented to Council on 8 August 2022, whereby Council resolved to place the draft on public exhibition for a total of 56 days to allow the community to provide further input into the draft Master Plan. During this 56-day public exhibition period, AlburyCity conducted four community information sessions dedicated to Eastern Hill engagement. Two were held at the AlburyCity administration building, one at QEII Square and one at the Eastern Hill Rotary Lookout. The first community information session held at the AlburyCity administration building had approximately 40 people in attendance, the second session was attended by approximately 35 people. The pop-up session at QEII Square had approximately 65 people in attendance and the on-site Eastern Hill session had approximately 50 people in attendance.

At the close of the 56-day public exhibition period, the community responded with 606 submissions, received from 522 separate contributors. Due to the considerable number of submissions received, and the extensive amount of community interest generated through the public exhibition period, Council Officers engaged an independent consultant, Lightbulb Consulting, to review and evaluate the public submissions to better understand the extent of community support (or otherwise) for the draft Master Plan and various proposed elements.

A further report, outlining the feedback received during public exhibition and results of the independent review, was then presented to Council on 11 April 2023, with some of the key themes including:

- general support for proposed infrastructure improvements;
- concerns at the impact of mountain bike riding;
- concerns about the consultation process;
- supportive of improved accessibility from a disability and pram perspective; and
- support for revegetation and efforts to maintain and improve native vegetation and habitat.

The results of the public exhibition contrasted to some of the findings from the initial 'Have Your Say', with the perceived impact of mountain biking the most dominant and contentious element identified during public exhibition. Whilst there was significant opposition to mountain biking elements of the draft Master Plan, it was also noted there were many people who were supportive of infrastructure improvements, including the upgrade of the Rotary and Trig Point Lookouts, walking trail improvements, improved access, and parking and upgrades of amenities such as toilets and BBQ provision. Many respondents felt these infrastructure improvements would result in improved accessibility and provide benefits for the broader community.

The results from the public submissions indicated that 32% of people were typically supportive of the draft Master Plan, with 36% opposed to the draft Master Plan, and 32% of respondents either neutral or seeking some changes to the draft Master Plan. Based on the diversity of results and feedback received, it was evident that further refinements to the draft Master Plan would be required to alleviate some of the community concerns and better align with broader community aspirations for the area.

On this basis, Council resolved to establish an Advisory Panel, represented by key community stakeholders, to collaborate on Master Plan refinements and recommend proposed changes to the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan for further consideration by Council. The Advisory Panel would have a tenure of up to three months and be governed by the Terms of Reference, which was endorsed as part of the Council resolution. The following stakeholder groups were included on the Advisory Panel:

- AlburyCity Access Committee (1 representative);
- AlburyCity Councillors (2 representatives);
- Albury Wodonga Mountain Bikers Club (AWMTB) (1 representative);
- Friends of Eastern Hill (1 representatives);
- Mungabareena Aboriginal Place Management Group (1 representative);
- Rotary Club of Albury (1 representative);
- Sustainability Advisory Committee (1 representative); and
- Youth Council (1 representative).

This report now seeks to summarise the feedback and recommendations received from the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan (EHAMP) Advisory Panel and identifies a range of Master Plan refinements for further consideration by Council.

Issues

The Council-endorsed Terms of Reference set out the scope for the EHAMP Advisory Panel to ensure that discussion remained focused on the key issues identified by the community in the feedback collected through the public exhibition period. The key elements to be considered by the Panel included:

- the size and scope of Trig Point infrastructure (draft Master Plan Recommendation 15);
- the proposed re-alignment of the Hume and Hovell, Track including Kiewa Valley lookout provisions (draft Master Plan Recommendations 21 and 22);
- traffic, pedestrian access and parking (draft Master Plan Recommendations 8, 9, 10 and 18);
- inclusion and size of mountain bike trails and associated infrastructure (draft Master Plan Recommendations 12, 13 and 23); and
- ecological restoration (draft Master Plan Recommendations 24, 25, General 1, and General 4).

The EHAMP Advisory Panel held its first meeting on 24 May 2023 and subsequently met twice per month on five occasions over a 12-week period. EHAMP Advisory Panel meetings were facilitated by an independent third party, with key AlburyCity staff attending to provide information only to the EHAMP Advisory Panel members. A summary of the Panel discussions and status of each item at the conclusion of the Panel meetings is tabulated below.

Item	**Master Plan Recommendation**		**Advisory Panel outcomes**
	#	**Description**	
Trig Point	15	Improve the Trig Point Lookout.	**Consensus was reached** on the following: • The scale of the Trig Point layout was considered appropriate to facilitate circulation of people of all abilities, noting there would be opportunities for refinement as part of detailed design process. • Inclusion of interpretive signage is considered essential to facilitate story-telling, identify key landscape features, and support education and connection to place. • Where possible, use natural materials and other materials that will 'sit lightly' within the landscape.
Hume and Hovell Track	21	Highlight the view to Kiewa Valley and Alps.	**Consensus was reached** on the following key initiatives: • Amend wording in the Master Plan to retain the existing memorial seat. • Enhance the lookout area with additional facilities. For example, picnic tables, furniture, additional seating and revegetation. • Area not to be overdeveloped.

Item	Master Plan Recommendation		Advisory Panel outcomes
	#	Description	
	22	Re-align the Hume and Hovell Track.	**Consensus was reached** on the following key initiatives: • All abilities access to the Trig Point is important with the provision of a 3m wide sealed path from the car park to the Trig Point. • Walking tracks should prohibit vehicular access, with the exception of emergency and maintenance access. • The Hume and Hovell Track at the southern end needs further consideration, including connection with the Lookout and access to Mungabareena Reserve. • Minor improvements to the section of track from the Trig Point to the Kiewa Valley Lookout – not sealed. • Realignment of the Hume and Hovell Track to connect to Easternview Estate was well supported. • Generally the current number of walking tracks is considered sufficient. • Realigning the walking track near the car park to improve pedestrian safety is well supported.
Traffic, Pedestrian access and parking	8	Improve traffic safety on East Street.	**Consensus was reached** on the following: • Intention is to provide a traffic treatment to slow traffic to allow pedestrians to cross safely across East Street. • Details of the exact traffic treatment will be ascertained at the design phase and involve traffic counts, surveys, detailed planning and design. • Recommend shading the area over the 'roundabout' and noting that final traffic treatment requires further investigation to determine most appropriate intervention.
	9	Redefine the vehicular entry to the Lookout car park.	**Consensus was reached** on the following key initiatives: • Intention of moving the entrance point is to separate the pedestrian and vehicle traffic to ensure safety for all users. • The details of the entry and exact traffic treatment will be ascertained at the design phase and involve traffic counts, surveys, detailed planning and design. • Recommend shading the area over the 'roundabout' and noting that final traffic treatment requires further investigation to determine most appropriate intervention.

Item	Master Plan Recommendation		Advisory Panel outcomes
	#	Description	
	10	Rationalise car parking.	**Consensus was reached** on the following key initiatives: • The draft plan has been designed to best utilise the current hard-stand area, without encroaching or expanding further into sensitive environmental areas. • There was general agreement that the proposed design would be adequate, with additional overflow parking options to be considered in the design phase (if required). • Vandalism – agree with inclusion of adequate lighting and CCTV. Consideration should also be given to inclusion of gates that could allow potential closure of lookout at night (if required).
	18	Improve safety and access for pedestrians along Doctors Point Road.	**Consensus was reached** on the following: • Intention is to separate active transport users (pedestrians/cyclists) from motor vehicles along Doctors Point Road, noting current environmental constraints that would be subject to further investigations at time of future road upgrade.
Mountain Biking	23	Develop an MTB trail network.	**No consensus was reached.** • Three panel members were very supportive of inclusion of mountain bike trails. • One panel member is somewhat supportive of the inclusion of mountain bike trails. • One panel member is open to inclusion of dedicated mountain bike trails but not necessarily those proposed, in order to minimise environmental impact. • Two panel members strongly opposed to mountain bike trail network.
	12	Designate MTB gatherings/ events	**No consensus was reached.** As above.
	13	Separate MTB users from other park users.	**No consensus was reached.** As above. Note: If a land bridge is included within the Master Plan, it would require softening and screening.

Item	Master Plan Recommendation		Advisory Panel outcomes
	#	Description	
Ecological Restoration	24	Restore the ecology as part of the MTB trail network development.	**There was unanimous support** for restoring the ecology of the area, regardless of whether mountain bike trails go ahead. **Consensus was reached** to have a stand-alone action relating to ecological restoration and the development of a vegetation management plan for the Reserve.
	25	Protect the cultural and natural values of Mungabareena Reserve.	**Consensus was reached** to remove reference to the MTB car park within this recommendation, noting that all other elements in Mungabareena Reserve would require consideration by the Mungabareena Aboriginal Place Management Group, which will be undertaken as part of the Mungabareena Reserve Master Plan development.
	G1	Protect adjacent residents from bushfire risk by maintaining a clear zone along Reserve boundaries.	**Consensus was reached** to change the wording to 'Protect adjacent residents from bushfire risk by maintaining in accordance with the Hume Zone Bushfire Risk Management Plan'.
	G4	Improve ongoing maintenance by implementing Council's maintenance regime for high profile sites.	**Consensus was reached** to change the wording to 'Improve ongoing maintenance by implementing Council's maintenance regime for high profile sites at the car park and Rotary Lookout, with the balance of the Reserve managed on an occasional basis (subject to seasonal demands)'.

Proposed Master Plan Amendments

Based on the discussions and feedback received from the EHAMP Advisory Panel, and from a review of the feedback received by the community during the public exhibition phase, several amendments have been identified and included within a revised Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan (Attachment 1).

The proposed Master Plan refinements include 14 specific amendments to several of the Master Plan recommendations, which have been summarised in the table below.

Draft Master Plan Recommendation	Status	Proposed Master Plan Amendments
8. Improve traffic safety on East Street Develop a roundabout, including raised pedestrian crossings, refuge islands and line marking at the intersection of East and Walsh Streets.	PROPOSED CHANGE	*AMEND RECOMMENDATION TO:* **8. Improve traffic safety on East Street** Further investigate an appropriate traffic treatment at the intersection of Walsh and East Streets to allow pedestrian to cross safely. *Note - 'East Street Intersection and Entry Plan' Access Improvements Drawing has been updated to reflect this change.*
9. Redefine the vehicular entry to the Lookout car park Remove existing entry of the access road at East Street and revegetate. Provide a new 2-way road access from the proposed roundabout through possible land acquisition. Retain part of the existing road and widen to accommodate 2-way traffic. Consider closing off access into the Reserve after dark.	PROPOSED CHANGE	*AMEND RECOMMENDATION TO:* **9. Redefine the vehicular entry to the Lookout car park** Remove existing entry off East Street and revegetate. Investigate a new 2-way road access from the intersection of East and Walsh Streets, with an appropriate traffic treatment to be determined during the design stage. Retain part of the existing road and investigate widening to accommodate 2-way traffic. Consider closing off access after dark. *Note - 'Rotary Lookout Concept' Drawing has been updated to reflect this change.*
10. Rationalise car parking Provide a one-way loop to access the car park with designated 15 spaces + 2 disabled spaces. Include solar powered lighting and consider CCTV.	PROPOSED CHANGE	*AMEND RECOMMENDATION TO:* **10. Rationalise car parking** Provide a one-way loop to access the car park with 15 designated spaces and 2 accessible spaces. Include solar powered lighting, consider CCTV and the inclusion of gates that can allow for potential closure of car park after hours. *Note - 'Rotary Lookout Concept' Drawing has been updated to reflect this change.*

Draft Master Plan Recommendation	Status	Proposed Master Plan Amendments
12. Designate MTB gatherings/events Provide a designated trail head gathering space (with paved area, signage and shelter) on the west side of the car park, away from other park users.	PROPOSED CHANGE	*AMEND RECOMMENDATION TO:* **12. Provision of dedicated bike facilities** Provide dedicated bike facilities (with paved area and signage) on the western side of the car park, away from other users. *Note - 'Rotary Lookout Concept' Drawing has been updated to reflect this change.*
13. Separate MTB users from other park users Where possible, separate walkers from mountain bike users. This could include a land bridge to create grade separation.	PROPOSED CHANGE	*AMEND RECOMMENDATION TO:* **13. Improve accessibility** Include a land bridge to create grade separation and improve accessibility to the Trig Point. Will be suitably screened to sit lightly in the landscape. *Note - 'Land Bridge Plan' Access Improvements Drawing has been updated to reflect this change.*
15. Improve the Trig Point Lookout Rationalise access and provide an equal access path, alternative step access and path leading to the south. Develop a viewing and resting space with feature paving, seating and interpretive signage.	PROPOSED CHANGE	*AMEND RECOMMENDATION TO:* **15. Improve the Trig Point Lookout** Rationalise access and provide equal access path between the Lookout car park and the Trig Point. Develop a viewing and resting space with feature paving, seating and interpretative signage. *Note - 'Trig Point Lookout' Drawing has been updated and stair access removed to reflect this change.*
18. Improve safety and access for pedestrians along Doctors Point Road Provide a cantilevered boardwalk (permeable mesh construction) with handrails and balustrade.	PROPOSED CHANGE	*AMEND RECOMMENDATION TO:* **18. Improve safety and access for pedestrians along Doctors Point Road** Provide a cantilevered boardwalk (permeable mesh construction) with handrails and balustrade, subject to further environmental investigations and approvals. *Note - The 'Overall Master Plan' Drawing has been updated to reflect this change.*

Draft Master Plan Recommendation	Status	Proposed Master Plan Amendments
21. Highlight the view to Kiewa Valley and Alps Replace the existing seat with new furniture and interpretive signage.	PROPOSED CHANGE	*AMEND RECOMMENDATION TO:* **21. Highlight the view to Kiewa Valley and Alps** Retain the existing memorial seat and enhance the Lookout area with understorey revegetation, subtle furniture/ seating to allow multiple users to enjoy the Kiewa Valley Lookout. *Note - The 'Overall Master Plan' Drawing has been updated to reflect this change.*
22. Re-align the Hume and Hovell Track Develop a new alignment for the Hume and Hovell Track, which is separated from MTB trail network, vehicular movement routes, and is clearly signed for improved legibility.	PROPOSED CHANGE	*AMEND RECOMMENDATION TO:* **22. Re-align the Hume and Hovell Track** Realign the northern section of the Hume and Hovell Track to create an off-road trail from the Lookout car park to connect with Eastern View Estate. Investigate the realignment of the southern section of the Hume and Hovell Track, which is separate from any bike network, and improves the connection between Mungabareena Reserve and the Kiewa Valley Lookout. *Note - 'East Street Intersection and Entry Plan' and the 'Overall Master Plan' Drawings have been updated to reflect this change.*
23. Develop an MTB trail network Construct a small network of trails, as per the MTB Strategy, to be developed over a number of years.	PROPOSE CHANGE	*AMEND RECOMMENDATION TO:* **23. Develop a shared use trail network** Construct a small network of flow trails (1 ascending and 2 descending trails) which should be designed for multiple users including bike riders, runners and walkers. *Note - The 'Overall Master Plan' Drawing has been updated to reflect this change, which represents a reduction in the number of initially proposed MTB trails from five dedicated MTB trails to three shared use trails.*

Draft Master Plan Recommendation	Status	Proposed Master Plan Amendments
24. Restore the ecology as part of the MTB trail network development Plant local species in 'fingers', creating habitat links from ridgeline to river. Revegetation will be designed to control MTB movement and help reduce erosion.	PROPOSE CHANGE	*AMEND RECOMMENDATION TO:* **24. Restore the ecology of Eastern Hill** Prepare a vegetation management plan for the reserve that provides guidance on the restoration and ongoing management of vegetation and habitat utilised by native flora and fauna. *Note - The 'Overall Master Plan' Drawing has been updated to reflect this change.*
25. Protect the cultural and natural values of Mungabareena Reserve Utilise the existing car park off Doctors Point Road as a secondary MTB user access/pick up point. Install boulders and plantings to restrict vehicular access beyond the road. Remove informal tracks and undertake a revegetation program. Consider replacement of the existing footbridge.	PROPOSED CHANGE	*AMEND RECOMMENDATION TO:* **25. Protect the cultural and natural values of Mungabareena Reserve** Consult with the Mungabareena Aboriginal Place Management Group, as part of the development of the Mungabareena Reserve Master Plan, to improve connections from Mungabareena to Eastern Hill for all users. *Note - The 'Overall Master Plan' Drawing has been updated to reflect this change.*
GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS		
Protect adjacent residents from bushfire risk by maintaining a clear zone along reserve boundaries.	PROPOSED CHANGE	*AMEND WORDING TO:* Protect adjacent residents from bushfire risk by maintaining reserve boundaries in accordance with the Hume Zone Bushfire Risk Management Plan. (Remove reference to "Clear Zone".)
Improve ongoing maintenance by implementing Council's maintenance regime for high profile sites.	PROPOSED CHANGE	*AMEND WORDING TO:* Improve the ongoing maintenance by implementing Council's maintenance regime for high-profile areas at the car park and Rotary Lookout, with the balance of the Reserve to be managed on an occasional basis (subject to seasonal demands).

The proposed Master Plan changes identified above seek to address some of the key concerns identified by the community during public exhibition, particularly those concerns relating to mountain biking, which was a polarising issue for the community. The key proposed change has been the removal of dedicated trail facilities for mountain bikers, and a reduction in the number of initially proposed MTB trails from five dedicated MTB trails to three shared use trails. The newly proposed shared use trails would have an average gradient of 6-10% which makes them ideally suited for a range of users including walkers, runners and bike riders.

The inclusion of shared use trails would allow different users to co-exist, which is achieved through good design, education and appropriate signage. Shared use trails are becoming increasingly popular around the world as they include many benefits including:

- a shared use trail accommodates the needs of most users;
- a shared use trail system disperses users across the area;
- sharing trails builds a trail community;
- shared trails are the most cost-effective trails for land managers; and
- shared trails enhance/increase peer regulation of the shared resource.

Community Consultation

A summary of the community engagement activities undertaken to date, as part of the development of the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan, are outlined below.

Have your Say

An initial 'Have your Say' process was open from 25 January 2022 to 16 February 2022. This 'Have your Say' process had 554 contributions from 519 different contributors. In addition to the initial 'Have your Say' process, some additional community and stakeholder engagement was undertaken with the Master Plan Consultant. This included informal meetings with the Albury Rotary Club (who originally established the Eastern Hill Lookout), Aboriginal Elders from the Mungabareena Aboriginal Place Management Group, the Albury Wodonga Mountain Bikers Club (AWMTB), as well as inviting feedback from some adjoining landowners.

This resulting feedback from the 'Have your Say' process and preliminary stakeholder engagement was then utilised to develop initial draft concepts that were included within the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan. This draft Master Plan was subsequently presented to Council on Monday 8 August 2022, whereby Council resolved to place the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan on public exhibition for 56 days (double the minimum 28-day standard period).

Public Exhibition

There was extensive promotion of the draft Master Plan during the public exhibition period, which included:

- onsite signage at all formal entrances to Eastern Hill Reserve;
- promotion on Council's website;
- dedicated social media promotions; and
- extensive traditional media coverage.

In addition, there were four community information sessions facilitated by AlburyCity that were attended by over 100 community members. Two sessions were conducted in the Robert Brown Room at the AlburyCity administration building, one was held at QEII Square and one at the Rotary Lookout on Eastern Hill. All of these sessions were well attended by the community.

At the conclusion of the public exhibition period, the community response included 606 responses from 522 contributors, noting that multiple contributions from the same author were collated into a single response.

Due to the significant number of submissions received, and the extensive amount of community interest generated through the public exhibition period, Council officers engaged an independent consultant, Lightbulb Consulting, to review and evaluate the public submissions to better understand the extent of community support (or otherwise) for the draft Master Plan.

Based on the independent review, the consultant concluded the following from the public submissions:

- 17.6% were strongly for the proposal;
- 14.2% generally for the proposal;
- 4.4% for proposal but with changes;
- 19% were neutral;
- 8.4% were against proposal but could support it with changes;
- 29.3% were generally, against proposal; and
- 7.1% were strongly against proposal.

The results, when aggregated, suggested that 32% of people were typically supportive of the draft Master Plan, with 36% opposed to the draft Master Plan, and 32% of respondents either neutral or seeking some changes to the draft Master Plan. The results of this evaluation suggested that the inclusion of mountain biking was clearly the most contentious element within the draft Master Plan.

Council was presented with a summary of the feedback and results of the public exhibition at the Council meeting on 11 April 2023. Acknowledging the diverse input and feedback from the community on the draft Master Plan, Council resolved to establish a Community Advisory Panel to collaborate on Master Plan refinements for further consideration by Council.

Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan Advisory Panel

The Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan Advisory Panel was established for a period of three months and governed by a Terms of Reference that was endorsed by Council on 11 April 2023. Membership of the Advisory Panel included:

- AlburyCity Access Committee (1 representative);
- AlburyCity Councillors (2 representatives);
- Albury Wodonga Mountain Bikers (1 representative);
- Friends of Eastern Hill (1 representative);
- Mungabareena Aboriginal Place Management Group (1 representative);
- Rotary Club of Albury (1 representative);
- Sustainability Advisory Committee (1 representative); and
- Youth Council (1 representative).

The Advisory Panel was convened on five occasions from 24 May to 26 July 2023, and the key elements considered by the Panel included:

- traffic, pedestrian access and parking (draft Master Plan Recommendations 8, 9, 10 and 18);
- inclusion and size of mountain bike trails and associated infrastructure (draft Master Plan Recommendations 12, 13 and 23);
- the size and scope of Trig Point infrastructure (draft Master Plan Recommendation 15);
- the proposed re-alignment of the Hume and Hovell Track including Kiewa Valley lookout provisions (draft Master Plan Recommendations 21 and 22); and
- ecological restoration (draft Master Plan Recommendations 24, 25, and General Recommendation 1 and General Recommendation 4).

A strong theme that underpinned the Advisory Panel discussions was accessibility, with Panel members reiterating the importance of the Reserve being accessible to all community members. Through these discussions, consensus was reached on five of the six areas (as previously identified earlier within this report), with the potential inclusion of mountain biking the one area where consensus was not reached. A compromise involving a reduced number of mountain bike trails was identified by Albury Wodonga Mountain Bikers, with a proposed reduction in the number of trails from five to three trails (one ascending and two descending), however this compromise also did not achieve consensus by all Panel members.

Dyirramalang Wiradjuri Elders Group

On 12 September 2023, Council Officers met with the Dyirramalang Wiradjuri Elders Group to discuss some of the concerns they had identified in relation to the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan (Attachment 2). The Elders Group's concerns focussed on the potential impacts to Aboriginal cultural heritage that may arise from the creation of mountain bike trails on Eastern Hill.

Council Officers noted that should the draft Master Plan be endorsed by Council, the first step in implementation will involve a range of due diligence including environmental and heritage approvals. This due diligence is used to inform the detailed design phase associated with each of the draft

Master Plan concepts and involves an 'avoid and minimise' approach to ensure that any proposed works are designed in a way to avoid and minimise any impact on the environment and heritage values.

The Albury City-Wide Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Study (2021) contains a predictive model regarding the likelihood of Aboriginal cultural heritage being present across the city, with Eastern Hill identified as having low sensitivity, whilst the adjacent land parcels along the Murray River and Mungabareena Reserve have medium-high sensitivity. Notwithstanding the potential low sensitivity on Eastern Hill, a due diligence assessment would still be completed, which would include (but not be limited to):

- undertaking a flora, fauna and environmental heritage assessment across the entire Reserve;
- completing a Due Diligence Cultural Heritage Assessment, undertaken in accordance with the Due Diligence Code of Practice for the Protection of Aboriginal Objects in NSW (DECCW 2010);
- if required, undertaking an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment Report (ACHAR) in accordance with the NSW *National Parks & Wildlife Act 1974*. This process involves the consultation with Aboriginal People to determine any potential harm on Aboriginal cultural heritage from proposed activities, and informs decision-making for any application for an Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permit where it is determined harm cannot be avoided; and
- preparation of a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) for key projects, which is an assessment that examines the possible environmental impacts (including threatened species and ecological communities) of a project on the environment.

Related Strategies

Towards Albury 2050 Community Strategic Plan

This project aligns with the following outcomes from the Towards Albury 2050 Community Strategic Plan:

Theme One – A Growing Sustainable Economy.

1.3 Albury will offer diverse and innovative tourism experiences to attract new and repeat visitation:

1.3.1 Communicate the story of Albury through our tourism offerings, providing an authentic and engaging visitor experience.

Theme Two – An Enhanced Natural Environment.

2.4 Albury is recognised as a leader in the conservation and management of our natural assets:

2.4.2 Biodiversity has been preserved, enhanced, and restored to strengthen our natural assets to improve eco-system connectivity; and

2.4.3 Acknowledge our connection to the natural environment by providing opportunities for the community to connect and respectfully enjoy our natural environment.

Theme Three – A Caring Community.

3.6 Albury is a vibrant region that values enrichment offered by arts and cultural activities and provides for diverse lifestyles and experiences.

3.6.3 Albury will provide a diverse range of experiences – including entertainment, art and cultural experiences, sport and community driven events.

Two Cities, One Community – Community Strategic Plan 2022 – 2025

Section 1: Our Economy.
1.2 We are a destination that offers a variety of experiences, attractions and events for all.

Section 2: The Environment.
2.2 We preserve, experience and promote the beautiful and unique area we live in.
2.5 We will partner with and support our community to deliver on improved environmental outcomes

Regional Natural Environment Strategy

This is a Two Cities One Community Strategy that identifies Albury Wodonga's significant environmental assets, the major threats to these assets, as well as key actions to be undertaken in relation to managing biodiversity. It is the key Strategy to support decision-making relating to environmental lands, parks and gardens management, nature-based recreational projects, and community engagement initiatives across Albury Wodonga. The proposed ecological restoration activities identified in the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan are strongly consistent with the intent of the Regional Natural Environment Strategy, and will help protect, retain, and enhance habitat for a range of key species.

Albury Mountain Bike Strategy

2.1.3 Establish a locally significant trail network at Eastern Hill:
- *Undertake detailed design for a trail network at Eastern Hill.*
- *Hume and Hovell Track alignment refined and incorporated into the network design to minimise user conflict.*
- *Revegetation program incorporated into the trail development to improve both ecological value and visitor experience.*

The provision of well-planned and managed trails in natural areas, particularly in areas currently and forecast to experience high population growth and expansion, has the potential to positively contribute to conservation efforts and preservation of natural areas by minimising the building of illegal and unsanctioned trails.

Albury Wodonga Destination Management Plan 2019 - 2023

Activation Area 2 - Growing Tourism Product Offer & Infrastructure.
7.2.2.7. Trail Upgrades (including the Wagirra Trail) and Guided Tours.

AlburyCity Disability Inclusion Action Plan

2.3 Continue to make parks and play spaces more accessible and inclusive, with design informed by the 'Everyone Can Play Guidelines'.

NSW Public Spaces Charter

- *Principle #1: Open and Welcoming – everyone can access public space and feel welcome, respected and included.*
- *Principle #2: Community Focused – public space brings people together and builds strong, connected and resilient communities.*
- *Principle #3: Culture and Creativity – public space provides a platform for culture and creative expression that makes places more colourful, animated, and thought provoking.*
- *Principle #4: Local Character and Identity – public space reflects who we area and our diverse stories and histories.*
- *Principle #5: Green and Resilient – public space connects us to nature, enhances biodiversity and builds climate resilience into communities.*
- *Principle #6: Healthy and Active – public space allows everyone to participate in activities that strengthen our health and wellbeing.*
- *Principle #8: Safe and Secure – everyone feels safe to access and use public space at all times of the day.*
- *Principle #9: Designed for Place – public space is flexible and responds to its environment to meet the needs of its community.*
- *Principle #10: Well-managed – well-managed and maintained public space functions better and invites people to use and care for it.*

Adventure Cycling Strategy – Department of Regional NSW

Vision – NSW will be the home of Australia's premier adventure cycling destinations, capitalising on the diverse natural beauty across our State to strengthen our visitor economies and support community health, connections, and wellbeing.

Objective 2 – Increase access so local communities can enjoy quality adventure cycling experiences in green and public spaces.

Murray River Experience Master Plan

Eastern Hill is identified in conjunction with Mungabareena Reserve in the Murray River Experience Master Plan, which identifies the following site upgrades:

- replacement of public amenities to provide access for all abilities;
- replacement of park furniture and the provision of interpretive signs; and
- upgrading of the Hume and Hovell Track.

Plan of Management for Community Land

The AlburyCity Plan of Management (PoM) for Community Land (2016) outlines how Council manages Council-owned and managed community land. Both Eastern Hill Reserve and Devils Glen Reserve are classified as 'Natural Area' (Bushland) within the PoM, and the permitted uses that can be undertaken within community land categorised as 'Natural Area' include activities that:

1. support a variety of flora and fauna habitat;
2. assist in maintaining biodiversity, water and air quality;
3. provide aesthetic relief from urban areas; and
4. form some recreational opportunities.

Given the above, it is noted that the design statement for the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan seeks to balance physical activation, ecological activation and spiritual activation, which is consistent with the categorisation identified within the PoM. The extent of development that can be undertaken within community land categorised as 'Natural Area' extends to include the development for the purpose of social, community, cultural or recreation activities consistent with the purpose of the land. More specifically, the draft Master Plan has a very strong focus on ecological restoration, with several recommendations identified to restore the natural vegetation (especially within areas that have been degraded due to previous tree clearing and grazing history), as well as protect and enhance the existing remnant vegetation to improve biodiversity value and enhance the quality and extent of habitat for a range of fauna. The potential inclusion of shared use trails is considered to align with the 'recreation' value within the Natural Area category, which has the specific objective 'to promote use of the land that may enable public use and enjoyment of that land'.

Risk

- **Business Risk** – once endorsed, this Master Plan will have implications on budget and resourcing to deliver the actions identified. Future implementation of the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan will require resourcing that can be considered through Council's operational planning and capital works programming and budgeting processes. The Anticipated Order of Costs (included in Attachment 1) currently provides an estimated cost of $4.9M for the collective projects identified within the draft Master Plan, however these costs will be further refined as part of detailed design process for each project. The draft Master Plan has identified that the range of actions would be staged over the short term (1-2 years), medium term (3-5 years) and long term (5+ years), which will allow the draft Master Plan actions to be implemented over several years as project due diligence and designs continue to be refined and funds become available. A detailed funding strategy will be developed that outlines future funding opportunities that can be considered, including grant applications, future Council budget deliberations, and via other stakeholder contributions (eg. Rotary).

- **Corporate Risk** – developing master plans for high-profile community spaces provides a strategic direction for all key stakeholders and Council. It is also critical to achieving grant funding. This draft Master Plan has been the subject of extensive public scrutiny and media interest. This is expected to continue, and it will be important for Council to continue to engage with the community on any proposed detailed designs and work associated with the draft Master Plan should it be endorsed.

- **WHS and Public Risk** – this project has addressed community concerns regarding the access to Eastern Hill Reserve and the Hume and Hovell Track where it crosses East Street. WHS and risk management will be considered further as part of the detailed design process associated with individual Master Plan elements. Detailed risk assessments will be undertaken for specific projects prior to works commencing on-ground should the draft Master Plan be endorsed. The establishment of shared use trails could be perceived to present some public risk, although this risk can be managed through appropriate design and construction, education and appropriate signage.

- **Environmental Risk** – there are no environmental impacts at this stage in the development of the draft Master Plan. Once the draft Master Plan is endorsed, individual projects will be subject to detailed due diligence including flora and fauna surveys, natural and cultural heritage assessment, and preparation of a Review of Environmental Factors for key projects, which is an assessment that examines the possible environmental impacts (including threatened species and ecological communities) of a project on the environment.

- **Delivery Program Risk** – there are no delivery risks identified at this time. The draft Master Plan, once endorsed, will be used to inform the New Initiatives process in future years funding, using the Anticipated Order of Costs and Proposed Staging Program included as Attachment 1 as a guide to project implementation.

Options

1. Endorse the preliminary draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan that was circulated as part of the original public exhibition process in August 2022. This is not the preferred option due to the large amount of community feedback that identified concerns with some recommendations of the draft Master Plan. **Not Recommended.**

2. Endorse the revised version of the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan (Attachment 1). This is the preferred option as this version has been refined following discussions and recommendations received from the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan Advisory Panel and from a review of the feedback received by the community during the public exhibition phase. The revised version has resulted in the removal of dedicated facilities for mountain bikers, and a reduction of trails from five dedicated mountain bike trails to three shared use trails that would be designed to accommodate multiple users including bike riders, runners and walkers. It should also be noted that there will be further opportunity to refine the Master Plan concepts in future as part of investigations associated with due diligence and detailed design. **Recommended.**

3. Endorse the revised version of the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan, with the exception of the newly proposed shared use trails that would be removed from the Master Plan. This is not the preferred option, as whilst the proposed inclusion of mountain bike trails has been a polarising issue for the community, there has still been a number of community members expressing interest in including mountain bike trails at Eastern Hill. Feedback from the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan Advisory Panel has also resulted in a compromise and proposed reduction in the number of trails from five to three trails, with the proposed trails to be shared use trails that will accommodate bike riders, walkers and runners. Establishing a small network of managed shared use trails may also help reduce the incidence and impacts associated with illegal and unsanctioned trails that have occurred in several natural areas across the City. **Not Recommended.**

4. Conduct another round of public exhibition for the revised version of the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan. This is not the preferred option, as the recently convened Eastern Hill Advisory Panel provided a platform for a range of community stakeholders to collaborate on Master Plan refinements and recommend proposed changes for further consideration by Council. **Not Recommended.**

5. Request further changes to the revised version of the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan. This is not the preferred option, as the revised Master Plan has been through a period of extensive community consultation and refined following recommendations received from the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan Advisory Panel and from a review of the feedback received by the community during the public exhibition phase. **Not Recommended.**

6. Take no further action and do not proceed with the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan. This is not the preferred option. Whilst there has been significant opposition to some elements such as mountain biking, it is also noted that there were many people in the community who were quite supportive of the proposed ecological restoration activities and range of infrastructure improvements. Not proceeding further with the Master Plan would jeopardise the implementation of a number of improvements to the facilities and offerings that have been requested by the community. **Not Recommended.**

Conclusion

Eastern Hill Reserve, including Devils Glen and Doctors Point Reserve, is a 77-hectare reserve that is zoned both C2 (Environmental Conservation) and RE1 (Public Recreation). The Reserve is currently accessed by residents and visitors for predominantly passive recreational purposes such as bushwalking. The Eastern Hill Rotary Lookout is a well-known vantage point to take in the views of Albury and its surrounding landscapes, and Mungabareena Reserve has significant cultural value, being declared an ‘Aboriginal Place’ in 2016.

Eastern Hill does not currently have an endorsed master plan to guide the future use, management, and proposed activation of the site. The need for a master plan has become a priority following feedback from the community and the Albury Rotary Club requesting improvement to the facilities and offerings.

Consequently, Council engaged Yonder Landscape Architects to develop the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan, in conjunction with Council Officers, key stakeholders and the wider community. The draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan was presented to Council on 8 August 2022, whereby Council resolved to place the draft Master Plan on public exhibition.

A further report outlining the feedback received during public exhibition and results of the independent review was then presented to Council on 11 April 2023. The results from the public submissions indicated 32% of people were typically supportive of the draft Master Plan, with 36% opposed to the draft Master Plan, and 32% of respondents either neutral or seeking some changes to the draft Master Plan.

At the 11 April 2023 Council meeting, Council resolved to establish an Advisory Panel represented by key community stakeholders to collaborate on Master Plan refinements and recommend proposed changes to the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan for further consideration by Council.

Based on the discussions and recommendations received from the Advisory Panel, and from a review of the feedback received by the community during the public exhibition phase, several amendments have been identified and included within a revised Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan (Attachment 1). More specifically, the proposed Master Plan refinements include 14 amendments to the draft Master Plan recommendations, including a proposed reduction of trails from five dedicated mountain bike trails to three shared use trails that would be designed to accommodate multiple users including bike riders, runners and walkers. The inclusion of shared use trails would allow different users to co-exist, and provide many benefits including the provision of a shared network to meet various user needs, potential to build social relationships and enhanced trail community, improved cost-effectiveness, and enhanced peer regulation of the shared resource. The provision of well-planned and managed shared use trails also has the potential to positively contribute to conservation efforts and preservation of natural areas by minimising the building of illegal and unsanctioned trails.

Should the draft Master Plan be endorsed by Council, the first step in implementation will involve a range of due diligence, including environmental and cultural approvals. The proposed staging program (included in Attachment 1) identifies due diligence as a short-term priority (1-2 years), that will precede the implementation of proposed improvements that are scheduled for the medium term (3-5 years) and longer term (5+ years). This due diligence will be used to inform the detailed design phase associated with each of the draft Master Plan concepts and will involve an ‘avoid and minimise’ approach to ensure that any proposed works are designed in a way to avoid and minimise any impact on the environment and heritage values.

It has been evident throughout the development of this draft Master Plan that there are polarised views within the community on some of the draft Master Plan concepts, with strong feedback received both for and against some of the draft Master Plan recommendations. Having now gone through an extensive amount of community consultation over an 18 month period, the draft Master Plan concepts have been further refined to address some of the community concerns. It is acknowledged that the final version of the Master Plan may not be fully supported by all members of the community, however the Master Plan is an aspirational and strategic plan that attempts to balance the needs of the entire community, by sensitively balancing future activation whilst protecting Eastern Hill’s unique natural character.

Recommendation

That Council:

a. receive and note the valuable contributions and feedback received from the Community Advisory Panel;
b. receive and note the refinements that have been incorporated into the draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan as a result of community feedback received; and
c. endorse the revised draft of the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan (Attachment 1) as the final version.

Attachments

1. Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan – Final Draft (DOC23/420354).
2. Correspondence from Dyirramalang Wiradjuri Elders Group (DOC23/390445).