CM13.2. Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan Due Diligence Assessments - Draft Stakeholder Engagement Plan

DATE	25 October 2024	**FIL REFERENCE**	FIL18/02617
CONFIDENTIAL	No		
FURTHER ENQUIRIES	David Costello City Landscapes	**PHONE**	02 6023 8133
AUTHOR	Nerilee Kerslake		

Purpose of Report

To present the draft Stakeholder Engagement Plan for the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan (EHAMP) Due Diligence Assessments to Council for consideration and endorsement.

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, birdwatching and trail running. 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.

The need for the Master Plan for Eastern Hill became a priority following feedback from the community and the Albury Rotary Club requesting improvement to the facilities and offerings. There was 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. On this basis, AlburyCity commenced the development of a Master Plan for the site in 2022 to guide the future use, management and activation of the site.

The Master Plan was prepared over an 18-month period and involved a three-stage community consultation process. It was evident throughout the development of the Master Plan that there were polarised views within the community on some of the Master Plan concepts, with strong feedback received both for and against some of the Master Plan recommendations. Following detailed and extensive community engagement throughout 2022 and 2023 across multiple engagement platforms (key stakeholder meetings, onsite pop-up sessions, 'Have your Say', a Public Exhibition process, Pre-Meeting Briefing Sessions, and the establishment of a Community Advisory Panel) the Eastern Hill Activation Management Plan (Attachment 1) was endorsed by Council on 27 November 2023, whereby Council resolved to:

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;
c. endorse the revised draft of the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan as the final version;
d. undertake a Biodiversity Assessment and a full Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment (including consideration of tangible and intangible heritage) prior to any detailed design; and,
e. consult with the community and our Aboriginal Advisory Committee on any detailed design.

In giving effect to the above Council resolution, it is now considered timely to commence due diligence investigations, including a Biodiversity Assessment and Cultural Heritage Assessment, with an intent to identify significant biodiversity elements and cultural heritage features across Eastern Hill Reserve that can inform future planning as part of the design process for Master Plan concept elements. This project initiative is included in the 2024/25 Operational Plan with an approved budget of $100K.

Issues

Prior to undertaking any detailed planning works associated with the Master Plan, it has been determined that a Biodiversity Assessment is required to highlight the Reserve's environmental features and identify what and where significant biodiversity elements are located. Similarly, a Due Diligence Cultural Heritage Assessment (with significant First Nations stakeholder engagement) is required to highlight the Reserve's cultural heritage features (both tangible and intangible).

The preparation of both a Biodiversity Assessment and Cultural Heritage Assessment will importantly then be used to inform the detailed design phase associated with each of the Master Plan concept elements, and thereby allow an 'avoid and minimise' approach to ensure that any proposed works are designed in a way to avoid and minimise any impact on the natural environment and heritage values.

AlburyCity is now seeking to engage suitably qualified consultants to prepare a Biodiversity Assessment as well as a Cultural Heritage Assessment, as per the following scope of works:

Biodiversity Assessment
- Field survey to assess the likelihood of the area/habitat supporting threatened species or ecological communities;
- Description and mapping of vegetation likely to be impacted by proposed Master Plan works; and,
- Opportunities for enhancement of habitat values on Eastern Hill.

Cultural Heritage Assessment
- Identify whether Aboriginal objects and values (both tangible or intangible) are or are likely to be present within the area of proposed works;
- Determine whether proposed activities are likely to harm Aboriginal objects or values (if present); and,
- Determine whether further studies are required or if an Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permit (AHIP) application is required for the proposed works.

To support the development of the Biodiversity and Cultural Heritage Assessments, a draft Stakeholder Engagement Plan (Attachment 2) has been prepared. This will ensure that key subject matter experts as well as the broader community are appropriately engaged and their knowledge used to inform the development of the Biodiversity and Cultural Heritage Assessments. The Stakeholder Engagement Plan proposes a range of touch points with the community and key stakeholders between December 2024 and April 2025, with the resultant Biodiversity and Cultural Heritage Assessments to be shared with the community and Council upon completion.

Strategic Alignment

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.

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.

Risk

- **Business Risk** – The endorsed Master Plan will have future implications on budget and resourcing to deliver the actions identified. Future implementation of any actions will require resourcing that can be considered through Council's operational planning and capital works programming and budgeting processes.

  Under the NSW *Environmental and Planning Assessment Act 1979* and the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, AlburyCity has an obligation to assess biodiversity values prior to any works commencing, and plan so that significant impacts to these values are avoided and minimised wherever possible. Similarly, any potential impacts to cultural heritage must also first be assessed under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* to identify any significant cultural heritage values prior to any works commencing and plan so that these impacts to the values are avoided and minimised wherever possible. This project seeks to undertake relevant biodiversity and cultural heritage investigations to mitigate these risks.

A Stakeholder Engagement Plan has been prepared to provide key stakeholders and the community with an opportunity to have input into the biodiversity and cultural heritage investigations that can inform future planning as part of the design process for Master Plan concept elements.

- **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, and this creates a positive image for Council. This 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 studies or proposed detailed designs and work associated with the endorsed Master Plan. The endorsement of a Stakeholder Engagement Plan to support biodiversity and cultural heritage investigations will provide an opportunity for key stakeholders and the broader community to share their biodiversity and cultural heritage knowledge of the site, thereby reducing the potential impact on the natural environment and heritage values as the Master Plan is progressively implemented.

- **WHS and Public Risk** – These are not generally considered in the development of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan however will be considered at a high level during the design planning process.

- **Environmental Risk** – While there are no environmental risks associated directly with the Stakeholder Engagement Plan, environmental risks will be considered through the design phases as each project in the Master Plan has funding to progress. The preparation of both a Biodiversity Assessment and Cultural Heritage Assessment will importantly be used to inform the detailed design phase associated with each of the Master Plan concept elements, and thereby allow an 'avoid and minimise' approach to ensure that any proposed works are designed in a way to avoid and minimise any impact on the natural environment and heritage values.

- **Delivery Program Risk** – Endorsement of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan will allow for the next stage of stakeholder and community engagement to commence. Feedback from this phase will be used to further refine the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan documentation allowing the project elements to move towards detailed design. Not endorsing the Stakeholder Engagement Plan will delay completion of this process and likely have impacts on the projects associated with the endorsed Four Year Delivery Program.

Community Engagement

This project will undertake both a detailed Biodiversity Assessment and a detailed Due Diligence Cultural Heritage Assessment to assess the proposed project sites within the EHAMP area and inform future planning for the delivery of these projects.

A Draft Stakeholder Engagement Plan (Attachment 2) has been prepared to engage with key subject matter experts as well as the broader community through mechanisms including:

- an Electronic Direct Mail (EDM) to the community advising of the upcoming assessments and providing a general project update;
- updates to the 'Major Projects' website page with a project progress update;
- signage placed at strategic locations on site to inform the community of the Assessment works and status;
- meetings held with key stakeholders – led by consultants and supported by AlburyCity staff;
- reports uploaded to the 'Major Projects' website page once completed; and
- updates to the 'Have your Say' webpage.

Options

1. Endorse the Draft Stakeholder Engagement Plan for the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan Due Diligence Assessments, and progress stakeholder and community engagement as part of the development of Biodiversity and Cultural Heritage Assessments for Eastern Hill. **Recommended.**

   This is the preferred option as it will provide key stakeholders and the community with an opportunity to have input into the Due Diligence Assessments that can inform future planning as part of the design process for Master Plan concept elements.

or

2. Not endorse the Draft Stakeholder Engagement Plan for the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan Due Diligence Assessments, and request amendments. **Not Recommended.**

Conclusion

Following 18 months of extensive community engagement throughout 2022 and 2023, the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan was endorsed by Albury City Council on 27 November 2023. It is an overarching strategic plan for guiding the future use, management and proposed activation of the site allowing for improved community access and infrastructure in the Reserve.

Prior to commencing any design of the endorsed Master Plan concepts, it is appropriate to undertake due diligence investigations including a Biodiversity Assessment and Cultural Heritage Assessment, with an intent to identify significant biodiversity elements and cultural heritage features across Eastern Hill Reserve. This information will then be used to inform future planning and the design process to ensure that proposed works are designed in a way to avoid and minimise any impact on the natural environment and heritage values.

AlburyCity is now seeking to engage suitably qualified consultants to prepare a Biodiversity Assessment as well as Cultural Heritage Assessment for Eastern Hill. To support this project, a Draft Stakeholder Engagement Plan (Attachment 2) has been developed to ensure that key stakeholders and the community are informed and have input into the future planning associated with the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan. More specifically, this engagement will help incorporate key expert knowledge and community views on biodiversity and cultural heritage values, which will support the

progressive implementation of the Master Plan in a way that sensitively balances future activation whilst protecting Eastern Hill's unique natural character.

Recommendation

That Council endorse the Stakeholder Engagement Plan for the Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan Due Diligence Assessments, and progress stakeholder and community engagement as part of the development of Biodiversity and Cultural Heritage Assessments for Eastern Hill.

Attachments

1. Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan – endorsed 27 November 2023 (DOC23/444151).
2. AlburyCity Stakeholder Engagement Plan - Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan Due Diligence Assessments (DOC24/258054).