

TREE ON MT EVELYN AQUEDUCT TRAIL, REAR OF 88-90 BIRMINGHAM ROAD, MOUNT EVELYN

Report Author: Trees Coordinator
Responsible Officer: Director Built Environment & Infrastructure
Ward(s) affected: Billanook;

The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public.

SUMMARY

Council has a request to remove three (3) trees at the rear of 88-90 Birmingham Road, Mt Evelyn on the Aqueduct Trail. The resident's main concern is that the three trees are dangerous and will fall onto their property. The trees are assessed by arborists as low risk. Council has one recorded Public Liability claim for this property.

The trees are exotic, not indigenous to the area. The details of the trees are in the attached Arborist Assessment Report. The reserve is in a Green Wedge Zone (GWZ1) and is also subject to Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO). As the trees are listed environmental weeds, a Planning Permit is not required if the trees are approved by Council for removal.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council retains the three (3) trees on the Aqueduct Trail, at the rear of 88-90 Birmingham Road, Mt Evelyn.

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

There are no related Council decisions relevant to this item.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

In accordance with Council's adopted Tree Management Policy, which can be found at <https://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Our-Council/Corporate-documents/Policies-strategies/Trees-Policy>) the resident has asked the Ward Councillor to escalate this matter. Council's Tree Management Team has recommended not removing three trees as they are assessed as low risk. The resident is concerned about future branch fall, risk of uprooting and the potential damage to the property and risk to children.

Options considered

There are three options to deal with the request:

1. Remove all the trees.
2. Heavily prune the trees.
3. Leave the trees at this time.

Option 1 has the advantage that all risks would be removed. However, there would be a loss of environmental and amenity value, and it would take many years to grow replacement trees to a similar size. Removal of trees at residents' request that have been assessed as low risk by an arborist will also place pressure on Council's limited resource and budget.

Option 2 may manage the risk in the short term. However, heavily pruning mature trees exposes them to new wind forces and may increase the risk of branch failure. Heavy pruning also risks killing the trees.

Recommended option and justification

While accepting that option 3 does not meet the resident's wishes and does not remove risk entirely, it is recommended that no action is undertaken with the three trees. A qualified arborist has assessed the trees and recommended that they remain. The process taken by staff is in accordance with Council's Tree Policy and follows the normal processes for any requests from the community for inspection of a tree(s). This option is also the most beneficial from an environmental and local amenity perspective.

Under this option, the trees would be inspected, and any recommended action carried out, if their condition significantly changed in the future.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

If Council decides to remove the trees, the cost is normally met through operating budget. An approximate cost to remove the three trees is \$25,000.

If the trees are retained, any ongoing maintenance costs will also be covered by the operating budget.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan: Protected & Enhanced Natural Environment.

No regional, state or national plans and policies are applicable to the recommendation in this report.

RELEVANT LAW

Not applicable.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

It is generally accepted that well-treed streets can have an increase in property values as they add value to the neighbourhood character and local amenity.

Social Implications

It is generally accepted that well-treed streets improve the amenity of the neighbourhood.

Environmental Implications

The trees are not indigenous and are a listed environmental weed. However, they do contribute to the environmental value of the area.

Trees can store atmospheric carbon as biomass. Trees are composed largely of carbon and continue to take in carbon as they grow. By fixing carbon during photosynthesis and storing it as biomass, growing trees act as a sink for CO₂. The carbon that is removed from the atmosphere by trees contributes to a more stable climate.

Trees can play an important role in reducing the urban heat island effect. Leafy tree canopies cool their surroundings by shading hard surfaces and transpiring. Scientific studies conducted in inner Melbourne have demonstrated that street trees can reduce daytime summer air temperatures by between 1.5°C and 4°C.

Trees provide valuable habitat and food sources for indigenous fauna. While the subject trees do not have hollows, they may provide a food source for indigenous fauna, especially cockatoos.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Not applicable.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Not relevant

RISK ASSESSMENT

Council's Coordinator Tree Management Team has assessed the trees and rated them low risk using the risk analysis matrix in section 3.5 of Council's 2016 Tree Policy. The risk matrix is based on the method set out by the International Society of Arboriculture.

The Risk Management Team has checked all claims records and has located one claim from the resident for fence damage related to these trees in 2024.

It is accepted that if the trees are retained there is a risk that further branches may fall and potentially uproot. However, this is experienced widely across the municipality with the assessment of trees where they are retained. Arborists cannot guarantee that any tree will not drop branches or fail at some stage of its life.

If the trees are retained and did cause damage to the resident's property, there is a risk of an insurance claim being made against Council.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. Arborist Assessment Report