

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations**

Melbourne—Tuesday, 9 March 2021

*(via videoconference)*

#### **MEMBERS**

Ms Sarah Connolly—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Mr Tim Smith

**WITNESSES**

Mr Peter McKinnon, Manager, Climate Futures, City of Wyndham;

Mr Jayden Mizzi, Team Leader, Growth and Investment Strategic Planning, City of Casey;

Ms Susan Hecker, Manager, Parks and Urban Design, and

Ms Fleur Anderson, Acting Executive Officer, Sustainability Planning, City of Whittlesea;

Ms Bernadette Thomas, Manager, Sustainable Environment, and

Mr Greg McLaren, Manager, Urban and Open Space Planning, City of Hume; and

Mr Luke Shannon, General Manager, Planning and Development, City of Melton.

**The CHAIR:** I advise that the sessions today are being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. Rebroadcast of the hearing is only permitted in accordance with Legislative Assembly standing order 234.

Thank you to everyone for joining us today at this public hearing for the Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations. On behalf of the committee I acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of this land. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be joining us here today. I also extend a very warm welcome to any members of the public and media watching today.

This is one of several public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee will be conducting to inform itself about the issues relevant to the inquiry. Before we begin, I would like to point out that all evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that you can speak freely without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give. However, it is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments made outside the hearing, even if you are restating what you said during this hearing. You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check and approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thank you for making the time to meet with the committee today. Could I please remind members and witnesses to mute their microphones when not speaking, to minimise interference. I think we all learned a little bit of that last year. Each witness will have the option of making an opening statement or presentation before we proceed to questions.

We have got five councils here today, and I thought we would just go through one by one for you to state your full name and title before giving your presentation. And if we can limit presentations to 10, 15 minutes tops, just so that we have got plenty of opportunity to ask questions. I know members here have a lot of questions they really want to ask of you here today. So in saying that, we might kick off with Wyndham City Council.

**Mr FOWLES:** Should we introduce the members, Chair?

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, yes. Let us do that. So my name is Sarah Connolly. I am the Chair. I am the Member for Tarneit.

**Mr FOWLES:** I will go next because I was the rude one. I am Will Fowles. I am the Member for Burwood.

**Ms GREEN:** I am the next one in the alphabet, so I will go next. I am Danielle Green. I am the Member for Yan Yean, but I am also the Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and for regional Victoria, and so I have got an interface area that is all covered by growth suburbs and Mitchell shire, which is a bit of growth and a bit of regional. I have had a longstanding interest, and being in the Parliament since 2002, I have seen a lot of growth, so I am really looking forward to this inquiry, and I thank the councils for being here today.

**Mr HAMER:** G'day. I am Paul Hamer. I am the Member for Box Hill.

**Mr MORRIS:** I just assume we are going alphabetically. I am David Morris, Member for Mornington, Deputy Chair of the committee, shadow minister for a number of portfolios and, I think, the second longest standing member on the committee behind Danielle.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, I always forget to introduce the MPs and myself. So, Peter, we might hand over to you at Wyndham City Council just to kick us off. I do not know if you have got a presentation prepared for us. But we might just go around the councils for you to introduce yourselves, and then we will kick off with Wyndham.

**Mr McKINNON:** Sure. Thank you for that, Sarah. So I am Peter McKinnon. I am the Manager for Climate Futures at Wyndham City Council. Lovely to meet you all today.

**Mr SHANNON:** Hi. I am Luke Shannon. I am the General Manager of Planning and Development at the Melton City Council, so immediately to the north of Wyndham City Council.

**Mr MIZZI:** Jayden Mizzi, Team Leader of Growth and Investment Strategic Planning at the City of Casey.

**Ms HECKER:** Susan Hecker, Manager of Parks and Urban Design at the City of Whittlesea.

**Mr McLAREN:** Greg McLaren, Manager of Urban and Open Space Planning at Hume City Council. I will also be joined by Bernadette Thomas, who is the Manager of Sustainable Environment, shortly.

**The CHAIR:** Fantastic. I think we have got everyone. Peter, did you want to kick off?

**Mr McKINNON:** Yes, no worries, Sarah. I will just try to share my screen. For the parliamentary inquiry's benefit, I do have a presentation which summarises our submission.

#### **Visual presentation.**

**Mr McKINNON:** Bearing in mind what you mentioned, Sarah, I will get this wrapped up in about 10 minutes. It is a summary of our submissions we put to the inquiry late last year.

So, as I said before, my name is Peter McKinnon. I am the Manager for Climate Futures here at Wyndham city. I really do thank you for the opportunity to present today. Just a little bit about our municipality, a little bit about our departments and what we do and I guess some of the asks we are looking for based on the submission. Just for the committee's benefit, the team I lead up has a really broad range of specialist functions from coasts and water through to green living and green spacing and city landscapes. I have also been leading up an area in relation to just the latter from pandemic recovery and emergency management, economic growth and industry facilitation. I think the committee would be well placed to sort of consider this environmental infrastructure situation on the back of the COVID-19 pandemic and I guess the new pressures that have been put on the public realm.

Next slide, thanks, Nathan. The next slide does talk a little bit more around Wyndham and what we are I guess experiencing as a city. You can see where we are placed on the western fringe of Melbourne. We have, you know, a very large amount of coastline—27 kilometres of relatively undeveloped coastline—which stands us apart from most other cities, particularly in the metropolitan region. I think the key thing for Wyndham, together with a lot of the growth councils here, is our growth rate. Currently, as you can see, there are 288 000 people, with a projected population to exceed more than half a million within a fairly short space of time within the next 20 years or so, and even though COVID has slowed down slightly, we are still seeing a very forward trend when it comes to growth. So being one of the fastest-growing cities in Australia really does put us into a different territory as it relates to providing the right level of infrastructure for our growing community.

Next slide, thanks, Nathan. What I will talk about next are really some of the initial community conversations we are getting from our community. We are in the process of doing a Wyndham 2040 refresh, which is our major community-facing council plan document. As I said before, it really has highlighted I guess the importance of the public realm and open space systems and settings within our city based on COVID-19. A lot of commentary from our community around improvement for public open spaces, a lot of commentary around revegetation planning—I will talk about tree canopy in a little while—and also just some of our more natural assets, whether it be our river systems or large grassland reserves.

There is a real strong push this time round—I guess it is the first time we have seen it here in Wyndham—a real collaborative effort that relates to climate and environmental action. There has been a lot of feedback from our community around that, and I think that proves the point that as a growth council we are starting to move in that space, and that is probably the first time through our community feedback that that message has come out louder and clearer. This is all on the back of some community recovery roundtable sessions that we held last year in November on the back of the pandemic about how we can build back better and grow back better in the face of the pandemic.

Next slide, thanks, Nathan. Really the submission talks around the metropolitan strategic assessment, or the MSA, in Wyndham, and really what we are looking for and what we would like to continue to do is to develop a clear path forward on sites within Wyndham and obviously across the whole metropolitan region. I am sure the other councils would share similar examples. We have found there has been a lack of management or clarity on some of the ownership of some of these sites, and this is both within the urban growth boundary and sites outside of it, which has led to some environmental degradation, particularly of the grassland reserves, which we know have got such intrinsic remnant value. We can see that sort of environmental degradation when that clarity around land ownership and management is not put forward. We have got to have better planning within the precinct structure planning process, and then we are also about increasing the value of the infrastructure assets themselves. I think the key other component of that is making sure we are building this in conjunction and co-designing it with our community, who have got limited knowledge or awareness of what these environmental ecosystems and this infrastructure could actually mean for their cities. This is, as I said, both pocket parks within the future urban fabric as well as large-scale grassland reserves. That photo you see there in front of us is the proposed western grassland reserve, which is a 15 000-hectare grassland reserve that straddles both Wyndham and Melton, which is part of that MSA all the way back to when the urban growth boundaries were founded about 10 or so years ago.

Next slide, thanks, Nathan. Look, really, what we are keen to get out of this inquiry too is getting some accelerated delivery of our urban environmental infrastructure, particularly big open spaces that are there. This is from our own open space strategy, which is a public document. It has gone through a committee consultation by our council. Those figures that you see in front of you are just the shortfall that we see in both passive and active open space in three of our key catchments—Werribee, Point Cook and Tarneit. You can see there we are not talking small numbers. They are quite large, and obviously that is a competing interest in amongst the residential development, but we know just from our open space strategy around the needs of community that is our current shortfall. So any system which is going to help accelerate delivery of those open space settings to that tune and to that area on that slide is going to be really important for us.

Next slide, thanks, Nathan. Our submission goes into a fair amount of detail around trees and tree canopy and the idea about greening our outer suburbs. As you can see there, Wyndham has got the lowest tree canopy in the nation—this is based on a number of studies—5.4 per cent. As you can see there, we do have some longer term targets of 25 and 35 per cent in total by 2041—quite ambitious. What I can say is that that canopy figure, only going back less than 10 years ago, was closer to 2 per cent so we have doubled it even though it is still only 5.4 per cent. We know we can do this, and you can see there we are planning in excess of 21 000 trees each year, with developers and other agency partners providing their own. I think it is a really important point to make—I am sure the other councils will agree on this—that, with the residential development that is occurring in the outer suburbs, the densities of lots and the sizes of lots are getting smaller and smaller. We are looking at around 350 to 400 square metres as an average lot size here, so the demand on public realm, the demand on council open space systems and the need to create quality public realm is getting more and more intense for us as an outer growth council. So, really, we are keen to get some ways forward to improve our tree canopy, and also we need to get a review of our infrastructure design standards across the settings. So that is from the VPA settings, Regional Roads Victoria, or the MRPV now—making sure that we have got the right standards in place and that the trees and open space settings are not the last things to be planned for as we roll out our residential suburbs and they are actually integrated into that design.

Next slide, thanks, Nathan. I mentioned before about two really key pieces of state government infrastructure and environmental infrastructure which we require, and these are nominated within the planning system to be delivered. But as I said before, it is around acceleration, it is around moving them forward so that environmental quality does not get less and less as the years continue through. The two big areas for Wyndham are the western grassland reserve, which I mentioned before and which in total is a 15 000-hectare proposed national park as part of the MSA, and the second one is the Werribee Township Regional Park, which is a large

parcel of essentially flood plain land within the urban growth boundary, nestled amongst the Werribee River and again set up as a new state park. We are waiting on both DELWP and Parks Victoria to start slowly but surely acquiring that land, making that land good from an environmental point of view. So any mechanisms or strategies in place through government to help accelerate key pieces of infrastructure like that would be most welcomed by Wyndham.

Next one, thanks, Nathan. As I mentioned before, I think the other key component—I am not too sure if the other councils will have this same unique element—is our coastline. As I said before, it is 27 kilometres of relatively untapped coastline. We know with that growing population across the western suburbs it is getting more and more pressure. The lack of quality infrastructure, whether it be just around roads, car parking, trails, accessways—all sorts of just basic amenities—we know we are already falling short. With all that growth we can see areas like the environmental elements of that Wyndham coastline suffering unless we have the requisite state government funding to help support it. Wyndham has just gone through its first-ever coastal and marine management plan process, and that is being endorsed by the relevant minister as we speak. It is going through the relevant processes. We do have a plan in place but, as we know, having the infrastructure spend and the commitment of money to help deliver these things is going to be really important, and that is not only in relation to upgrading the open spaces in and around the coastal reserve like the Point Cook Coastal Park but also linking up some of the key missing trail links, whether it be the bay trail, so these are bike path links, or pedestrian trails to help improve amenity and infrastructure along our systems. Next one, thanks, Nathan.

I guess the last one is just to really highlight where we would like to see this inquiry go, and one of the more recent examples is the K Road Cliffs master planning exercise. This was a master plan which council led. It is a really complex parcel of land. As you can see there, that is the site there with those beautiful red cliffs and trees. There is a car parking area and a viewing platform as well. It is well renowned. I guess it is the Wyndham money shot, for want of a better word. But we were able to develop a master plan around about 12 months ago and then we were very successful through the Growing Suburbs Fund to help implement the action of that master plan. The site itself was becoming really degraded. If we were not to do anything, all those trees and all that vegetation you see in that photo there would actually fall into the river, and a whole range of actions, whether it be landscaping, repaving, a whole lot of drainage work that is required. So I guess what that tells us is that we can partner with the state on these things. We have got to come up with the clear plans, the clear messages. Moving forward I think our aim would be to really expand what we see as a successful fund in the Growing Suburbs Fund but dedicated directly to environmental infrastructure to help accelerate some of those key projects which I have just taken you through today.

Just a couple more slides, Nathan, and I will finish up. The other one again is very similar. We received \$3.2 million for Wyndham Park, which is a large-scale regional open play space along the Werribee River there which we are using, which has now got a range of activities and activations near one of our town centres. Knowing that if we can come with the right plan with all the right commitment from community and relevant stakeholders, such as traditional owners and other government departments, we know that we can get this moving forward. But having a dedicated fund in that regard is really important.

The last slide I have got there really summarises that piece. Really, I guess the crux of our submission is to have a dedicated growing suburbs environmental infrastructure fund. As you can see with our submission there, we have got a number of ideas just with our own little patch where we think we can get some really good wins for our community.

I guess the last point I want to make is, as I said at the start, on the back of COVID the appreciation of our community for open space systems in the public realm has never been more so, and it is coming out loud and clear with our early community consultations for the council plan. We really think it is the right time to invest in this infrastructure and improve the livability for those in the outer suburbs.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Peter. That was a really great presentation. I loved some of those photos, but I am a bit partial to that particular part of the world really, being the Member for Tarneit. Jayden, I am going to hand over to you next.

**Mr MIZZI:** Thank you, and good morning. I do not have any lovely photos like that to share unfortunately, but I will in my presentation this morning echo many of the comments that were made by Peter there.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this morning. It is a particularly important topic as Melbourne continues to grow at rapid pace, so we appreciate the chance to assist you with the inquiry. We note first off that the remit of the inquiry is quite broad, so we have not attempted to address all aspects of environmental infrastructure in our submission but we really tried to focus on what the real challenges are, and the opportunities as well, facing the City of Casey today. So I will take you through a little bit of that this morning.

But just at the outset, our submission to the inquiry that we submitted last year identified essentially three broad recommendations that we have which relate to the need for increased investment in existing and future parks, the opportunity to capitalise on under-utilised land for tree planting to achieve canopy cover and urban forest objectives, and the need to prioritise the delivery of the Clyde regional park. I will elaborate on those in a little bit more detail. At a high level, Casey's rapid growth—you will no doubt be familiar that Casey is one of the fastest growing municipalities in the whole of Australia, like most of my colleagues here this morning will say—our population grew from about 220 000 in 2006 to its current population of 380 000. By 2041 we are forecast to reach about 550 000, so that is essentially the population of Tasmania today living in just one municipality in Melbourne. We are seeing an average of about 5500 new houses being settled each and every year, which we have seen for the last five years. That trend looks set to continue this year despite COVID. We are on track to reach, if not exceed, 5500 new homes. The growth is also reflected in perhaps a lesser known stat, in the growth in the domestic animal population. Council recorded an average of 100 new dog registrations each and every week over the last financial year, the 2019–20 financial year, which has important implications on the provision of parkland and in particular the provision of dog-friendly open space.

With all this rapid growth comes great opportunity but also a variety of challenges. I will take you through some of those. Growth area councils like Casey have the opportunity to capitalise on greenfield urban development by requiring the provision of new open space, and it is evident that this has been successful to a degree. There was a report published by the Victorian Planning Authority, the VPA, in 2017 which estimated that Casey has about 80.7 square metres of open space per person, which is on par with other growth area councils across Melbourne. On a positive note, that is well above the metropolitan average of 57 square metres, so it is clear that growth area planning is doing something right. However, about 84 per cent of Casey's population lives within what we would call a safe walking distance of public open space, and that is usually assumed to be about 400 metres. So it is 84 per cent, which is marginally above the metropolitan average of 81 per cent, but it is still well short of the 95 per cent target that is set for growth area communities by the VPA's precinct structure plan guidelines. As Peter highlighted, the COVID-19 pandemic and its various restrictions have really placed a greater emphasis on the need for accessible open space and open space that is functional, diverse and well maintained. Council experienced a much greater usage of its local parks and open spaces, and that has obviously added additional pressure onto maintenance programs.

We have also been doing some community consultation over the last 12 months. In a recent community engagement program more than 25 per cent of the roughly 3600 respondents said that a clean environment with more green and open spaces was how they envisaged their municipality in 10 years time. Interestingly, park cleanliness and lack of maintenance was the top reason why residents felt less connected to the place they live.

I would also note that as the focus for investment continues to go towards infrastructure in these newest communities, there are also increasing inequities with established suburbs in growth area municipalities. Urban development has brought with it many brand new, high-quality local parks for our new estates, but maintenance and renewal of parks in adjacent established areas remains critically underfunded. This is an emerging issue for council and one that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

In our submission we submit that the committee ought to recommend that funding mechanisms for parks and open space be reformed to ensure sufficient infrastructure is provided not only for the growing populations but also bridging the divide between new and established communities. This is something that could entail a review of clause 53.01, the public open space contribution mechanism—investigate of the use of the growth areas infrastructure contribution, GAIC funding, or any other funding mechanism like that proposed by Peter just before.

We say that growth areas also provide challenges and opportunities for canopy cover and urban forest objectives. You would be familiar with the *Living Melbourne: Our Metropolitan Urban Forest Strategy*, which notes on one hand that urban development reduces total green cover, so trees, shrubs and grasses, but on the other hand it has the opportunity to create new canopy cover and new vegetation where it might not have

previously existed. We would say though that the growth area planning framework has not capitalised on this opportunity to date. This is demonstrated by Casey's current canopy cover of only about 7.7 per cent, and that is half of what the current metropolitan canopy cover is, which is about 15 per cent. And it is only a quarter of the 30 per cent target set by Infrastructure Victoria in their draft 30-year infrastructure strategy.

Reduced average house lot sizes have increased pressure on delivering vegetation on public land. We would say that there are opportunities to capitalise on under-utilised public land to contribute to the urban forest, so that is looking at land in Casey, for instance, along the Cardinia Creek corridor and the Hallam Creek Valley, as well as various VicRoads and Department of Transport landholdings that we would say are prime opportunities for investment to meet canopy cover and biodiversity connectivity.

The Melbourne strategic assessment program, the MSA program, we say, does not sufficiently protect native vegetation in growth areas. It sets an expectation for the development industry that wholesale clearance of vegetation is appropriate. Whilst there are obvious conservation benefits to the creation of new consolidated ecological spaces, like the western grassland reserve, individual scattered trees and vegetation throughout urban areas have landscaped climate and health benefits that warrant their attention. And it is also notable that funds collected through the native veg and scattered tree offsets with the MSA program are intended to be spent on projects in Melbourne's west and north, which contributes to the overall loss of vegetation covering in the south-east growth corridor.

A survey of around 1000 local residents about the environment a couple of years ago, in 2018, found that 49 per cent of residents strongly agree that we need stricter enforcement of laws to protect the local environment, and this is an increasing trend; in 2012 that figure was about 28 per cent—those who felt that. A similar amount, about 49 per cent, agreed that increased urban development increases pressure on the natural environment, and 19 per cent said that the preservation of natural habitats should be the main environmental priority for council. So we are seeing a real community interest in public open space as well as natural habitats and conservation.

So we submit that the committee ought to consider and adopt what is draft recommendation 71 of Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year strategy, which aligns with the recommendations we put forward in our submission last year. Recommendation 71 sets a 30 per cent target for canopy cover in growth areas and recommends funding for state government agencies and local government to plant, replace and maintain canopy trees. Infrastructure Victoria, like the council submission, also recommended investigating planting on under-utilised land.

Lastly, I thought it would be helpful to take you through a little bit of a case study of the Clyde regional park. It is a case study that I think really highlights both the challenges and the opportunities for the provision of open space in growth areas. The park has a long history behind it. It was first recommended in Parks Victoria's *Linking People and Spaces* strategy, which was back in 2002, so it was recommended at a time when Casey's population was around 175 000. It was originally known then as the Cranbourne regional park, and the contemporary *Melbourne 2030* strategy, the metropolitan planning strategy, notionally identified a location central to the suburb of Cranbourne, which was obviously within the then urban growth boundary. By 2006, as urban development in Cranbourne and its surrounds continued at pace, the proposed park was then relocated further east and it became known as the Cranbourne East metropolitan park, and by that time Casey's population had grown above 220 000. By 2012 there continued to be no commitment to delivering the park, the urban growth boundary had been expanded twice and Casey's population had risen above 270 000. The proposed park was then relocated further east again and into the neighbouring town of Clyde.

The draft *McPherson Precinct Structure Plan* was publicly exhibited in 2016, which proposed a 49-hectare site for the regional park. However, in the absence of a confirmed budget for land acquisition, there was no intention at the time to apply a public acquisition overlay over that land and there was a reluctance to label the site in the precinct structure plan as anything other than a potential regional park. The ultimate location for the site, which is now known as the Clyde regional park, was only settled in 2019 under amendment GC99, which applied the public acquisition overlay to about 120 hectares of land outside of the urban growth boundary. So this came 17 years after the park was first recommended and when Casey's population had doubled and grown above 350 000.

Despite this and despite the delays to its delivery, we would see the final planning exercise to secure that PAO as a demonstration of a really successful partnership approach between local and state government and state

agencies. The 120-hectare Clyde regional park is to be co-located with an 80-hectare sport and active recreation precinct, which will be delivered by council, and a 198-hectare Melbourne Water retarding basin. So the combined infrastructure will provide the full gamut of passive and active recreation, with opportunities for native vegetation, habitat creation and integrated water management. The continuous public ownership of about 398 hectares will create a precinct that is more than one and a half—about 1.7—times larger than the renowned Albert Park sports and recreation precinct in inner Melbourne.

So it is a very exciting opportunity that we are very happy has progressed. The council is now advocating for a continued partnership through the master planning of this precinct as well as the prioritisation of land acquisition in order to commence its timely delivery. So we submit that the committee ought to make a recommendation that the government act on the public acquisition overlay to ensure that there are no further delays to delivering this essential infrastructure for the growing south-east.

In summary, essentially the three recommendations that council has put forward are: to increase investment to manage, maintain and upgrade existing parks and securing new land for parks; to commit to the 30 per cent canopy cover in growth areas and invest in tree planting on under-utilised landholdings; and to secure land and prioritise the delivery of the Clyde regional park.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Jayden. That was a really good summary. I am going to go to the City of Whittlesea with Susan Hecker. Have we got Susan? No, we have lost Susan. Okay. We will come back to Susan. Bernadette and Greg, can I throw to you?

**Ms THOMAS:** Good morning, everybody, and apologies for coming in a bit late. I am the Manager of Sustainable Environment from Hume City Council, and Greg is the Manager of Urban and Open Space Planning at Hume. In Hume's submission we focused on all passive and active open space areas but also including conservation areas as well, so I am going to talk probably a bit more about conservation areas than Peter and Jayden have. But I guess just first up I am wanting to support a couple of things that Peter and Jayden have said around having dedicated funding for environmental infrastructure. Peter raised and Jayden raised a couple of things where there are gaps between parks and open space in the newer areas as opposed to more established areas. There are differences there and different, I guess, expectations, and also the Melbourne strategic statement does not protect vegetation in growth areas. It does contribute to a net loss even though we are offsetting into our grasslands in particular into the western grasslands.

What Hume in our submission are seeking is an integrated and a sustainable and a socially responsible approach to environmental infrastructure. We want to get outcomes not just for the environment but also for the community that uses these—as Jayden mentioned, even more highly important spaces to them post COVID. Also just to note that council also put a submission into the inquiry into ecosystem decline, and a number of issues also cross over with this inquiry. We would be happy to send our submission to the panel if you thought that that would be useful for your deliberations.

In that, I will just highlight a couple of areas that we highlighted in that submission: proactive investment into public land; proactive investment into private land; ensuring compliance and enforcement of native vegetation controls—it is one thing to have controls within the planning scheme and other mechanisms, but if they are not enforced then we do still end up with a loss of vegetation in these open space and conservation areas; and addressing issues with the implementation of the Melbourne strategic statement, as Jayden kind of referred to before. So we are after an integrated approach, I think. A number of path and trail networks may be delivered by one developer but may stop at a certain point and delivery does not proceed, so having an integrated approach through the PSP process where infrastructure is delivered in real time and that links up and the communities do not have to wait 20 or 30 years to get a certain piece of a pathway or a bike trail perhaps.

We are also interested in seeing this kind of infrastructure included in all of the state government major projects, and we included a couple of examples in our submission. One in particular is the Camp Road level crossing, where the Upfield cyclepath was actually blocked at Camp Road through the process of implementing that piece of infrastructure because the walking and cycling trail was not considered very early on in the planning stage for that project.

Another key point that we made in our submission was funding for ongoing management of the infrastructure. Jayden referred to the Clyde regional park. Hume also has the Jacksons Creek regional parkland and the Merri



Creek regional parkland. Those processes have been quite lengthy. There are a lot of different issues with private ownership of designated open space areas, so we really need, I guess, the government to be very proactive right at the start of those processes so that we have surety that particularly the private open space areas will become part of the parkland and that we are not kind of chasing our tails towards the end of those park development processes.

In Hume we have 95-plus designated conservation sites—that is over 700 hectares of land that we manage annually—with about \$2 million of council funding. We do not receive any state government funding to support that work, and also what we do find is that when areas of biodiversity conservation are handed to state government or state departments that level of funding does not meet council's level of funding and we often end up with spillover impacts in council reserves. So we are keen to see an enhanced level of funding, particularly for Parks Victoria, because a number of particularly biodiversity conservation strategy sites will come into Parks Victoria management and from past experience we have already seen that that can be problematic because Parks Vic is not funded adequately, I suppose, to manage those reserves for their conservation values and therefore for local residents and community to make use of those sites.

There is tree protection, which Jayden also touched on. A lot of large, single old trees are lost through the development process in the growth areas, and they do not need to be. But the way that the MSS is implemented and the focus on the biodiversity conservation strategy areas mean that often those couple-of-hundred-year-old river red gums in Hume are lost through the development process, and because they are outside of patches they then are not part of a reserve. Of course they have got biodiversity—I cannot think of the word—not objectives but outcomes, but there are other, I guess, things to consider, and amenity is one of them. Reducing climate emissions is another, and contributing to the landscape character of a new development is another as well. At Hume we do a lot of work trying to incorporate those into new parks and open spaces within the growth areas, but if a developer does not have to keep a large old tree, then often, as much as council officers negotiate, those trees will be lost to the environment and to the community.

The last major point that I would like to make before handing over to Greg is around protecting and I guess restoring the biodiversity conservation strategy areas. Again, Hume provides about \$1 million a year to rural landowners to help them protect conservation on their own properties. Some of those biodiversity conservation strategy reserves are currently in private ownership. At the moment council makes available funding to private landowners to continue to manage those areas before they are at some point down the track—it could be 10 years, it could be 15 years—handed over to the state government, because we believe that that ongoing management is vital to maintaining the habitat and the ecosystem value of those sites. But then as I said earlier, once they are handed over to the state that level of funding needs to be maintained to continue to maintain the sites for their habitat and their ecosystem value.

So I am going to hand over to Greg now to just talk a little bit more about Melton conservation open space.

**Mr McLAREN:** Thanks, Bernadette. I think Bernadette has covered off most of the points, but I just want to perhaps reiterate the point that Bernadette, Peter and Jayden all made and that we are all dealing with in growth. It was great to see that the terms of reference for the committee referred to growing populations rather than just growth areas. So it is dealing both with the growth areas and the established communities, and that is a significant issue for Hume, as it is for many councils—that mismatch. There are mechanisms in our growth areas through our PSPs, through the Growing Suburbs Fund and things like that to support the development of open space in those areas, but in our established areas there is often a significant shortfall. I would look to this committee—if there is something that comes out of it, along with accelerated growth and support to enable that, it would be really pushing that funding and support along.

My portfolio also includes our activity centres, our urban areas. So we are developing currently a new open space strategy and a new community vision. We will be going out to the community shortly on open space, but making those connections to the green corridors, to the open space network, to our activity centres, to our train stations and to our community facilities is absolutely going to be critical, and it is what we are hearing from our community—that ability to be able to move from one location to the next in a degree of comfort, and to have locations, whether they be activity centres or whether they be open spaces where people can go for respite during climatic conditions, is equally as important as the various matters that Bernadette spoke about with biodiversity and conservation.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Greg. Luke—lucky last.

**Mr SHANNON:** Thanks, Sarah. I will try not to repeat some of those issues that have already been raised. I also note that our submission is encapsulated in the interface growth councils' submission that was made last year. But there are a few specific issues I would like to touch on relative to the City of Melton in particular and the western region.

Similar to the other councils we have heard from, we are experiencing significant growth. Our current population is 180 000, and that will grow to 500 000 over the next 30 years. So by 2050 or thereabouts between the City of Melton and the City of Wyndham the population on the western edge of Melbourne will be 1 million people, so obviously significant relative to the overall population of the city. The growth rates that we are experiencing are similar to the other councils that we have already heard from and do present challenges, but we would say they also present significant opportunities, particularly from an environmental infrastructure perspective, and I would just like to touch on some of those particularly.

The City of Melton: just a couple of programs that I thought I would refer to that we currently run. We have in place an environmental enhancement program, which has been in place since 1994. That provides effectively \$2 million worth of rate rebates to our rural landholders for them to maintain their properties free of weeds as best they can and to maintain native vegetation where it exists on those properties. So that is a very unique program. We also have a 2000-hectare environmental estate, so environmental reserves across our municipality that council maintains on an ongoing basis.

One of the issues that we face as a growth council is the rate of growth and particularly the rollout of that growth. We are experiencing effectively a patchwork quilt of growth at the moment where it is like a giant jigsaw puzzle coming together. That unfortunately is not particularly well controlled through the precinct structure planning process, so that can present some issues where you have individual freestanding developments that occur and it is some time before adjoining development occurs and meets up with them. That can provide some disconnect in terms of open space networks, particularly linear open space networks. So that is a real issue that could be well addressed I think through the precinct structure planning process which is driven largely by the Victorian Planning Authority.

I want to spend most of my time just talking about the critical need for investment, which I think most other people have spoken about, and there are just a few specific projects that I would like to refer to. The first one relates to regional park provision. Currently within the City of Melton there are no state-owned regional parks. However, there have been two identified in the planning, which dates back 20 years, for regional parks across Melbourne. The first park is the Toolern Creek regional park. That is a 130-hectare park which effectively runs through the middle of the Melton township. It is land currently owned by council that has been agreed to be gifted to Parks Victoria for their ongoing maintenance and improvement. That gifting has not yet occurred. However, we are ready to do so, and we are certainly very anxious for Parks Victoria to be able to invest in that really significant regional park.

The second park is the Kororoit park, which is immediately to the west of Caroline Springs. The park location has not been completely defined, but it is a significant park in that it is 260 hectares in size, and it does require a particular precinct structure plan to be completed to enable the boundaries to be defined. The land is currently in private ownership, and there is certainly a fairly pressing need to define the boundaries of the park to give the owner certainty and for it to be acquired and used for regional recreation and particularly environmental purposes straddling the Kororoit Creek. Those two parks are really critical for the future of residents in the western region of Melbourne and the City of Melton particularly.

Another similar project of significance is the Werribee River trail, and I think Peter touched on this a little bit earlier. That is a trail that runs between the Melton township and Werribee. It is around about 30 kilometres in length and will follow the alignment of the Werribee River, which is absolutely magnificent through that location. It will require a significant degree of investment to enable it to be facilitated, probably at a federal, state and local level. The study identifying the location and the nature of the reserve was done some years ago, led by Parks Victoria and the City of Melton and the City of Wyndham, and that will provide a very significant trail along a major environmental asset, being the Werribee River.

The western grassland reserve has also been spoken about briefly earlier. That is a reserve that largely sits within the City of Wyndham, but it does include 1500 hectares within the City of Melton. That land is to be acquired by the state over time using money paid by developers for offsets as they develop land within the urban growth boundary. Unfortunately only a quite small portion has been acquired to date, and the area is degrading quite significantly. The council would certainly urge for that to be acquired at the earliest opportunity so that it can be maintained and again provide the owners with the certainty that they are looking for in that area.

The Kororoit Creek is, again, a major linear reserve which partly exists through Caroline Springs and Burnside at the moment, and Kororoit Creek obviously extends down to the bay at Williamstown. The creek alignment effectively bisects the growth area within the City of Melton and will ultimately provide a significant environmental reserve. It is currently largely in private ownership, and that is one of the positive opportunities that arise from the growth, that a reserve along this significant creek can be brought into public ownership. Again, it is quite degraded, particularly in some of the rural areas, so the opportunity to reinstate that back to its natural form is significant. There are issues of clarity that will be needed around the ownership and maintenance of it. There are areas of growing grass frog habitat along the creek lines. The questions of acquisition and ongoing maintenance certainly need resolution between local and state government, but again a significant opportunity and one of the benefits that will come from the growth that we are experiencing.

The final issue I would just like to raise—and this may be on the outskirts of the scope of the review—relates to the funding of recreational facilities. Through the development contribution plan program and infrastructure contribution plan program set by the state government through the Victorian Planning Authority there is significant underfunding of recreation facilities. If I could just give one example of that situation, that is a significant reserve at the Mount Atkinson estate just south of Caroline Springs, where two ovals and a pavilion were built on a section of land within that development. The cap in the infrastructure contribution plan means that only around about 60 per cent of that will be funded by the developer, so the funding for the balance of that will need to be secured by council. And I should express my thanks on behalf of council to the government for particularly the Growing Suburbs Fund program. That is certainly somewhere we will seek to provide top-up funding for that project, but we see that that funding program and other like programs are really critical to enable some of these key pieces of infrastructure to be brought back to their natural state and provide the great community benefits, so we would strongly encourage those programs to continue and grow as possible. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Luke. That was a great summary for Melton. I might kick off with some questions. My first question is going to be for you, Peter.

**Ms GREEN:** Sorry, Chair, just a moment. I think we are still waiting to hear from Whittlesea, so if we start going with questions, then when Whittlesea is back online can we ask them to present? I am aware that they have got some specific tree protection things within their planning schemes, so I would like for them to be recognised when they come back on. Apologies for interrupting.

**The CHAIR:** Absolutely. They have had some technical difficulties, so we have got people trying to contact Susan. I think calling her, sending her a couple of messages, but so far we have not had a response. But as soon as they come back in we might jump to Susan to do that presentation.

**Ms GREEN:** I have messaged the CEO.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, great. Peter, Wyndham's supplementary submission states that a range of guidelines, requirements and manuals from state authorities have often undermined the overarching vision and objectives set out in PSPs and that this has resulted in the delivery of environmental infrastructure that fails to live up to its potential or deliver best-practice outcomes for the residents of Wyndham. Can you expand a bit on this point, perhaps with some examples? Importantly, what are some of the requirements of state authorities that have proven most problematic in terms of undermining the provision of environmental infrastructure through PSPs?

**Mr McKINNON:** Sure. Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess the key summary of those examples does relate to the broader provision of infrastructure for growing suburbs. As each of the councils here will no doubt attest, when we roll out suburbs there is a whole range of other infrastructure, whether it be water, sewers, NBN—all sorts—power. Then we are dealing with a range of other government authorities. I think the two clear examples

for us relate firstly to tree canopy and tree cover. I mentioned this briefly in the submission before, but, for example, when you take into account all the underground infrastructure provision for all those essential services and you then add in road safety measures from VicRoads or from the roads authorities, the actual requirement to plant trees and plant trees with any canopy cover, there is actually not much room left in a nature strip or in a normal residential street to give that tree canopy and that boulevard effect.

As I said, every interest has got its own need, but when you combine all those interests we find at Wyndham—and I am confident that other councils share this scenario—issues like trees and tree vegetation often lose out. So that becomes a real issue, and in the name of meeting those standards, that essential services standard, that environmental infrastructure is often forgotten about. That is why, as I put in my submission, I think that needs to be front and centre, the idea of landscaping and the public realm, whether it be a streetscape or whether it be an open space system: how do the trees come in at the same time as we are building the driveways or all the other essential services? I think it comes at the back end too many times.

I think the other one which was not articulated in so much detail in our submission, and I think it is a really important one for all growth councils, is the idea of wetlands and of wetland provision within cities. Obviously all of the new growth areas change the whole topography and the drainage functions of our cities, so we create a range of wetlands and retarding basins to help deal with the drainage. In terms of the standards from developers, as opposed to the standards of Melbourne Water, as opposed to each individual council's standards and the EPA, we are not sure where the clarity and the management of those wetland systems come into play. Again, we are not really coming up with good, high-quality outcomes, because there are so many different, I guess, throws at the stumps with this particular provision. We all know that particularly with a passive open space system these wetlands play such an important role. I understand that DELWP are going through a broader hectare review or an instrumental review of that change, and I think it is well worth this panel looking into that from DELWP. It is called the MUSIA inquiry, and I will give you some further details on that. I think it is a really important piece of the open space environmental infrastructure system that, if we are going to do this, we should also bring in the wetlands and that element. Given there are a range of different measures and standards there, we are probably coming out with a suboptimal outcome. Hopefully that answers the question, Sarah.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Peter. It does. David, I will hand over to you.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thanks, Sarah. Can I ask one very quick one of Bernadette and then go to a broader issue, if I may. Hopefully, Bernadette, this will be a quick answer. It is just the issue of major individual trees that are getting knocked over that you raised. Obviously it is simpler and easier for a developer to just work off a blank palette, and I can understand why they would do it, but if we are looking at trying to bring in rules to prevent this occurring, with a major tree like that it is often not just about preserving the tree, it is about preserving the footprint and preserving the root system. Are you aware whether that issue complicates the matter or whether it is relatively straightforward, saying, 'All right, the canopy—we can identify that. That's got to be protected. Move on'?

**Ms THOMAS:** It is probably a bit more complicated than that. I think there are opportunities through the PSP development to identify those trees and the space that might be required. You are right, some of them are very large old trees and they do require quite a bit of space to be protected, and of course you do not just want to protect one tree on its own with a sort of concrete jungle around it. So you would be aiming to protect it in some form of reserve, and that is what we do at Hume as much as we possibly can—if there is a single old tree or even a couple that are adjacent to each other, we will aim to protect them in a reserve. Sometimes it might be next to an open space area so that it has sort of that landscape amenity as well as protecting the tree on its own and any biodiversity values that go with it. So is that sort of answering—

**Mr MORRIS:** Yes. And is that approach working? I mean, you are obviously not getting—I was going to say you are not getting significant take-up; I am not in a position to judge. But you are still losing more trees than is desirable.

**Ms THOMAS:** Yes. It works best where there is a patch of trees so it can be sort of accumulated into a reserve, but it does not often work when there is a single tree on its own.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thanks for that. Sarah, I am happy to move on and just come back to the next issue the next one around.

**Ms GREEN:** That is great, David, because I was going to do a follow-on question from the one that you just asked of Bernadette.

**Mr MORRIS:** Go for it.

**Ms GREEN:** Thanks, Chair. Thanks, David. Bernadette, I am disappointed we have lost the Whittlesea officer, because I have seen—and I would be interested to know what the actual mechanism is—in the Whittlesea planning scheme they actually do have a protection for significant trees. So with each precinct structure plan all the significant trees are identified and the developers are actually required to go through a very big process before they can actually get rid of them.

I have just noticed when I have visiting ministers or people who represent other growth areas that they are just really surprised at how many significant trees there are within the Whittlesea growth areas. I will invoke the late David Turnbull—it is a year since we lost him. He was the CEO of Mitchell shire but before that the City of Whittlesea CEO and then director of planning, but everyone said it was his tutelage. I just wonder whether anyone is familiar with what is in the Whittlesea planning scheme and why it cannot actually be inserted in other planning schemes. I have observed, say, from when Mill Park was done that there was that broad brush—you know, just bulldoze, go through the whole lot—but then with South Morang, Epping North, Wollert, Mernda and Doreen it is just not the way it is done and the big river red gums have been preserved.

**Ms THOMAS:** I do not know what Whittlesea's planning scheme talks about in terms of retaining significant old trees, but I guess where our focus is is that through the PSP development process there is a native vegetation precinct plan that goes along with that, and it is generally through that process where trees are identified to be retained or lost. We have had success, mostly, as I said in response to David's question, where there is a patch or a stand or a group of trees. Some of the single large old trees are equally significant in their own right, but they are the ones that are mostly lost because—and maybe it goes back to David's question—the space to protect them might be one or half a housing block, so there is not an incentive really for a developer to say, 'Look, we recognise the value of that', whether it is a biodiversity value or even sort of a saleable or marketable amenity value, which is often how the large old trees in a reserve are marketed to new residents. For some reason we have less success with just the single large old trees and retaining those.

**Ms GREEN:** In the absence of Whittlesea being online, secretariat, I might just suggest that we follow up with Whittlesea and see what it is specifically, because I know that I get developers complaining that they have much more trouble getting rid of trees in Whittlesea. I think, from the point of view of this inquiry, that is a really good thing. I think I read recently that the tree canopy and that walkable distance to small pocket parks are better in Whittlesea compared to Hume, Melton and other growth areas and particularly Wyndham. So let us take a look at it. I am happy, Chair, for someone else to ask a question, but I have got plenty more.

**The CHAIR:** We will come back to you, Dan. Will?

**Mr FOWLES:** Thank you, Chair. My question is for Peter in the first instance. You spoke of those public open space shortfalls. I think they were in the order of magnitude of 30 hectares across three I guess they were localities—they were not LGAs or anything. How were those calculated, and are they conservative targets, stretch targets? And if there is a large piece of public open space on the boundary of an LGA, to what extent does that factor into the computation for the adjoining LGA?

**Mr McKINNON:** Yes. Thanks for that, Will. Great questions. Look, those numbers are definitely locality based. So the areas I put in there are just three suburbs within the Wyndham LGA. The targets were born out of the development of our open space strategy, which is already about six or seven years old. I think I heard Hume, in the throes of doing a refresher, are in the same state. They are quite conservative, those numbers. They were based on a range of studies and documentation, and I can give you further detail just based on the need around livability indexes and having that proximity to good open space systems. I guess a simple way of looking at it is when you bring out the Melway map. You look at the eastern suburbs and you look at the green spaces there, and you compare that to the west in places like Wyndham and Melton, and you can see that that shortfall is there. So that is actually quite a conservative number, and this is, as I said, about eight or nine years ago, that shortfall.

In terms of taking into account other LGAs and, I guess, nearby parks and whether that is [inaudible], I do not honestly know the answer because I was not around with that development, but I suspect not. I can come back to you and get that confirmation, but it is a good point that we should be looking at this in a really regional context. I think this is where this panel should really concentrate instead on: what is that big bang for buck around some of those larger open space systems which you know is going to have a real regional impact? And you have heard about many of them today. But I will certainly take that question about whether LGAs were considered in that calculation on notice if that is okay.

**The CHAIR:** We will go to Paul.

**Mr HAMER:** I think Greg had his hand up. Were you also responding to Will?

**Mr McLAREN:** Yes. Just to reinforce what Peter is saying: yes, we are developing a new open space strategy. We are utilising our GIS system to do the mapping. As to where we have that shortfall in provision, it is no surprise that shortfall is in our established communities, those committees that have been around for 30-plus years. Without going into the metrics of how it is being done, probably our most significant area is an area in Campbellfield where we have a community of probably about 600 households that have access to one house block of neighbourhood open space.

We are looking at both provision and quality of our open space in our established areas. We have recognised that over the last 15 years we have developed some really good principles and standards and guidelines that have informed our PSPs, so we now have a really good network and great quality open space which has been developed. Our issue is some of that lag, particularly around the walking and cycling network. But we certainly are probably going to end up in a similar position where we will need to identify significant funding that goes into certain areas, particularly if we are able to bring them up to a level of equity and a reasonable level of open space.

**The CHAIR:** Peter, you have got your hand up? You are just on mute, Peter.

**Mr McKINNON:** Thank you, Sarah. Will, I was able to just rifle back through my notes to give you a quicker answer. I can confirm we did not look at adjoining LGAs as part of that. I guess the key message here for this panel is that a lot of those old open spaces were developed on population rates, and I think the relevancy here is that when we are dealing with the VPA and development we are actually putting open space on net developable land now. So clearly, with our population increasing and increased densities across not only some of our newer areas but older areas of our municipalities, those shortfalls, as I said, are quite conservative. So they are based on population rates, based on those livability indexes. So just to clarify that for you, Will.

**Mr FOWLES:** Got it. Thanks, Peter.

**The CHAIR:** Paul?

**Mr HAMER:** Thank you. My question is to all of you, but I think it was Luke who brought up the issue of the GAIC contributions and the difficulty of them applying to environmental infrastructure. I was just wondering if you could perhaps tease that out a little bit more, particularly in terms of what mechanisms or what changes to the planning system would actually assist or enable those contributions to be used in a way for environmental infrastructure, or alternatively if there are other barriers in the existing planning system that are preventing councils from implementing the desired amount of open space.

**Mr SHANNON:** Thanks, Paul. My initial point was more around the developer contribution required of the developers, which is separate to GAIC, but I will come back to GAIC in a moment. The developer contributions, or infrastructure contribution plans as they are now known, typically fall way short of the money required to build the assets, and they are largely in part around transport, so roads and bridges and so on, but also around community facilities such as recreation reserves and the like. The shortfall in those areas is generally around 30 to 40 per cent, so it is significant. It is tens of millions of dollars over any precinct structure plan area.

The issue around GAIC is slightly different insofar as that is money collected by the state government directly from the developer—just over \$100 000 per hectare of developer land—and that goes into a pool which is then expended on identified state infrastructure. That might be key roads, key reserves, hospitals, the high order type

activities. There is certainly an opportunity there for acquisition of land for environmental infrastructure at a state level. I think one of the issues with GAIC is it is not well defined as to how it is and will be used. There is money being collected on an ongoing basis as developers develop land, but there is no real clarity as to what the strategy is as to where it will be expended so I think that is definitely an opportunity to perhaps have a more targeted approach to how GAIC is expended at a state level.

**Mr HAMER:** Can I just follow up on that then, just on the developer contributions? If there is a 30 to 40 per cent shortfall once they leave the estate, that is a bill that councils ultimately then have to pick up from the more ratepayers. Do you as a council or as collective councils—a group of the fringe councils—have a view on how that situation can be remedied? Obviously there would be quite a lot of resistance from industry in terms of just saying, ‘Well, the actual group cost is double that so we are going to increase our charges by double’.

**Mr SHANNON:** Yes. I might go first, Paul, if I can. Yes, the process does get reviewed from time to time and there is a lot of push and pull in terms of where the numbers land. The example I gave earlier was a recreation facility at the Mount Atkinson estate that will be built over the next couple of years. It is a \$12 million project and the developer contributions fund around about \$8 million of that, so there is a significant shortfall of just over \$4 million. So that is money that council has to take from rates, so from our general ratepayer base, and also seek additional funding—for example, through the Growing Suburbs Fund, and we have been quite successful in that regard. But our ongoing suggestion is that the DCP—development contributions plan—and infrastructure contribution program should be constantly reviewed as the cost of projects escalates. For example, the cost of building these facilities has gone up significantly in recent years, just due to construction costs increasing—the cost of materials like sand and so forth—but the process of reviewing the cost in the planning system is so cumbersome and it takes so long that you are always behind. So I think there could certainly be a more agile way of reviewing those costs and making them more realistic to what it actually costs to provide these facilities for the community.

**Mr McKINNON:** Madam Chair, Peter from Wyndham. Just to echo Luke’s point, I think the key there is really in the planning system and the fact that a lot of these costs are I guess implemented at the time of development, so the DCs and that figure that we talk about is already in there. So how can we be more agile and faster in terms of moving those numbers into a more realistic scenario? Because as you pointed out, Paul, those costs are often borne by the rate base to try and cover it, and we do seek those fundings. But it does all stem back to when the precinct structure plans are approved—and a developer contribution plan associated with that with a set and fixed cost is determined at that time—and as we know, sometimes these sites take years if not decades to actually come online. So that cost blowout and gap gets even bigger. So having a really agile planning system is the quickest way around this particular issue—because a lot of this is already legislated, enshrined, as we all sit here today, so until we can start making some legislative changes there we are not going to be able to cover that gap.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Peter. Does anyone else want to jump in? Will?

**Mr FOWLES:** Sorry, you were inviting the councils to jump in—

**The CHAIR:** I just was not sure if any other representatives wanted to say anything else about that particular issue.

**Mr MIZZI:** Yes, through you, Chair. I think I would echo the same comments as Luke and Peter. The ICP—the infrastructure contribution plan—system is a relatively new framework for development contributions, and I think we are still working through the teething issues of implementing that new framework. But one of the mechanisms within that framework is a cap on the amount that we can collect for what is called community and recreation infrastructure, and that encompasses parks and active open space, particularly the construction of active open space being sports facilities. I would say that we are experiencing similar concerns as Melton and the others in terms of the cost of this community infrastructure—like community facilities and sports facilities—which is significantly outweighing the amount that we can collect under this cap. So I believe there would be opportunities through the review of this system. It is still in its infancy, and the VPA and others in the state have recognised that it will need to be amended as we have learnings through its implementation, but that cap is one thing in particular that we think would need to be raised.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Greg?

**Mr McLAREN:** Through you, Chair. I think the PSPs and the ICP and so forth are good mechanisms for our growth areas, but it is our established communities where we have the real shortfall, and it is much more difficult to use that sort of mechanism in those established areas. It usually leads to decisions—and I think Brimbank made this decision—where you allocate significant capital funding in a large pool over a short period of time to bring some of those areas up to scratch. But when you have got developers who are developing neighbourhood parks in your growth areas and wanting to spend in excess of \$1 million, sometimes more, it is a real challenge when you are trying to get and secure those sorts of funds for a neighbourhood park in an established area.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I know Will has got a question. We are going to break at 11.30. I am just conscious—I am looking at the time—it is 11.29. We might break for morning tea before asking the next round of questions.

**Mr FOWLES:** Sure. Chair, perhaps if I just flag the question so that our submitters could cogitate over their scones. It is really about, I guess, understanding your collective views about the relationship between and the effectiveness of all of the revenue measures and all of the means by which you access them. Whether it is GAIC, whether it is public open space contributions, whether it is developer contributions under some other mechanism, it seems to me that there are a number of streams. Some are hypothecated, some are not. There is some complexity there. I would love to discuss that with you at 11.45.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. We will break for 15 minutes.

Just before going to morning tea, Will asked a really great question. I just want to highlight, before we throw that out to council reps to address, we have got Fleur from the City of Whittlesea, who is sitting in the waiting room. We might let Fleur in. If everyone is comfortable, Fleur might want to do that 5–10-minute presentation that we talked about. Here we go. Hi, Fleur.

**Ms ANDERSON:** Good morning.

**The CHAIR:** Good morning. Thanks for joining us, Fleur. I am not sure what happened with Susan, but we have got you as a representative from the City of Whittlesea. Fleur, did you just quickly want to introduce yourself and maybe go through a 10–15-minute presentation from Whittlesea council, and then we will throw back out to questions.

**Ms GREEN:** Chair, do you mind if I just indicate to Fleur for her benefit that I had flagged a bit of a question in comparison to other LGAs, because I am quite proud of Whittlesea in the way that you have preserved a lot of the major trees. My understanding was that that was a brainchild of the late David Turnbull in terms of the preservation of significant trees, and my understanding was that that was actually within the planning scheme. Developers complained to me that it is something that they have to put up with in Whittlesea that they do not have to in other LGAs, so I would love to hear whether that is something that I have understood or misunderstood. If you could cover that in your presentation, that would be great. And thanks for joining us, Fleur.

**Ms ANDERSON:** Yes. Look, I hope that I can do this justice. Sorry, Susan is violently ill and she is the manager of parks. I am currently Acting Executive Officer for Sustainability Planning. She has sent me a presentation, but it is only in a PDF so I am not sure that I can actually share that with you. But I will try and just run through the information that I have in front of me. The main points that Susan was going to make—and I will speak to the tree policy as well, Danielle—were around the fact that we are a growth municipality and whilst we have those growing pains as well, we are also retrofitting, so this provides us with a number of different challenges. We are close to 500 square kilometres, and our population is set to grow by 60 per cent by 2041. We are three to four times bigger than middle LGAs, so once again we have the northern growth corridor coming through. The things that that is affecting in terms of environmental infrastructure fall within our local parks, our sporting reserves, our waterways, easements, our conservation areas and town centres.

Within our submission there are a number of key actions or key points that we wanted to make. Susan was going to highlight just a couple of those in the presentation. One was around Quarry Hills. Quarry Hills is located in the growth corridor between Epping, South Morang, Wollert and Mernda. It has significant environmental and cultural heritage values. It is currently 220 hectares, but the ultimate footprint will be 1100 hectares, and that obviously brings within it a massive maintenance burden of actually delivering a



regional park that is that size. I think its ultimate footprint will make it one of largest regional parks in Melbourne. That is one of the key ones that she was going to talk about. I suppose it is about providing infrastructure within that regional parkland. Our community often talk about safety when they want to visit quality open space and also about amenity, and that refers to things such as just basic shared paths, lighting, bubblers, toilets et cetera. It is all of the supporting infrastructure that goes with the park itself as well as the ongoing maintenance.

Other key actions that she had drawn out was that we have the need to secure some co-funding for the Aboriginal gathering space and that we need to develop a shared plan for the future of the Merri Creek corridor, and that falls into the space of the Merri Creek parklands, which we were involved in but seems to have gone quiet recently, so we are not sure where the state government is up to with that. There are also some key actions around the coordination and the funding to acquire the additional key open space, so there are some gaps there within projects like the Quarry Hills, which I have mentioned, and also Merri Creek.

At the moment we are advocating heavily for the state government to meet their commitment around securing the 1200-hectare grassy eucalypt woodland reserve. I know that DELWP are moving through a series of workshops at the moment, but currently their strategy focuses on using the environmental levy to purchase that space over time. Our advocacy position would be around to deliver that space under the original time line, which was to be by last year—I know that is not possible, but to deliver it as soon as possible whilst that quality of habitat still exists in the north. And there are also some key actions around completing shared linkages and shared paths.

The last thing I wanted to mention was around water security for the northern growth corridor and the issue that we have with Melbourne not having the longer term water security beyond 2028. The projections and modelling show that if we are not going to build a new desal plant, even with the desal running at 150 gigs per annum and being on full order, with population growth, climate change and increasing urbanisation, we do not have that water security. So if we start looking at localising and using alternative water sources such as stormwater, we have some issues with regulation that would stop us, for example, using stormwater to potable sources. And, yes, also it is I suppose the cost of delivering the infrastructure on subcatchment scale or catchment scale that we would be able to deliver those projects, those alternative water-harvesting projects, as well as maintaining them—again a burden to local government that we cannot necessarily fund into the future but relates heavily to our security going forward.

Just circling back to Danielle's comment about the trees, we do have the river red gum protection policy. There are some gaps in our vegetation overlay policies, particularly around our waterways, that we are aiming to fill in the next couple of years with planning scheme amendments. But we do have those policies to protect trees. We do abide by those policies and we make sure that it is within the permit conditions et cetera for developers. I am not sure what else I can say about that. I do not have any facts and figures in front of me around how many trees we have saved et cetera, but I think it is something that sits around, from memory—and I could be incorrect on this—80 per cent retention of viable and safe trees, or river red gums, for our iconic species.

I am sorry. I cannot do any more than that, because I have been given literally 1 minute's notice to dial in to this submission. So I am happy to take any questions on notice, and Susan also mentioned that we would be happy to meet with the environment minister, Lily D'Ambrosio, at any point and discuss our submission further.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Fleur. That is really greatly appreciated. It is really hard jumping in without much notice, so thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. We have sort of gone through a little bit of a presentation from each council and MPs have been asking questions. Just before the morning tea break, Will had asked a really important question around GAIC, so we might turn our minds back to that. Will, if you just want to reiterate that question?

**Mr FOWLES:** Sure. There are, it would appear, a number of revenue streams that ultimately get applied to environmental and other infrastructure, including the GAIC, including individual developer contributions and the public open space contributions, perhaps, for built-up areas. Some of those streams are hypothecated, some are not. My question is: what is the most efficient way of funding this infrastructure, in your collective view?

**The CHAIR:** Peter. You have got your hand up.

**Mr McKINNON:** Thanks, Chair. Look, it is not the collective view, Will, but I guess it is a view which may or may not be shared by others. I think it picks up on Wyndham's earlier submission that when you look across all those different revenue streams you mentioned, there is not any actually specified for this purpose that we are talking about today, and that is I guess what our submission talks to—there should be and we should re-energise a stream based on this. As Luke pointed out from Melton, we are hoping that GAIC or DCs might be able to fund some of this environmental infrastructure, but it is part of the broader infrastructure planning and infrastructure provision picture of council. So I think the answer to your question is that none of them actually hit the mark because none of them actually specifically talk to this issue. Often we are trying to utilise funds to get this issue in there, and I think that is the missing piece from a Wyndham perspective. So that is my two cents.

**Mr FOWLES:** Sorry, if I could just clarify, Chair: some of this environmental infrastructure, though, has been funded by those streams, has it not? It is just that it is not hypothecated purely to environmental infrastructure.

**Mr McKINNON:** Spot on. That is exactly right, Will—and the Growing Suburbs Fund is probably the most useful fund that utilises money for this type of purpose.

**Mr FOWLES:** Thanks.

**Ms GREEN:** Can I just ask a quick follow-on to that? That is a really good question from Will. I noticed in our most recent budget there was a new parks program, so I am wondering what the awareness of it was. It is called the parks revitalisation grants program. It seems to me that it would apply to established areas and new areas. And also, Fleur, I am not sure whether you are aware, I think that with Quarry Hills there was something called the metropolitan parks or something like that. The original money went back to when John Brumby was state and regional development minister, and then there has been subsequent money, I think, in the last two budgets that went to Quarry Hills plus something from developer contributions. Can anyone answer those?

**Mr McLAREN:** Through you, Chair, yes, the parks revitalisation program has provided some funding for parks in established areas, and I know Hume has been the recipient of two grants of \$300 000 each for two of those spaces. Of a total budget, one project is \$3.2 million, the other one is \$4.7 million. So we are appreciative of the amounts, but they are a bit of a drop. Also, just on the growth area infrastructure contribution, my understanding is that it is largely for the growth areas as opposed to the established areas. Others may have a different experience.

**Mr FOWLES:** If I can just kind of reiterate part of my question, Chair, so there is the growth areas infrastructure charge, the GAIC; there are from some councils presumably public open space contributions, which could be on projects that increase density or could also be on new builds as well presumably—there might be guidance on that; and there are developer contributions. There is a mix of these things. Look, my question again is: what is the most efficient way of collecting this revenue and dispersing it for infrastructure, including environmental infrastructure? Don't all go at once.

**The CHAIR:** Luke, you are the only—

**Mr SHANNON:** Chair, I am not sure if this goes to the heart of Will's question, but it is a point worth making. In my submission I spoke about two regional parks that were to be delivered for the western region in Melbourne, and I do not know what the funding source of those will be. Potentially GAIC could make a contribution towards that, so that is the contribution that developers make directly to the state government. I think the heart of the issue may be—I do not want to speak on behalf of Parks Victoria by any means, but whether they have the funding streams they need to be able to acquire key assets like that, I do not know. That is probably not a question for me, but we would certainly encourage a solid funding stream for them. Where that comes from, I do not know, but they have critical work to do in terms of acquiring and then developing these parks all around Melbourne, and beyond I guess.

**Ms GREEN:** So, Chair, in Luke's submission and also in his presentation I was struck by the overlap between Melton and Wyndham, and I think with what Bernadette was saying about Hume and the Merri Creek. I think so much it is around our catchments. You know, you have got the Werribee River that goes across two municipalities that we have discussed. The Merri Creek actually is a boundary between Hume and Whittlesea and then Hume above that, so it seems to me that that is probably a factor that we need to take into account. But

I wanted to just flag with all participants, all councils, what they thought about metropolitan partnerships maybe as a vehicle to move these things forward. Metropolitan partnerships are not as mature as regional partnerships, but one of the things that the northern metropolitan partnership recommended was the tracks and trails strategy. They almost all go along waterways that traverse various municipalities, and so they were able to get funding for that—not for all of it, but there is sort of a forward plan for it. You do not have to answer it now, but if those in the north have a view on it—whether that has been a good vehicle—or whether others want to have a look at it later and see whether that could be a good possible vehicle into the future with that cooperation. But yes, it troubles me, and this is something that environmental people have always said to me, how it can be really dangerous for a waterway in terms of it being cared for in being a municipal boundary, because frequently it just gets overlooked, and so this might be something that we need to take into account in our recommendations.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Danielle. Did any of the councils want to make further comment on that? Luke?

**Mr SHANNON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think Danielle makes a really important point there—that it is important to look at these things at a regional level, so forget about municipal boundaries, because they are just a line on a map. Currently with many of the funding streams we are all being quite opportunistic to seek funding for small projects here or there, but I think having a longer term vision that is shared by a region is really important. Whether that is through the partnership model I guess warrants further discussion, but I just impress the point that looking at it at a regional level is really important and that we take a cooperative approach to addressing these really important issues.

**Mr MIZZI:** Can I just add—thank you, Chair—I think there is a distinction between different types of infrastructure and I think there is a distinction between local infrastructure and regional infrastructure. I agree with the others that it is important to have a regional approach, especially when you are talking about that larger scale regional infrastructure. I think there are different mechanisms that would need to come into play though when you are talking local or regional infrastructure. Things like the ICP framework, for instance, and public open space contributions are typically more targeted towards the local infrastructure. The challenge we probably have is with the more regional infrastructure, which is where we would be looking for GAIC or for the Growing Suburbs Fund and the like.

The other thing I wanted to add though is there has been talk for many years about the need for a metropolitan open space strategy, and I would see that that is a tool which would really guide where state investment should be driven. That is a strategy that we have not seen delivered. It has been a number of years that there has been talk about the need for a metropolitan open space strategy; I think the VPA were running with it for a time. But without having that kind of overarching strategy—and perhaps to Danielle's point, it is more looking at regions rather than the metropolitan as a whole, but I think to be able to guide where GAIC or other grants or other funding should go, there is a need for that kind of overarching strategy.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Bernadette?

**Ms THOMAS:** Thanks, Sarah. Probably following on from that there is the regional parklands project groups, I think—I cannot remember exactly what they are called—with representatives from DELWP and Parks Vic and I think the VPA and the councils where the regional parklands are going to be located. Potentially that is another focus area, because these are enormous parks. As I mentioned before, Hume has one at Jacksons Creek plus also the Merri Creek parklands. They are bigger than any of the other regional parks across the city and so they provide really good I guess opportunity to be fully funded so that the master planning or the plans for those regional parks can be realised within what is an acceptable perhaps time period for those communities that surround them and will use them and we are not waiting 20 or 30 years to have all of those regional parklands realised.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Fleur?

**Ms ANDERSON:** I just wanted to go back to Danielle's comment about waterways and just talking about scale. There is a move to start talking about sub-catchment-scale planning as well as catchment-scale planning for our waterways. I think that that is a sensible move because that is the scale on which these landscapes function and happen. That then begs the question, I suppose: if we are talking about infrastructure around waterways, lower down the catchments councils or LGAs may indeed have better bang for their buck to invest upstream in infrastructure that will provide them with the impacts that they need—either flood mitigation or

waterway quality. So that starts to change, I suppose, the possible funding arrangements that could happen if certain issues or challenges were realised on those larger scales. It also starts to raise the issue around how we collaborate and navigate through those different scales, and I am talking specifically about waterways here.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Fleur. I just want to make a comment just so I am clear. Are councils in agreement that you think that it is probably time to review GAIC funding and whether the amount the developers are putting in is correct and appropriate for the current day?

**Mr McLAREN:** And where it is directed.

**The CHAIR:** Okay.

**Mr SHANNON:** Yes, I concur. I think it certainly needs review. That would certainly, I am sure, be contested, but it is appropriate to review it and be clear on where it should be allocated. The riskiest thing with the GAIC allocation is that it is eroded through a series of small innocuous-type projects. It really needs to go to strategically important projects. I think there needs to be some clarity around that, but I think reviewing the scale and where it is allocated is timely because it has been in place for probably 10 years and to my knowledge has not really been reviewed in any meaningful way since then.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Will, you just wanted to round off the questions?

**Mr FOWLES:** Yes. I just feel I am kind of putting it again, but if we have one more crack at a blank sheet of paper, what is the best way of sourcing the revenue and then applying the revenue to environmental infrastructure projects? We are not going to hold you to it, but this is a parliamentary inquiry. We would like to know what you think would work best in this universe.

**Ms THOMAS:** Maybe just a general comment if I may. Perhaps making sure that it is non-competitive is useful. We talk of shovel-ready projects; however, if we do not have the funds to do the up-front planning and/or investigations or whatever it is for the project to then commence, then we are not ready when the money is available sometimes. So being able to put money into that would be useful.

**Mr FOWLES:** Do you have a view about the revenue mechanism, Bernadette—through you, Chair?

**Ms THOMAS:** No, I do not, sorry, because I am not the planning manager. Apologies.

**Mr FOWLES:** That is fine.

**Ms THOMAS:** But I am happy to go back to our organisation and send some follow-up information if that would be useful as well as about that.

**Mr FOWLES:** Yes, please.

**Mr SHANNON:** I think from my perspective, Will, there is no easy answer to that. I think there are a number of sources of revenue. One is the developers. They should make a fair contribution to the infrastructure. It is not fair on them, however, to contribute to infrastructure that may go way beyond their site or make a significant contribution. For example, the Werribee River trail, which I spoke about, is outside the growth area, and in my view it would be unreasonable to ask developers to pay for that given the existing population that would use that facility, but perhaps they could make a contribution towards it. At a local level obviously councils need to make a contribution, particularly for assets that they already own. As I spoke about earlier, we have a 2000-hectare environmental estate that we maintain at significant expense each year. And then I guess the other source is at a state level through the annual parks fee that all ratepayers pay through their rates through the state government through the parks levy or whatever it is called. That might be an opportunity to perhaps have a more focused attention as to where that is allocated.

**Mr McLAREN:** I think I would just add in there that the growth areas happen on the back of the established areas. The strategic and statutory planners do not really like this, but with contributions towards what is happening in the established areas from the developers in the growth areas, often if we are talking creek corridors and things like that, it is downstream. So it comes back to what Bernadette spoke about earlier, an integrated response: 'This is open space, here's the network'. Certainly distinctions between established areas and growth areas—you might be able to address some of that disparity now, here. The developers are not

necessarily going to like this, but then they are going to push for those other sources of funding that you were talking about.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. We will go to Danielle.

**Ms GREEN:** Thank you. I have got a substantive question, but I have just got a quick follow-on around the water catchments, and that is: what interaction do councils either individually or at a regional level have with the Port Phillip catchment management authority? I am just wondering whether they can have a role somehow in this open space and environmental planning.

**Mr McKINNON:** I am happy to answer [Zoom dropout] through you, Chair. Danielle, I think the point there is probably more with Melbourne Water [Zoom dropout] a lot of regional plans when it comes to broader waterways, treatments, integrated water management plans. So I think there are definitely some avenues there, and I know there have been a range of strategic actions that Melbourne Water are leading. As I said before, with the wetland stuff, we really do need them to be part of, I guess, the solution to this as well. So I think there is a really good role for that to play through that regional element.

But again, getting back to a council perspective, it is just being sure where that jurisdiction technically lies, because Melbourne Water will put together the right plan and they will nominate the right regional project and we can all see it go across the maps but then it sort of sits out there without having any genuine implementation behind it a lot of the time and we have to go back to all those different funding streams and revenue streams that Will mentioned to try and scrap for some of the work that is in there. I think it is also being really clear that if we are going to take that regional approach, we do have a genuine implementation and action plan attached to it as well. Thank you.

**Ms GREEN:** Thanks. Chair, if I am now able to ask my substantive question, councils are actually required to do health and wellbeing plans, and I think it is within the cycle now that everyone is doing them. I just wondered how environmental infrastructure or how you as environmental officers and planners would feed into health and wellbeing plans. I just say that on the back of—I met with some VUT researchers recently, wearing my sport hat, and I was really seriously disturbed about the low levels of participation in organised sport and passive recreation of people living in the growth corridors. I think Hume is one of the top at about 10 per cent, but most of the others are well below that, and I think Melton is the lowest. I just think we are on a hiding to nothing in growth corridors if we do not address that. I think we all saw during COVID how much people use public open space, but if you live in an area where there isn't any—how can we address that? Would your council officers who are undertaking your health and wellbeing plans be open to your input?

**The CHAIR:** Bernadette?

**Ms THOMAS:** Thank you. Thanks for the question. I think the short answer is yes, Danielle. The officers who—and I am speaking very generally here, and other councils may do it slightly differently—manage the development of the health and wellbeing plan are generally focused on population health or in that kind of community services area. But how it usually works in councils is that they will consult widely across the council for input into that. So, for example, in my area, which is sustainable environment, we run a number of community tree-planting events throughout the season. We do walks and talks for citizen science in relation to birdwatching and frog counts and other things, which kind of cross over that environment and active health and wellbeing space. So definitely those kinds of activities are generally contained in at least the Hume health and wellbeing plan just as a matter of business as usual.

**The CHAIR:** Fleur?

**Ms ANDERSON:** Yes, a little bit similar to Bernadette, at the City of Whittlesea we have a strong health-nature connect in the municipal health and wellbeing plan. There is lots of evidence base and research, and we have all experienced it with of course COVID as well in terms of connectivity to environment and mental health and physical health and wellbeing as well—emotional health and wellbeing. So it really comes down to the crossover that we have, again, which is around that programming. We have great assets in the City of Whittlesea. We have [Zoom dropout] assets. We have low visitation rates. The low visitation rates are reflective of our community's employment clusters being further away, that they are time poor, that they have got longer commutes—they have got less time to spend in those environments. But we do find that when we use activational programming, that draws people into spaces for the first time and they get to experience those

spaces, and we draw those connections constantly. So we invest in the programming side of things—again, similar offerings to what Bernadette imagined. We are getting huge responses to running things like nature steward programs et cetera, things like that. So it is really about how we activate these spaces so that people come and meet these spaces for the first time, but then it is making sure that the amenity is in the spaces so that if people are bringing their aged parents, they know there is a toilet there. If they are wanting to walk at dusk, they know there is security lighting et cetera. It is those sorts of things as well.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Fleur. Greg?

**Mr McLAREN:** Everything that Fleur just said is exactly what I was going to say. You can have a great open space network, but it does not just work on its own. People are time poor. They need to be engaged through activation. Certainly COVID has really pushed up the ante for us in the levels of amenity—so things like toilet provision, drinking fountains, areas of respite and shade. They will have to go up tenfold. It is really drawn a very stronger focus on what the needs of those open spaces are.

**The CHAIR:** Peter?

**Mr McKINNON:** Thanks, Chair. Echoing everything that has been said, Danielle, there is definitely a connection with the relevant municipal public health plans with all the things that we have been talking about. This is enshrined with the recognition in those plans of the environment and climate now we have to include. At Wyndham we are taking us that COVID step to the next level where we are trying to piece all this together into a resilience plan, which will take into account community resilience, resilience of our landscapes. That is around tree planting, getting that activation that has been talked about and knowing that if we have got a really good, connected community through our open space systems of people there then we are going to be better off, whether it be future pandemics or future shocks or stresses that we are likely to encounter as well. So I think it has really highlighted the need to get that healthy community, healthy place connection happening. So I think they are now more ready to respond than ever, Danielle.

**The CHAIR:** Greg, I can see your hand is still up. I do not know if you have anything lastly to add.

**Mr McLAREN:** I have taken it down now. Sorry.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry. I can see so many hands up. Danielle, did you have anything off the back of that?

**Ms GREEN:** I suppose I just really like that idea of the resilience plan. Obviously our committee will make our own recommendations, but I would be really encouraging the interface councils, the growth councils, to really work together and have a deep-dive look at the recommendations of the mental health royal commission but also draw their attention to a piece of academic work that was written I think by Melbourne University after Black Saturday about mental health and trees, how people suffered real grief when they lost trees and how there is that real connection to it—I suppose just feeding that into every funding application that you are doing about mental health and wellbeing, across the board, whatever it is, whether it is for sport and rec, the Growing Suburbs Fund, whatever advocacy presentations you are making to government, and availing yourselves of the recommendations in the mental health royal commission and how they relate particularly to growing suburbs.

Having met with the Deputy Premier and Minister for Mental Health since the royal commission came out, I think he is very, very focused on growth areas. And given that some of the key sites that have been funded, that were announced funding in the early funds last week, were in suburban settings, like Whittlesea, Frankston, Brimbank and Geelong—that is also a growth area—I think just reinforcing that and backing that in might be helpful for all of us to try and up the amount of funding that goes into environmental infrastructure because of its mental health connection.

**Mr HAMER:** Look, I was actually going to start on a slightly different topic, and this is one that I guess I have observed in my area, which is admittedly a developed area, but particularly in terms of connections to regional open space within the local area. I think, Greg, you were mentioning about the lack of open space within some of the established areas. One of the issues I know that has come to the surface quite a lot is even in terms of things like bicycle paths to actually access the regional parks. A regional park might have fantastic trails and bicycle paths, but actually accessing that and getting the pathways through the local streets to get to those parks becomes a real challenge, and there is often a battle for space between other users and parking and the like. So I was wondering what are some of the, I suppose, actions that you take to facilitate that access

within the existing urban fabric and how, particularly as the new areas develop—and often in the areas I know many of the street widths are relatively narrow—that is actually being facilitated so there is that local level of access. So you have got your regional parks, which can often be for, say, more organised sport or even non-organised sport. You have got those large facilities, but as we know, just from COVID, there are a lot of people who are just walking around their local streets or walking their dogs to the park. We do not necessarily want everyone to drive or put their bikes in their car just to get to the regional park; we want people to be able to access those parks from their own home. Perhaps if you have got some comments on that.

**Mr McLAREN:** Perhaps, Paul, if I comment on that, we certainly had an approach around our broader trail networks, and we would have those connected to our residential estates that border those areas. But we are looking at going the other way and linking them into our urban areas so that we link to our activity centres, we link to our schools, we link to our transport hubs. We will combine that with where we are going with urban forests and canopy coverage so that you have a network which is treed with good canopy coverage, so that people can move I suppose in both directions, but it will also look at bringing together—

So we are dedicating a stream and a program within our capital works program to that, and that will also then integrate with the work that my team does around activity centre planning and renewals. We will also look at things like wayfinding. We will look at those rest points. We will really look at linking it back to how we make our neighbourhoods more resilient.

We have a separate footpath rehabilitation program, and we are in that process of identifying what are those streets which actually form part of the walking and cycling network. Those streets then will become sites where we will potentially look at different arrangements—where we widen footpaths, we provide an additional level of infrastructure—so that we get a much broader network across our urbanised areas and a broader open space network.

**Mr HAMER:** Does anyone else have a—

**Mr MIZZI:** Yes. If I can add to that as well, I think from Casey's perspective with growth area planning, for instance, it is a priority for us to be ensuring that our local parks are on roads that have a bicycle network to them. So within growth area planning there is a different hierarchy of roads and they all have different infrastructure, so we prioritise putting local parks on sort of connector roads where they can be easily accessed through either dedicated bike lanes or shared-user paths sufficient for bikes.

But the other point I would also add is the difficulty then with the established areas, and again it is going to the divide between growth areas, where you are able to build that in from the start, and established areas. We have real difficulty with getting people, for instance, to the Lysterfield Lake regional open space, where there is no public transport access at all and there are no real bike lanes. It is just rural roads, essentially, so it is not accessible from a public transport or active transport method, whereas Clyde regional park, the new regional park that the state will be delivering in Clyde, is going to be delivered along a major arterial road where it will have dedicated bike lanes getting to and from the local train station, and it is also a bus-capable road as well, so in future there will be capacity for public transport access directly to it. So again it just highlights the divide between the established and the growth areas.

**Mr HAMER:** Can I just ask a sort of related question. I am sort of thinking of it on the back of, again, COVID. The way that we use our parks, including our really small local parks, has possibly changed. I think there is probably a much greater appreciation for some of those sites. So I was just wondering: in terms of your open space strategies, many of them were probably written pre COVID, but is there thought to how some of those factors and how participation is changing might be reflected in terms of council strategies going forward? I think, Peter, you were talking about the Wyndham 2040 open space plan, and I assume that probably you all have something similar. Peter, I think you said you were going through a refresh at the moment. But to what extent are those considerations going to be reviewed as part of a review of the open space strategy?

**Mr McKINNON:** I am happy to jump in there, Paul—and through you, Chair. Without a doubt they will now become part of our new thinking, and each council is going through a new council plan or a revision of their strategy based on the legislative requirements. But as I said at the outset in our submission, we are already having our community conversations with numerous areas, both established areas—so, the older parts of Wyndham—and the newer areas, and with all the themes that we are talking about it has, as I said, never been

stronger in terms of the need for broader public realm experience and amenity upgrades and activation thereof. I think what is important to note is when it comes to trails and pathways it does have to have that integration.

I think Jayden picked up the point that there is this metropolitan-wide strategy, and it is really key to say: where do we spend our capital dollar or whatever DC or GAIC dollars we can get so that actually we have got that regional approach? The way that Wyndham is doing it is through this resilience plan, which will hopefully take into account not only community resilience and open space but the active transport element. Everything that we have talked about today is to try and pick it up in that one bag around better public health and wellbeing for our community. So I suspect based on COVID a lot of other communities will be similar to Wyndham and that that will be a key approach going forward.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Peter. David, I will throw to you for a question.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thanks, Sarah. I flagged a broader question earlier—I know Jayden raised the issue with Casey and someone raised the issue with Hume; I am not sure whether it was Greg or Bernadette who raised the issue with Hume, and others have referenced it too—and that is the role of Parks Victoria and the matter of resourcing Parks Victoria. I think wherever you go around the state there are issues with Parks-managed properties, which is not a reflection on the organisation or the management. It is more a reflection on the available resource. Of course as the population grows and more and more facilities are deemed to be appropriately managed by Parks, the pressure is only going to grow. What I am going to ask I think is probably not able to be answered, but if zero is ‘no work’s being done’ and 100 is ‘everything that needs to be done in a Parks Vic managed facility is being done’, in terms of any facilities that are in your municipality, can you give us an indication of where on that scale they might be? You know, are they getting it half done, are they getting a quarter done or are they getting most of it done but they just need a top-up? Can you give us an indication of how you see their performance going?

**Ms THOMAS:** Given that I was the one who raised it, Sarah, I might respond to David’s question. Look, I think it is down the lower end of the scale, David. And you are right, it is not a reflection on the expertise of the staff in the organisation or the willingness or the want of the organisation, but I do think for some time it has been underfunded for the quantum of responsibility that it has. And that is probably not just reflected in Hume. We have got one very large parcel, which is Woodlands Historic Park, and we have got some others as well. Our experience certainly is that on council’s conservation reserves, which are adjacent to that, we provide a much higher level of management focus than Parks Vic is able to, given their resourcing.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thanks for that. Is anyone else prepared to answer or comment on that?

**Mr SHANNON:** For us, David, in the City of Melton, again they would be on the lower side, and that is because there are no regional parks at this point in time. I spoke earlier about how there were two parks identified but they have not yet been acquired. Parks Victoria have installed some infrastructure in the Toolern Creek regional park, which council still owns. So they have done some work but it is still in our maintenance. Again, I think it really just comes back to the focus around the funding envelope that they have to be able to acquire and maintain, which I am sure is not an insignificant amount given the breadth of work they need to do. That is how we find the situation.

**Ms THOMAS:** Would you mind if I just follow that up? I think that is a good point. I do not know whether there has been any investigation on the growth in the quantum of land that Parks Victoria has to manage over time and the funding that has gone side by side with that. That might be a worthwhile exercise to go through—to see what is that changeover timing, the quantum of land, the management needed. What is the funding that they have had over that time and what is the funding that they actually need? Because I think we will find that there is a reasonable gap between those two.

**Mr MORRIS:** I think you are dead right, Bernadette. Exactly.

**The CHAIR:** Danielle?

**Ms GREEN:** Yes, I would just like to follow on from that. I do not disagree; however, there have been some specific projects that have been funded as election commitments and budget items in recent years. I would be really interested because it sort of worries me. Okay, something is in the budget and identified. Is there evidence it is progressing? Is there not? I am concerned at how those moneys are actually being used. For



example, in the City of Whittlesea, Fleur, the Plenty Gorge master plan was funded two or three budgets ago I think now or maybe two. I do not know; COVID years are like dog years—they seem to race by. That includes a 17- or 19-kilometre bike path and a whole lot of other infrastructure. Then in December Yan Yean Reservoir Park I know was funded for an upgrade. There were two or three other public parts—excuse me, I cannot remember where they were, but they might be in some of the other local government areas. Then on the Merri Creek park, that was an election commitment for the last election across Hume, Mitchell and Whittlesea to do the planning to implement a park. I would be interested in what evidence the local councils that cover those three projects are seeing—that the money is actually rolling out, because that is something we can then follow up with Parks Vic.

**The CHAIR:** Bernadette?

**Ms THOMAS:** Danielle, the Jacksons Creek regional parkland project is in progress now, and Hume is working with the department to continue doing some of that early planning. So that is in progress.

**Ms GREEN:** And when was that funded, Bernadette? I am interested in the lead times.

**Ms THOMAS:** It was an election commitment from the government at the last election. At least the regional parklands reference group was formed maybe about 12 months or so ago, I think. I guess the background planning has started, and that is I think the same for the Merri Creek, although it is a little bit further behind in the planning time frame. I guess that is one part of funding commitments. Where the really big money comes in is once the master plan or whatever—the regional parklands plan—has been developed. Then if there is public acquisition of private land to be done, if there are remediation works or all of this environmental infrastructure plus conservation works, that is where I think that the big buckets of money come. Maybe it is worth speaking to Parks Vic around—I do not know what consultation goes on with them; I am assuming that there is department-to-department consultation, as there often is in those situations—I guess what input do they have into creating a budget that does allow them to manage those sites to community expectations, and if it is a conservation site, in line with conservation expectations as well.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks. Jayden.

**Mr MIZZI:** Thank you. Yes, I just wanted to add our experience with the Clyde regional park. I understand that there was a budget commitment that was included as part of that commitment to deliver a number of regional parks around Melbourne. The funding for that—our understanding is that Parks Victoria will not proactively acquire land from private owners. The messaging that was put out by Parks Victoria at the time when the PAO was first being proposed was that they would essentially wait for landowners to come to them when they were willing to sell, and that is perfectly fine. That is one way of operating. But it essentially means that where there is a budget commitment that is not necessarily going to be spent any time soon. I do not believe that any of the land for the Clyde regional park has been acquired yet. I obviously cannot speak for them; I do not know where they are at with any negotiations that might be underway. But for our adjacent regional sports precinct that we are doing next door we have acquired two-thirds of the properties already within the 18 months or so since the PAO was approved. So that is a difference in the way that we have operated, but that is one thing—that if there are a series of different landowners that they need to deal with, it may take 15 or 20 years for the land to actually be usable if they continue with that path.

**Ms GREEN:** Whereas Plenty Gorge is in a different situation because it was established in 1988 or 89 or something and if not all the land has been acquired, it is very, very close to it and the master plan has now been funded. So, Fleur, are you able to elucidate anything around that?

**Ms ANDERSON:** I was briefly involved in the master planning process. I think our focus is more on how the recommendation is going to be delivered in the Plenty Gorge parklands. In terms of other planning, we are still needing to prepare a parkland plan for the Quarry Hills regional parkland with DELWP. Again, in terms of planning, we are still at the planning stage for other master plans that would relate to, say, Merri Creek, Edgars Creek or Darebin Creek. We have got the Plenty Gorge parklands, but I cannot speak to where exactly we are at. I know that certain recommendations have been made and that the experience with the Merri Creek parklands has been that it has been hot and cold, as in there is the commitment there to deliver it, we get called in to a bunch of meetings, there seems to be activity and then we do not hear anything for a year. With no communication I am not sure whether that is happening with Plenty Gorge; I have not spoken to my

counterparts in Parks about that. But I certainly know with the Merri Creek parklands it was sort of like we have got a million dollars to do some planning, we did a whole lot of meetings around looking at gap analysis of land acquisition et cetera and everything has gone cold since.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Fleur. Greg.

**Mr McLAREN:** Thank you. Just to add to what Fleur was saying there and also Bernadette about Merri Creek regional park, the planning is getting a bit out of kilter. We are working through the *Northern Regional Trails Strategy* and the funding opportunities that are available there, so that is one level of planning that is happening whilst the regional park planning is not happening. The same with Jacksons Creek regional park, where we are working with Western Water on part of the path. We have got subdivisions and developments, and we are starting to get close to the area where we need the regional plan to guide us. I would really reinforce that if it came out of this process, a really strong focus on moving forward those regional parks and the planning that is required, we would all be up for it.

**The CHAIR:** Bernadette, did you have anything to add?

**Ms THOMAS:** Yes, I just had one other thing to add, just to pick up on Jayden's point about the public acquisition overlays. It is a similar situation for the biodiversity conservation strategy sites as well. With the sites nominated that are in public ownership often there is no funding to acquire those sites until much later, and even sometimes when developers have paid their contribution that is also still not making its way to either purchasing that land or the offsets into the Werribee grasslands as well. So it is a similar situation where the framework is a set up, the planning has sort of been committed to, but the funding required for that planning to really move somewhere and into implementation is lacking. Often that is around acquiring private land parcels to sort of realise the vision of either a regional parkland or a biodiversity conservation reserve under the BCS.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Do we have any other members that have any final questions? We have 9 minutes to go. No? I might ask one. Fleur, Whittlesea's submission calls for limits on out-of-sequence development, knowing that it restricts the ability for timely planning of sporting infrastructure, as councils often have planned open space delivery projects to coincide with the land availability. Do you want to talk a little bit about the extent of the problem and what in your opinion you want to see governments do? I know this is probably something that will affect other councils as well.

**Ms ANDERSON:** Sorry to disappoint, Sarah, but I will have to take that on notice because that is not an area I operate in.

**The CHAIR:** That is completely fine. Are there any other councils that want to talk about that out-of-sequence—

**Mr SHANNON:** Yes. Thanks, Chair. I did raise this briefly in my presentation earlier. One of the issues I think we all face is having developments that are occurring in effectively a patchwork quilt-type manner. Within the City of Melton we have got between 50 and 60 individual subdivisions happening at one time, and the situation that could arise there is you may have properties under development that are disconnected from nearby properties which are under development. So the road connections may not be there and the open space connections may not be there. Critical to your point, sometimes the active recreation reserves may straddle more than one property—they might be over one, two or three properties—so the land may only come into council's ownership over a long period of time as each of those properties is developed. I think the way that that could be better managed is through the precinct planning process. Currently council has little ability to dictate where and when those developments happen, so there could be more levers within the approved PSP, which is prepared by the Victorian Planning Authority, to give a council greater say over the timing of the development of those individual properties to ensure that you do not have those situations arise. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks. Sorry, Will, have you got your hand up?

**Mr FOWLES:** Yes. Just following on from that if I can, Luke, in terms of the sequencing of that, it strikes me as being a really difficult thing to manage if you are sort of saying, 'You cannot develop before this date' or 'You must develop by that date'. There is a whole bunch of commercial factors that are, in many respects, outside of developers' control. Are there any mechanisms you would like to see introduced to better facilitate

that? Or is it actually something of a fool's errand and is there some other workaround that we could be contemplating to assist with that?

**Mr SHANNON:** You are right, Will. It is an extremely difficult situation because there are a lot of commercial realities involved here. A developer might own a piece of land that they need to develop to pay debt and so on. It is not so much to do with the timing as to the year that it might be developed; it is more trying to ensure that the development of individual sites aligns to neighbouring properties. So I do not think it is a question of saying, 'You cannot develop your property until 2030 or 2040'. It is rather this property should be developed in concert with this adjoining property because they might have key infrastructure that straddles both. Now, I recognise that that can still be problematic, because if the properties are in different ownership, you may have one owner who has no desire to develop at this time and they are land banking. That can happen. So it does require cooperation between individual developers to meet that objective.

**Mr FOWLES:** Which is a very difficult thing to achieve. If, for example, one developer has run into a funding issue and therefore cannot get their project up at the same pace as their neighbour, is there anything realistically that local or state government can do in that scenario?

**Mr SHANNON:** Currently no, there is no really nothing that can be done. Ideally council would have the opportunity to say, 'No, you can't develop this property until this other thing happens'. That should only happen, though, where there is a criticality about it. So, for example, if there is an active recreation reserve that straddles two properties, it seems incongruous that one property can be developed, the residents are all living there, yet they have no access to a sporting reserve because the adjoining property has not been developed. So I do not think the ability to say no should be used lightly, but there might be some key pieces of infrastructure that dictate in certain specific cases that council should have the ability to say, 'No, it's premature for that site to be developed until the adjoining site is developed', or there is a commitment for the adjoining site to do be developed.

**Mr FOWLES:** In the alternate, could council take over that responsibility and effectively have a caveat or something on the title so that the first application of moneys by the developer is to repay that cost or something? Could there be some other mechanism that would ensure that you do not have that bottlenecking?

**Mr SHANNON:** None that I am aware of. I think I know where you are going with the question. I think the issue is if there is a key property in that sequence of properties that is not going to be developed, that becomes problematic because council would need access to the land to facilitate that sporting reserve or the state might need it to deliver a school or whatever. It is really then we would require a compulsory acquisition to be undertaken by council. The issue with that is that is expensive and takes time, and it would also mean that we would have to forward fund. We would collect the money in time through developer contributions, but the community would have to pay in advance for the acquisition of that site and may not recoup that money for some years until the site is actually developed. It is not an easy issue.

**Mr FOWLES:** Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Jayden and Greg, I can see your hands up. Jayden, I will throw to you first.

**Mr MIZZI:** Thank you. Just a quick point. From Casey's perspective, we are less interested in stopping developers from developing. We are keen to be facilitating where possible, but obviously getting the infrastructure delivered is essential for these new communities. We note and are quite supportive of a bill that is currently before Parliament at the moment that is seeking to amend the *Planning and Environment Act*, and that looks to implement some new mechanisms in the ICP framework whereby councils can compulsorily acquire land required for infrastructure, be that a road project or the active open space, and it reduces the financial risk to council of compensation associated with that. That is a bill that is before Parliament at the moment. I am not sure where exactly that is sitting in the time frames, but we would be supportive of that as a last case resort if we do need to get a road connection through or an open space delivered and there is out-of-sequence development.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Jayden. Greg.

**Mr McLAREN:** It is great to hear what Jayden was just talking about there, because that out-of-sequence development seems to be a really significant issue. Largely around the walking and cycling network—for

people moving into new estates it will be 10, 15, 20 years away before there is going to be a connection created. It comes back to that comment I made earlier—I do not think development is just related to a subdivision. There have got to be some mechanisms where people have a shared responsibility, the developers have a shared responsibility, whether it be across growth areas or across the whole city.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Greg. Danielle, did you have any final comments?

**Ms GREEN:** Just further to Will's suggestion, I am with Jayden from Casey; I would not want to be saying no. But what would councils think about—for example, if our committee were to make a recommendation along the lines of a rolling fund or something like that that maybe might come from state government allowing a change to borrowing limits that was specifically around this that you could draw down on to deliver the environmental infrastructure early? Then it could be paid back when the developer contributions fall due, where you have got more than one developer responsible for developing that environmental infrastructure.

**The CHAIR:** Greg?

**Mr McLAREN:** Yes, support it.

**Mr MIZZI:** I would agree forward funding infrastructure is a key challenge, and we are having to look to sort of commercial loans at the moment as an option, and that is not necessarily going to be viable on a larger scale. So we would likely support that, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, thank you. It sounds like that is popular, Danielle.

I just want to say to everyone, on behalf of the committee, thank you so much for taking the time to come and speak with us today. I am really sorry that we were not face to face, but I think a lot of us have got used to this sort of online virtual Zoom meeting set-up, and I just want to say thank you for joining us and sharing some great insights in the things that you have presented and talked to us about today.

**Mr FOWLES:** Special shout-out to Fleur for joining us on 28-seconds notice.

**Ms GREEN:** You beat me to it, Will. Well done, Fleur. You get the order of valour for today.

**The CHAIR:** On that note, we will end the live broadcast.

**Mr McLAREN:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Enjoy the rest of your day.

**Witnesses withdrew.**