

Newcastle Urban Forest



Policy
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1 PURPOSE

The goals and objectives of this policy provide important directional statements that will guide the management of the Newcastle urban forest. They emphasise the role of the urban forest as an intergenerational resource that provides multiple benefits to the community, and the need to improve the capacity to provide those benefits.

2 BACKGROUND

The *Newcastle Urban Forest Background Paper (NUFBP) 2007* promotes a holistic view of Newcastle's green spaces and the urban forest it supports. It makes key recommendations necessary to maintain a healthy and well-managed urban forest that can supply the community with a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits.

To address the issues raised by the NUFBP 2007 will require a change in Council's focus from a reactive regulatory approach, where resources are expended in addressing conflicts related to individual private and public trees, to a more proactive asset management approach where resources are expended on broader management and maintenance of the urban forest resource so that many vegetation related issues and conflicts are avoided in the first place.

This Policy and the related Tree Management DCP and Technical Manual will play an important part in managing the Newcastle urban forest and meeting Council's legal obligations with regard to its tree resource.

3 VISION

The vision is of an attractive, liveable city with a thriving urban forest that provides economic, ecological and social benefits as part of Newcastle's essential and valued infrastructure that is managed and cared for by the City and its citizens.

4 URBAN FOREST GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

4.1 GOALS

The overall goals are to:

1. recognise the importance of the urban forest to the health and well-being of Newcastle and to its ecological and economic security;
2. maximise the capacity of Newcastle's urban forest to provide ecological, economic, social and aesthetic benefits to both present and future generations;
3. sustain and expand Newcastle's urban forest on an intergenerational life cycle basis.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

The following are the specific objectives for the Newcastle urban forest:

Quality & quantity of urban forest

- promote increased long-term public and private investment in the urban forest to provide benefits to:
 - microclimate regulation
 - soil and water management
 - air quality management
 - carbon storage
 - biodiversity conservation
 - recreation
 - culture & aesthetics
 - traffic management
 - economic development
 - economic products
- increase the aggregate extent of the urban forest to achieve density targets once these targets have been determined for Australian urban conditions
- compensate for loss of urban forest potential resulting from development processes
- improve the overall structure, health and condition of the urban forest

Planning processes

- integrate planning for the urban forest with local and regional processes for land use and settlement planning
- improve the compatibility of trees and vegetation with buildings and infrastructure through planning, design, engineering and arboricultural practices

Education & research

- improve knowledge and understanding of Newcastle's urban forest, its ecological processes, the benefits it provides and how it should be managed
- monitor changes in Newcastle's urban forest over time.

Community focus

- involve the community as a key partner in managing Newcastle's urban forest.

5 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The delivery of the Newcastle urban forest will be through four key areas:

- Organisational integration
- Systematic asset management
- Holistic approach
- Community focus

A Organisational integration

Council's statutory charter is to properly manage, develop, protect and conserve the environment. Managing urban forest is therefore a core function of local government and should be integrated into the Council's corporate management and land use planning processes.

A wide variety of disciplines should have input to management processes, including specialists in arboriculture, landscape architecture, urban planning, natural resource management, engineering and economics.

Council should cooperate with other councils, regional bodies, government agencies and large institutional land holders, to implement urban forest measures at a regional level.

Responsibility: all Council managers will be responsible for ensuring any policy or action which relates to the urban forest is formulated/implemented in accordance with this policy.

B Asset management (vegetation on public land)

Urban forest is a living asset subject to growth and decay. As an asset it needs to be managed in the same way Council manages its other built infrastructure, adopting a cyclic outlook that plans for maintaining and renewing the vegetation within designated levels of service. The level of service needs to reflect the management of risks arising from its operation and maintenance techniques to maximise its serviceable life.

Management decisions should take into account replacement life cycles that may exceed several human generations, reflecting the fact that trees and vegetation are long-life assets, with implications for intergenerational equity and long-term investment programs.

Urban forest assets owned (or controlled) by Council need to be funded in the same framework as built assets, with maintenance and renewal programs adopted through the Management Plan and recognised in the Annual Report as Public Works that require expenditure to ensure they are financially sustainable. Urban Forest maintenance and renewal programs need to incorporate external funding and community volunteer partnerships options.

Accurate information on the extent and condition of the urban forest, and its capacity to provide benefits should be key inputs to planning, management and environmental reporting processes. Application of this principle means developing systematic information systems, as well as improving knowledge and understanding of urban ecosystem processes and interactions, and their intrinsic and monetary values.

Responsibility: All managers responsible for Council assets.

C Holistic approach

Green space, and urban forest contained within it, is an integral component of the city's urban structure. Trees and vegetation should therefore be managed as part of an overall city green structure with common goals, not solely as isolated entities. Because the urban forest makes a sizeable contribution to the efficient operation of cities and suburbs, it should be managed so as to maximise its contribution.

An urban forestry program should utilise a wide range of policy tools, including planning and regulatory mechanisms, investment in planting and renewal, financial incentives, voluntary conservation programs, capacity building, research, education, accounting and inventory systems, and environment reporting. Both public and private lands should be addressed.

Infill development is one example of an unavoidable cumulative loss of private green space such as back yards and gardens that have important social, ecological and aesthetic values. Such losses need to be offset by increased tree and vegetation establishment on other suitable land such as in nearby public green space.

Therefore, to ensure the holistic management of the Newcastle urban forest, a development control plan for the management of urban trees on private property should be established, to support this policy with respect to guiding development which involves trees.

Responsibility: All Strategic Planning and Development staff when assessing applications and all City Services staff when dealing with Council's assets.

D Community focus

The community should be a direct partner, participant and 'owner' in formulating and implementing urban forest measures because the urban forest is an integral part of the local community and provides local identity.

The community is a potentially rich information resource, and can provide valuable insights that might otherwise be overlooked. Where appropriate, consultation should be sought from the community, including local experts, conservation groups, recreational user groups, indigenous groups and residents, and from associated professionals in engineering, planning, architecture and other fields.

Partnerships should be developed with utility agencies and major institutional landholders to promote enhanced greening programs, for example within educational institutions, Hunter Area Health, Department of Housing and the like.

Responsibility: All Council staff responsible for urban forest related activities.