



Grassy Plains Network

GRASSYPLAINSNETWORK@GMAIL.COM | GRASSYPLAINS.NET.AU | LEVEL 3, 60 LEICESTER STREET, CARLTON VIC 3053

Outline of consultant brief:

Pathways to increased protection of Melbourne's threatened urban grasslands

Prepared by the Grassy Plains Network
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Contact:
Adrian Marshall
Facilitator, Grassy Plains Network
grassyplainsnetwork@gmail.com
grassyplains.net.au

The Grassy Plains Network

The Grassy Plains Network is an independent organisation representing land management professionals, academics, ecologists and community members concerned about the ongoing decline and loss of grassy ecosystems across Melbourne and its surrounds.

Grassy Plains Network members advocate for improved grassland protection and management. Many of our members are acknowledged experts in the management and restoration of grassy ecosystems, having led long-term efforts to preserve grasslands across the Victorian Volcanic Plain. Grassy Plains Network members have been critical to the establishment of the native seed industry and to the development of best-practice monitoring methods for grasslands. We have members who have been working for decades with communities to raise awareness of the importance of grasslands and their conservation. Collectively, we have worked at every level of government, across all of Melbourne's north and west, in Landcare, CMAs and in dozens of community and environmental organisations.

A high-level strategic proactive approach is needed

Melbourne's urban grasslands are vital to the preservation of this critically endangered ecological community. The State has acted to preserve large contiguous patches of grassland within the Western Grassland Reserves and through the Melbourne Strategic Assessment. However, a number of high-quality, Themeda-dominated grasslands remain insufficiently protected within the pre-MSA urban growth boundary.

These urban grasslands are often associated with other natural assets such as creeks and wetlands, and they are essential elements for ecological connectivity in the urban landscape, especially in the context of the mounting effects of rapid climate change. Urban grasslands provide rich near to nature experiences for residents and workers, are green infrastructure contributing important ecosystem services across the city, including improved health and well-being, and they are an integral part of the identity of Melbourne's west and north.

Protection of these high-quality sites in urban Melbourne also works to achieve the vision and goals set in the 2017 policy document *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037*: that Victorians value nature and that Victoria's natural environment is healthy. These grasslands are close to many Victorians in the Western suburbs of Melbourne. They are high-quality grasslands with embedded rock, low nutrient soils and little grazing impact, therefore requiring only minimal restoration.

The recommendations of the 2022 Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline, and the findings of the 2021 Victorian Auditor-General's Office report *Protecting critically endangered grasslands*, further underline the significance of these grasslands and the urgency for substantive action to ensure their protection.

Following discussions between the Grassy Plains Network and DELWP, DELWP has agreed that the development of a proactive and strategic high-level approach to the protection of these grasslands will result in better overall outcomes than would be achieved through the business as usual approach.

Objective of this Report

This document outlines the brief for a consultant to develop a report provisionally titled *Pathways to protection of threatened urban grasslands*, which will investigate proactive and feasible pathways to the protection of threatened urban grasslands and report on the relative benefits and feasibilities across a range of options, and it will include recommendations for their protection and acquisition.

It is important to emphasise that this scoping report is to be focused on achievable outcomes to protect these grasslands. A product that is too vague or idealistic would not be useful, neither would a report mired in *realpolitik*, that accepts business-as-usual, and denies the possibility that this process represents a genuine opportunity to achieve positive conservation outcomes for our threatened urban grasslands.

Geographic scope

All grasslands on public and private land within the urban growth boundary not part of the Melbourne Strategic Assessment. In practice, the west of Melbourne, in particular Hobsons Bay and Brimbank LGAs.

The grasslands

Eleven grasslands (see Table 1 in Appendix 1) of particular importance have been identified as priorities for protection, though the identification of additional grasslands for protection should also be considered part of the scope of the consultant's report (See Appendix 2).

Tasks

The tasks associated with the development of this strategic approach document can be summarised as:

1. Identification of grasslands for increased protection
2. Expert assessment of the overall values and significance of each site
3. Identification and consultation with stakeholders
4. Compilation and assessment of the land use planning history and state-of-play for each site
5. Consideration of possible mechanisms for protection
6. Articulation of potential outcomes, pathways, barriers and opportunities
7. Development of recommendations for next steps
8. Production of report

Identification of grasslands for increased protection

Table 1 shows eleven grasslands of particular concern, which were identified from expert local knowledge, and thorough review of available ecological reports and vegetation mapping. The Grassy Plains Network notes that a few additional grassland sites on private land, where adequate documentation is lacking (see Table 2), may also be of substantial ecological value and not yet be approved for development. Councils, DELWP, ARI, and other organisations may be able to assist in the identification of such sites.

The presence of additional grasslands on private land is of particular note here. Hobsons Bay's Biodiversity Strategy has identified lack of knowledge about grasslands on private land as a knowledge gap that needs to be addressed. Without such data, Council strategic planners may be hesitant to specify areas on which Environmental Significance Overlays (ESOs) should be applied.

Expert assessment of the overall values and significance of each site

This will mainly require collation of existing documentation. Some significant grasslands may not have had suitable surveys undertaken. These will need to be identified and appropriate survey will have to form part of the next steps in this process. Some surveys will not have been made public.

One good outcome from this report would be for all parties to agree to share the available data. Estimates of biodiversity values may be sufficient for forming the general recommendations of this report. Recommendations for more detailed field assessments could also be included.

Consultation with stakeholders

The consultant will need to identify and speak to all stakeholders. This should include relevant community groups. Consultation may require a number of approaches, e.g. one-to-one conversations, workshops, written submission.

It is important to emphasise that this consultation process is vital for generating positive buy-in to a big picture approach to saving these grasslands. We want to deliver a message: that the State is willing to take the initiative here, is actively looking for ways forward, that better outcomes will be achieved by working together, that good outcomes are possible, that the time is right for this to happen.

The right consultant will be one who has a genuine enthusiasm for this project and can see its potential and their role in making positive change.

Compilation and assessment of the land use planning history and state-of-play for each site

The consultant will need to analyse planning history and state-of-play for each site to determine and summarise the potential scope for grassland conservation. This will include:

- Compilation and assessment of local planning controls, including zoning, overlays, local policies to determine local environmental controls, and requirements versus perceived development rights
- Assessment of the significance of each site relative to any local and State development strategies, and conservation strategies
- Assessment of land ownership and lot configuration, and development intentions of landholder, including any recent applications and development approvals.

Consideration of possible mechanisms for protection

Conservation mechanisms will vary on a grassland by grassland basis. To achieve the best conservation outcomes, it may also be appropriate to consider precinct-level scale. For example, approaching the Altona Industrial Precinct as a whole may allow some internal offsetting to occur across multiple land parcels held by single owners, and integration with the upcoming review of Hobsons Bay's Industrial Land Strategy. Similarly, multiple grasslands across the Cairnlea precinct may be best approached at precinct scale.

Without pre-judging the outcomes of the report, we see the measures needed to protect these grassland sites in two broad categories:

1. The feasible planning and offsetting measures at a site or precinct level which can protect part of a site and ESOS
2. The additional resourcing which can protect more of a site, either from an urban offset trading scheme or through public acquisition.
 - a. Low-quality grasslands within the urban Melbourne (not MSA) area might be able to contribute to an offset pool and contribute to the protection of the more significant grasslands. These will need to be identified and will include areas such as road and rail corridors where there are likely to be low-quality biodiversity values that will be lost to

future expansion (e.g. patchy Themeda stands on Tilburn Rd, Ardeer). Non-linear, low-quality grassland areas would also be considered. However, in sketching-out a likely offset pool, it will be important to work with stakeholders, to recognise long-term strategic goals such as the establishment of biodiversity corridors, and to recognise the general significance of road and rail corridors to grassland connectivity.

- b. Public acquisition must remain on the table as an option. How those funds are obtained is a political question and beyond the scope of this report. Nevertheless, some funds may be obtained, and we need to proceed on the basis that that is at least a possibility.

It is important to recognise that thinking outside of the box may be essential to achieve the best conservation outcomes. Mechanisms need to consider, but must not be bound by, the idea of value for money.

Mechanisms may include, but aren't limited to:

- Implementing planning controls, including environmental significance overlays, Development Plan Overlays, and statewide clearing controls, as part of development approvals
- Retaining offsets on-site and in the urban area
- Using a Native Vegetation Precinct Plan to allow the sharing costs across all landholders at a precinct scale
- Public land acquisition
- Facilitating transfer of land and subdivision
- Coordinating liaison across multiple landholders and agencies
- Survey and management
- Salvage and translocation
- Partial development of land, led privately or by Development Victoria with the VPA
- Creating a framework whereby DELWP can assist government authorities in responding to development and clearing applications when they arise, guided by an urban grassland strategy that seeks to minimise offsetting and maximise the retention of urban grasslands.
- Implementing some sort of urban offset trading and/or development contributions strategy for urban grasslands (inside the 2005 Urban Growth Boundary). Under the existing state-wide offset framework, it may be possible to direct a portion of urban grassland offsets to the protection of high-value future urban grassland reserves, e.g. by requiring Government agencies and infrastructure projects (and even private landholders) to participate in such a scheme. However, additional mechanisms need to be investigated that could direct all urban grassland offsets for such a purpose, e.g. a small scale strategic assessment under the EPBC Act. Such an approach could also approve future loss of grassland, e.g. the poorer quality grasslands identified as part of an offset pool.
- Closing the sort of policy loopholes that led to the loss of the Modeina Grasslands
- Requirements to manage biomass and weeds on private property
- Land-tax exemptions for private landholders who manage their land for conservation purposes
- Subsidies for weed management

Articulation of potential outcomes, pathways, barriers and opportunities

Examples of potential outcomes:

- Development Victoria creates three social housing grassland developments at Solomon Heights, Cairnlea and Broadcast Australia
- Hobsons Bay creates a Green Biolinks + Industry plan
- Modeina salvage and translocation plan
- DELWP facilitates Victoria University placing a covenant on the VU Grassland
- VicRoads uses the Outbound WRR Servo Grassland as an offset for upgrades taking place on rural highways.

Some sort of general offset calculation broadly summarising the biodiversity values across the geographic scope of the report will be useful to frame further discussions of potential actions. We need to know the extent to which an urban offset scheme may be able to further protection of these sites.

Development of recommendations for next steps

Without pre-judging the results of this report, next steps might include:

- Assisting Hobson Bay in assessing biodiversity values on public and private land and establishing ESOs
- Funding and conducting surveys to establish biodiversity values
- Facilitating grassland-sensitive subdivision where appropriate
- Proposing an “Offsets in the West” strategy that would apply to government agencies working in the west of Melbourne, e.g. Melbourne Airport Rail offsets going to creation of Solomon Heights conservation reserve
- Assisting with the business cases for development
- Pre-purchasing private land on the assumption that money spent would be recouped by later development
- Taking-on the management of privately owned grassland
- Establishing an independent urban grassland management team
- Funding councils to offer land holders financial incentives to manage their land for conservation purposes
- Recommendations for future ownership and management responsibility
- Proposals for new legislative tools that may help: e.g. some requirement to manage biodiversity values on private land.

We would expect the report to include some prioritisation of options that charts the potential outcomes in terms of the protection of environmental values weighed against their achievability.

Production of report

Deliverables

- 1 x A4 electronic document
- GPS layer identifying areas for discussion

Timeline

- Period for quotation and return brief: February 2022
- Selection of consultant: March 2022
- Consultation: April, May, June 2022
- Draft report: July 2022
- Final report: September 2022

Appendix 1: The grasslands, precincts and indicative approaches to protection

Table 1: 11 threatened grasslands, their precincts, and some indicative approaches to protection

Grassland	Significance	Urgency	Description of options	Achievability
Altona Industrial Precinct	Very high	Very high	<p>Precinct level approaches include considering all grasslands and potential offsets in a single package as well as larger connectivity and any future industrial uses. Matters to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must incorporate approaches to industrial development in the area. • Must consider role of green space as sea level rises, e.g. viable retreat of wetlands of Truganina Swamp. • Must consider broader biodiversity connectivity of Hobsons Bay. • Survey of existing biodiversity incomplete • No ESOs in place • Chance to resolve long-standing issues with inappropriate subdivision at Burns Road • Confirm Ajax Road, Ajax Road Part 2, and Ajax Road North all owned by Axxcell, and if so negotiate as single set 	
<p>Ajax Road</p> <p>Note: Future use of Areas G and H to be determined: no survey yet undertaken.</p>	<p>High</p> <p>Large (76 ha) block strategically located adjacent to Kayes Drain, Laverton Creek, Truganina Swamp and close to other large grassland patches.</p> <p>Good quality grassland. Southern portion all good, northern portion in large</p>	<p>Very high</p> <p>Active development proposal, no management.</p>	<p>Option 1</p> <p>Purchase and reservation of whole parcel (north and south). Ownership to be determined, though southern portion should be transferred to Melbourne Water.</p> <p>Best option for environmental values. Land without good biodiversity values can be used for other public facilities (park, play, community centre etc) or restored to grassland.</p> <p>Best option for residents.</p> <p>Cost could be reduced over time by use of site as offset.</p>	<p>Achievable through Government purchase or offsetting scheme.</p> <p>High purchase cost.</p>
			<p>Option 2</p> <p>Purchase and reservation of all southern portion and transfer of land to Melbourne Water. Development of northern portion with retention of all areas of biodiversity</p>	<p>Achievable through mix of Government purchase, or</p>

Grassland	Significance	Urgency	Description of options	Achievability
	<p>patches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SRF • Themeda • Intact rocky substrate • Potential SLL • Matted Flax Lily 		<p>significance.</p> <p>Makes development complex because of spatial arrangement of patches of biodiversity in northern portion. Developer loses significant amount of developable land in northern portion but is compensated through the purchase of the southern portion.</p> <p>Residents impacted by industrial development opposite.</p> <p>All remnant protected.</p>	<p>offsetting scheme, and planning controls.</p> <p>Not as expensive as Option 1, but still substantial cost.</p>
			<p>Option 3</p> <p>Use of southern portion as on-site offset. Development of northern portion with retention of biodiversity values in Area A (Patch adjacent to Kayes Drain). May be possible to include protection of Ajax Road North if same ownership confirmed.</p> <p>Some remnant lost and compensated for by on-site offset. Note that DELWP's offset position has been that southern portion can offset loss of entire northern portion. This proposal suggests Kayes Drain also protected. Either DELWP changes its position, or developer compensated.</p> <p>Offset arrangements would need to be negotiated. Note negotiations were at impasse at time of recent proposed subdivision application.</p> <p>Developer only loses some developable land, but not as much as in Option 2.</p> <p>Residents impacted by industrial development opposite.</p>	<p>Achievable through planning controls.</p> <p>May require some additional compensation given Area A being retained.</p>
<p>Ajax Road North Grassland</p> <p>Note: Unsurveyed</p>	<p>Likely to be moderate–high</p> <p>Medium sized (5.6 ha) block strategically located in the Altona industrial precinct close to large grassland patches.</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>No development pressure, no management.</p>	<p>Option 1</p> <p>Purchase and reservation of parcel for conservation purposes. Ownership to be determined.</p>	<p>Achievable through Government purchase, or offsetting scheme.</p> <p>High purchase cost</p>

Grassland	Significance	Urgency	Description of options	Achievability
	<p>Informal visual assessment shows a rocky grassland with dense stands of Themeda, some native herbs and limited weed, relatively easy to restore.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themeda • Rocky substrate • Potential SLL • Spiny Rice-flower 			
<p>Burns Road Grassland</p> <p>Note: Two ha block on north edge cleared and being developed.</p>	<p>High</p> <p>Large (39.5 ha) block strategically located in the Altona industrial precinct close to large grassland patches.</p> <p>A rocky Themeda paddock.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themeda • SRF • Rocky substrate • SLL • Tussock Skink 	<p>High</p> <p>Development pressure, no management.</p>	<p>Option 1</p> <p>Purchase and reservation of whole parcel. Ownership to be determined.</p> <p>Purchase could be complex, because site is a historic subdivision of hundreds of parcels. Council currently working on consolidation.</p> <p>Best option for environmental values. Cost could be reduced over time by use of site as offset.</p>	<p>Achievable through Government purchase, or offsetting scheme.</p> <p>High purchase cost.</p>
			<p>Option 2</p> <p>Reservation of part of parcel as onsite offset, with ownership to be determined, and partial development</p> <p>Purchase could be complex, because site is a historic subdivision of hundreds of parcels. Council currently working on consolidation.</p>	<p>Achievable through Government purchase, or offsetting scheme, and planning controls</p> <p>Reduced purchase cost.</p>
<p>Cairnlea</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Precinct level approaches include considering all grasslands and potential offsets in a single package as well as larger connectivity and any future residential and uses. Matters to consider:</p> <p>Matters to consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council keen to establish good biodiversity connectivity along Jones Creek • Former landfill sites require specific land use approaches for any development 	

Grassland	Significance	Urgency	Description of options	Achievability
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong local community groups Subdivision of Jonesfield Corner / Reis Street 	
Jonesfield Corner Grassland Note: Parcel extends both sides of freeway, northern portion known as Jonesfield Corner, southern portion as Reid Street Grassland	Moderate Medium-sized (9 ha) block strategically located on the Jones Creek link between St Albans Railway Reserves, Denton Avenue Grassland and Iramoo. Themeda with herbs, including Stachkousia subterranean and Pimelea curviflora. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NTGVVP SRF (may no longer be present) AFL Rocky substrate SLL Tussock Skink 	Moderate Some development pressure, no management.	Option 1 Development as public open space and recreation with retention of remnant patches. Creek corridor preserved and revegetated as biolink.	Achievable through Government purchase, or offsetting scheme, and planning controls.
			Option 2 Development with retention of remnant patches close to Creek. Creek corridor preserved and revegetated as biolink.	Achievable through planning controls.
Reid Street Grassland Note: Parcel extends both sides of freeway, northern portion known as Jonesfield Corner, southern portion as Reid Street Grassland	Moderate–high Medium-sized (7 ha) block with moderate to good diversity, weedy only in disturbed areas, relatively easy to restore. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NTGVVP SRF Tough scurf-pea 	Medium No development pressure, lack of management	Option 1 Purchase and reservation of whole parcel for conservation purposes. Ownership to be determined.	Achievable through Government purchase, or offsetting scheme. High purchase cost.
			Option 2 Partial development of site, with on-site offset.	Achievable through planning controls.

Grassland	Significance	Urgency	Description of options	Achievability
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rocky substrate SLL 			
Section G grasslands Note: Developer is state entity. Note: Legal background complicates process. Original offset requirements included specification that SLL be salvaged and translocated, which has not happened. Salvage and translocation of SLL now not currently permitted under Victorian legislation.	Moderate Small (0.8 ha) block with unsalvaged SLL. Well-located near other Cairnlea grasslands. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rocky substrate SLL 	Very high Development imminent	Option 1 No development on undisturbed areas. The three small patches of undisturbed grassland kept as reserves within Section G to support existing biodiversity, emphasise the Cairnlea character. Development Victoria well placed for best practice sustainable design.	Achievable through planning controls.
			Option 2 Translocation of SLL from two smaller patches to larger patch. Development of whole site except largest patch of native vegetation. Development Victoria well placed for best practice sustainable design.	Achievable through planning controls.
VU Grassland	Moderate–high Medium-sized (4 ha) block with SLL, rocky substrate and strong community involvement. Well-located near other Cairnlea grasslands and contiguous with grassland along Jones Creek. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rocky substrate 	Low No development pressure, good management	Option 1 Permanent protection for conservation purposes through a conservation covenant	Achievable through State intervention.

Grassland	Significance	Urgency	Description of options	Achievability
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SLL Tussock Skink 			
Solomon Heights	Very high	Very high	<p>Precinct level approaches include considering all grasslands and potential offsets in a single package as well as larger connectivity and any future residential uses. Matters to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High level of adjacent development imminent, and rezoning benefits for River Valley Estate Significance of Maribyrnong River as biodiversity corridor Impacts of Melbourne Airport rail 	
Solomon Heights and River Valley Estates	<p>Very High</p> <p>Large (38+ ha) block with NTGVVP, SLL, GSM, GGF, SRF on key biodiversity corridor of Maribyrnong River.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NTGVVP SRF GSM GGF Rocky substrate SLL Tussock Skink 	<p>Very high</p> <p>Development pressure</p>	<p>Option 1</p> <p>Creation of a conservation reserve to the north, and permitting development to the south, as outlined in the Council-commissioned Solomon Heights Biodiversity Report (Biosis, 2016) recommendations.</p> <p>The broader area of the two estates should be given first option for securing the offset requirements for any development at Sunshine North and within Brimbank, to ensure these biodiversity values are retained within the municipality.</p> <p>Areas of open space between the proposed conservation area and the Maribyrnong River should be retained and managed in the long term for their habitat corridor values.</p>	Achievable through planning controls.
Individual grasslands not part of larger precinct				
Broadcast Australia Grassland Note: Northern portion under federal legislation, not considered in this	<p>Very High</p> <p>Large (80 ha) block with very high biodiversity values, history of being a translocation site. Southern portion has some areas of</p>	<p>High-very high</p> <p>Development pressure, deliberate mismanagement</p>	<p>Option 1</p> <p>Purchase of southern portion for reserve.</p>	<p>Achievable through Government purchase, or offsetting scheme.</p> <p>High purchase cost</p>
			<p>Option 2</p> <p>Reservation of all 21 ha grassland plus wetland</p>	<p>Achievable through</p>

Grassland	Significance	Urgency	Description of options	Achievability
document. Southern portion under state legislation	low biodiversity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NTGVVP • GSM • Rocky substrate • SLL • SRF 		system. Development of remainder of southern portion Note that an EES is currently required by DELWP for any future development on southern portion, unless developer commits to retaining all 21 ha grassland plus wetland system.	planning controls.
Outbound WRR Servo grassland Note: Survey data lacking Note: Owned by State entity	Probably high Medium-sized (9 ha) block contiguous with Derrimut Grassland. Well-managed by VicRoads. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NTGVVP • SRF • Thelymitra spp. 	Low No development pressure, well managed.	Option 1 Permanent protection for conservation purposes achieved by VicRoads using the sit as an offset.	Achievable through State intervention.
Modeina Estate	High Site being developed with permission to remove all native vegetation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLL • SRF • Tussock Skink • Orchid? 	Very high Development in progress.	Option 1 Salvage and translocation of all threatened species, including SLL. Note: Salvage of SLL not currently permitted under Victorian legislation.	Achievable through State intervention.

Appendix 2: Possible additional grasslands with significant biodiversity values

The following are further grasslands that may have sufficient conservation significance to be considered under this report.

- Grieve Parade, Altona
- Cedar Woods Grasslands, Williams Landing
- Grasslands on private land in the Altona area, e.g. around Westlink Court

Appendix 3: The grasslands, further preliminary information

Altona industrial precinct

Two large and significant grasslands remain in private hands in Hobsons Bay: Ajax Road Grassland and Burns Road (Merton Street) Grassland. Both are strategically located close to other biodiversity assets. Both are under imminent threat and are currently unprotected by any Environmental Significance Overlay. Ajax Road was the subject of a recent planning application to subdivide and clear native vegetation. Two hectares of native vegetation were cleared earlier this year at Burns Road. The Grassy Plains Network consider the best chance of saving these grasslands lies in coordinated action between state agencies and Hobsons Bay Council. Several smaller grasslands in private ownership also require action to secure their long term future.



A large expanse of Themeda grassland at Ajax Road.

Ajax Road Grassland



Key facts

- Size 78 ha (35 ha grassland, plus wetland)
- Privately owned by Axxcel
- Subject of recent rejected planning application (PA 1841550) to subdivide and remove native vegetation. Proposal included an on-site offset on the southern portion, as well as contentious off-site offset for Sunshine Diuris.
- Unmanaged (some occasional Melbourne water management of southern portion)
- Parcel includes new Altona Police Station on leased land at south-east corner
- Strategic location for ecological connectivity on Laverton Creek, Kayes Drain and rail lines
- High biodiversity value, 500 Spiny Rice-flower, Arched Flax-lily, Small-flower Flax-lily, Yellow Rush-lily, rare salt-tolerant Themeda, intact rocky substrate potential Striped Legless Lizard habitat.
- **Northern portion**
 - High biodiversity values (A, D, E), including a large number of Spiny Rice-flower plants, with areas in places impacted by dumped soil (B, D, F) from Crown Casino and weeds
- **Southern portion**
 - An important brackish grassland ecotone, adjoining the estuarine Brackish Wetland of Truganina Swamp – a Biosite of State Significance – and includes rare form of Plains Grassland dominated by Coast Tussock-grass and Australian Salt-grass.
 - Will shift to brackish wetland as Truganina Swamp retreats or expands with climate change.
 - As an on-site offset for grassland, this portion is neither like for like (it will become wetland), nor in perpetuity (it will become a wetland).
 - Only vehicle access through Melbourne Water land (Truganina Swamp)
 - Herb-rich, very large population of Spiny Rice-flower plants
- **Areas G and H**
 - 3.8 ha
 - Not part of recent Biosis survey. Clearly high quality Themeda stands with weeds at edges only. Needs survey. Relatively easy to restore
 - Spiny Rice-flower plants present
- **EEPBC referrals**
 - 2014/7208

Potential outcomes

Core reserve consisting of habitat patch A, with link to rail-line and Kayes Drain, and all grassland and wetland south of Altona rail-line (existing offset proposal). As supporting reserve areas, some or all of patches G, H, D, E, where they can be incorporated into small reserves and an additional link north as part of the development plan.

Suggested mechanism: Apply statewide clearing controls and future Environmental Significance Overlay to development proposals for the larger lot H, as part of strategic conservation planning across the Altona industrial precincts. Locate any offsets on-site as far as possible, and direct other urban offsets to this site. Supplement any offset reserves with State Government land acquisition as needed.

Ajax Road North Grassland



Key facts

- Size medium, 5.6 ha
- Owned by unknown private
- Rocky, dense stands of Themeda, some native herbs, limited weed, relatively easy to restore.
- Needs survey
- An important link in the grassland habitat corridor along Werribee rail line.
- Spiny Rice-flower
- **EPBC referrals**
- Unknown

Potential outcomes

1. Burn followed by survey and weed control. Site purchased and reserved for conservation, strengthening the habitat corridor along Werribee rail-line.
2. This block could be retained as a local offset for clearing elsewhere in the Altona industrial precinct. It has little impact on orderly development or the area of developable land in the industrial estate.

Suggested mechanism: Apply statewide clearing controls and future Environmental Significance Overlay to development proposals for this block, as part of strategic conservation planning across

Altona industrial precincts. Direct other urban offsets to this site and supplement with State Government purchase as needed.

Burns Road (Merton St) Grassland



Key facts

- Size large, 39.5 ha
- Owned by many private landholders
- A historic subdivision of hundreds of land parcels, zoned industrial, and is similar in that regard to the Solomon Heights subdivision in Brimbank.
- Themeda paddock, rocks intact, some native herbs, some weed invasion. Heavily grazed in the 1980s but has regenerated well. Spiny Rice-flower believed present. Only known Hobsons Bay location of Striped Legless Lizard (apart from Laverton North Grassland reintroduction).
- Large parcel on northern edge has been cleared for development. VCAT process complete.
- Council pursuing strategy of consolidating land parcels to facilitate future development.
- Surveyed in 2018 by Abzeco.
- Key location on inland-coast biolink
- **EPBC referrals**
 - Unknown

Potential outcomes

Protect all the high quality, intact Themeda grassland, as part of a contiguous, manageable reserve – all or the majority of the estate.

Suggested mechanism: Apply statewide clearing controls and future Environmental Significance Overlay to lot consolidation and development proposals for this block, as part of strategic

conservation planning across Altona industrial precincts. Retain any offsets on-site and direct other urban offsets to this site. This is a priority site for State Government land purchase.

Cairnlea

Several grasslands in the south-eastern corner of Cairnlea are under threat. They are associated with the proposed development of Section G of the old Albion Explosives Factory, and the parcel referred to as Jonesfield Corner. The Jonesfield corner parcel extends south across the freeway to include the high-quality Reid Street Grassland. Jones Creek forms the eastern border of Cairnlea and connects the large and popular grasslands of Iramoo Wildflower Reserve, Howardson Circuit Grassland, VU Grassland and Pimelea Wildflower Reserve to Jonesfield Corner and the adjacent Section G grasslands and Reid Street Grassland. To the east lies the large, high-quality patch of Denton Avenue Grassland and the immensely significant St Albans Railway Reserves.

The integrity of the Jonesfield Corner Grassland and VU Grassland and their association with Jones Creek thus becomes strategically important in establishing the habitat corridor the runs from the St Albans Railway Reserves through to Iramoo. Reid Street Grassland and the Section G grasslands strengthen this connection and bolster the integrity of the Jonesfield Corner site.



Jonesfield Corner and Reid Street Grasslands

Jonesfield Corner also known as Jones Creek Grassland

Reid Street also known as Albion Explosives Factory Grasslands (K)



Key facts

- Size medium, Jonesfield Corner parcel is 9 ha, Reid Street is 7 ha
- Parcel extends both sides of freeway, northern portion known as Jonesfield Corner, southern portion as Reid Street Grassland
- Northern portion has areas of good diversity, Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain, Spiny Rice-flower, Arching Flax-lily, Striped Legless Lizard with other patches badly degraded.
- Southern portion more intact, Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain, Spiny Rice-flower, Tough scurf-pea, moderate to good diversity, weedy only in disturbed areas, Striped Legless Lizard. Relatively easy to restore.
- Both considered biosites of State Significance

- Important link as biodiversity corridor establishing connectivity between St Albans Railway Reserves, Denton Avenue Grassland and Iramoo via Jones Creek
- Areas of northern portion appropriate for public open space and recreation
- **EPBC referrals**
 - 2014/7358; 2010/5486
 - Latest activity 10 October 2014

Potential outcomes

Jonesfield Corner: Development as public open space and recreation with retention of grassy values and connectivity

Reid Street: Protection at a minimum of habitat zones 3 and 5, with a managed habitat link to Jones Creek alongside the Western Ring Road.

Suggested mechanism: Apply the current Environmental Significance Overlay and statewide clearing controls to development approvals for both sites. Locate any offsets on-site and direct any other urban offsets to this site. Supplement any offset reserves with land acquisition by State Government.

Section G grasslands

Also known as Albion Explosives Factory Grasslands (I)



Key facts

- Size small, 0.8 ha
- Strategic location near other grassland sites and the Jones Creek corridor
- Owned by Development Victoria, so no purchase required
- Currently under EPBC Act Referral, 2020-8720
- Original offset requirements included specification that Striped Legless Lizard be salvaged and translocated, which has not happened. Salvage and translocation of Striped Legless Lizard now not currently permitted under Victorian policy
- Cairnlea and nearby areas support good areas of grassland, including immediately adjacent at Jonesfield Corner. The three small patches of undisturbed grassland should be kept as reserves within Section G in order to support the existing biodiversity of the larger area, emphasise the existing character of Cairnlea public open space, and promote biodiversity values to the local community
- Considered under immediate threat
- **EPBC referrals**
 - 2020/8720

Potential outcomes

1. Development Victoria to amend Concept Plan to ensure no development on undisturbed areas
2. Salvage and translocation of Striped Legless Lizard from two smallest patches, retention of larger undisturbed patches for conservation purposes

VU Grassland

Also known as Albion Explosives Factory Grassland E



Key facts

- Size small, 4 ha
- Owned by Victoria University
- Themeda grassland
- Documented Striped Legless Lizard population
- Tussock Skink
- Contiguous with grassland along Jones Creek
- Not currently considered threatened
- **EPBC referrals**
- Unknown

Potential outcomes

Retained as conservation reserve, and permanently protected through a conservation covenant.

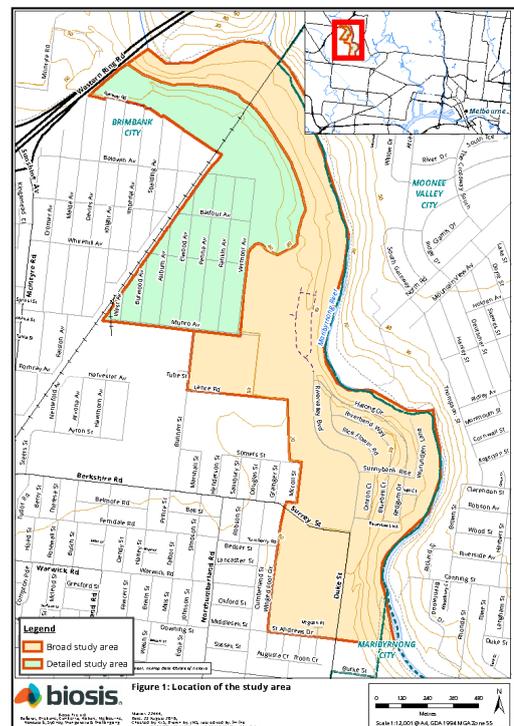
Solomon Heights and River Valley estates

The Solomon Heights and River Valley estates need to be considered together. They include areas of high biodiversity on the Maribyrnong River, an important conservation corridor. Disagreement over their future has been longstanding, and needs to be resolved, and will probably require state involvement. Their considerable biodiversity values are considered to be under immediate threat.

Outcome sought

The Grassy Plains Network believes the best achievable outcome for these estates involves the creation of a conservation reserve to the north, and if possible a supporting reserve in the southern portion rather than permitting development to the southern portion, as outlined in the Council-commissioned Solomon Heights Biodiversity Report (Biosis, 2016) recommendations. The southern section is the only part of the site where Striped Legless Lizard have been recorded and therefore consider it to be valuable habitat for this species, despite the high level of weeds and rubbish.

The proposed conservation area has significant potential to provide an offset site. Areas of grassland surrounding this core conservation asset contain ecological values and should be treated as ecologically sensitive areas. The broader area of the two estates should be given first option for securing the offset requirements for any development at Sunshine North and within Brimbank, to ensure these biodiversity values are retained within the municipality. Areas of open space between the proposed conservation area and the Maribyrnong River should be retained and managed in the long term for their habitat corridor values. This is the only remaining corridor in Brimbank for the broader movement of large mammals such as Eastern Grey Kangaroos.



Left: Map outlining the high-quality biodiversity values of the Solomon Heights estate and the proposed conservation area and habitat corridor. **Right:** Extent of Solomon Heights Biodiversity Report study area, which includes all the Solomon Heights and River Valley estates. Figures extracted from Solomon Heights Biodiversity Report (Biosis, 2016).

River Valley

Key facts

- Size small, 5 ha
- Owner Atlantic Link (private)
- Adjacent (east) to Solomon Heights
- Only protection a section 173 agreement. Wording of agreement poor, unclear
- Application to rezone to residential rejected by Council because of insufficient information supplied by Nature Advisory (Allen Brennan)
- Potential for purchase to be through developer contributions rather than by State
- Only patch on Maribyrnong with Themeda extending from upper flats down escarpment to river
- Integrity of Themeda extent threatened by bike and pedestrian paths
- Stage 7e already zoned residential, but residential boundary to industrial land not allowed
- Considered under immediate threat
- Longstanding problem site in need of resolution
- Good biodiversity across the site, especially north
- Resolution should be considered in conjunction with Solomon Heights
- **EPBC referrals**
 - 2018/8227

Solomon Heights

Also known as Baldwin Avenue Grassland



Key facts

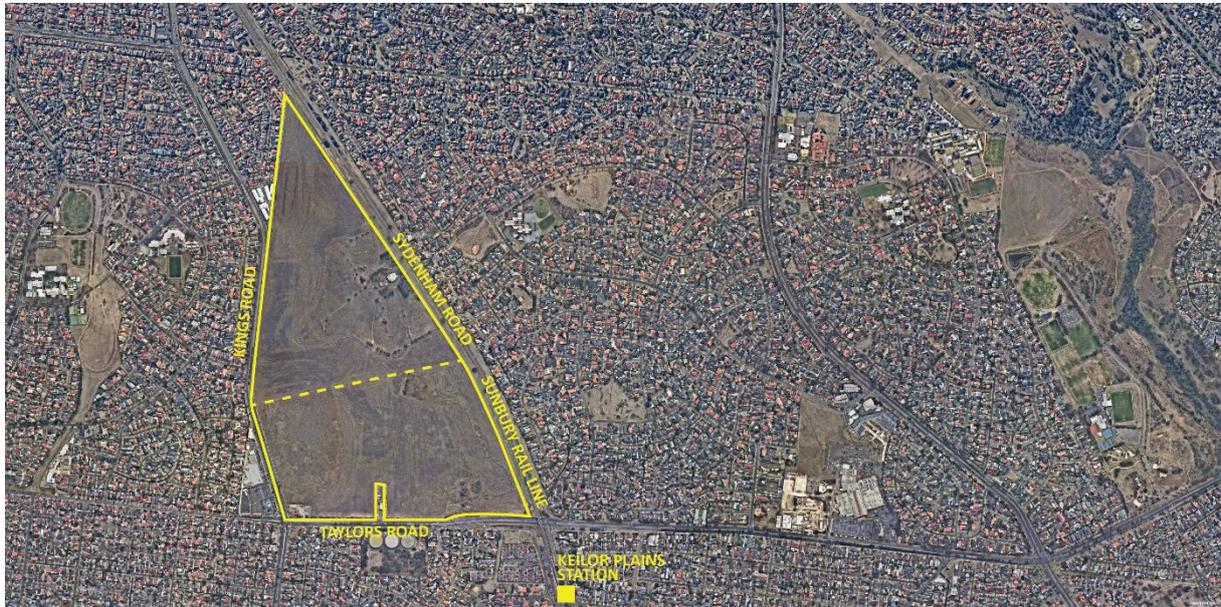
- Size large, 32.8 ha
- 465 lots owned by 120 owners from 1920s subdivision
- Roads in south owned by Glen Ora. Roads in northern section owned by Council
- Effectively in two portions with Whitehill Road the Glen Ora-owned border
- Ongoing destructive works from roadworks and soil dumping

- Northern portion has Spiny Rice-flower, Golden Sun Moth, Striped Legless Lizard and Tussock Skink and is floristically diverse
- Southern portion has Striped Legless Lizard and Tussock Skink and Pale Swamp Everlasting, more damaged than northern portion
- Glen Ora recently constructed large bund wall from contaminated soil without the necessary planning permission, an action now possibly under EPA investigation
- Considered to be in immediate threat
- Longstanding problem area desperately in need of resolution
- Resolution should be considered in conjunction with River Valley
- **EPBC referrals**
- 2016/7677, 2016/7688, both withdrawn

Other grasslands

Broadcast Australia

Also known as Sydenham Radio Transmission Tower, ABC



Key facts

- Size large: 80 ha
- Formerly federal land, now private land
- One parcel, considered in two portions: north and south.
- Both parcels under federal legislation because of ownership
- Heavily fenced. Genuine danger to public in northern portion because of high voltage underground infrastructure in northern portion
- Very high biodiversity values. Long history of DELWP translocating rare plants to site prior to its sale. Has Striped Legless Lizard, Golden Sun Moth
- Mismanagement
- Environmental Effects Statement required by DELWP for any future development on southern portion, unless developer commits to retaining all 21 ha grassland plus wetland system
- DELWP has intervened to prevent Brimbank rezoning land
- Radio transmission function to continue in foreseeable future so north parcel out of scope of this discussion. However, note action required to prevent ongoing mismanagement
- Considered under immediate threat
- **EPBC referrals**
 - 2008/4453

Potential outcomes

Core reserve: Retention of all 21 ha grassland plus wetland system in the southern portion. Management of the northern portion to be undertaken with oversight by DELWP or Brimbank Council. Potential to suit Development Australia involvement.

Mechanism: Apply the current Environmental Significance Overlay and statewide clearing controls to any subdivision, residential rezoning and development approvals for this site. Locate any offsets on-site and direct other urban offsets to this site. Supplement any offset reserves with State Government land acquisition.

Outbound WRR Servo



Key facts

- Size medium, 9 ha
- Owned by VicRoads
- Well-managed, including burns
- Risk that VicRoads may decide it excess to their needs and sell it or use it as an offset site
- Immediately adjacent to Derrimut Grassland
- Not presently considered under threat, though ongoing discussions about expansion of Western Ring Road and presence of powerline easement make future of site uncertain
- Spiny Rice-flower population.
- **EPBC referrals**
 - Unknown

Potential outcomes

Permanent protection for conservation. VicRoads to use site as an offset.

Modeina

Also known as Burnside Grassland



Legend

- Precinct 1a
- Precinct 1
- Precinct 2
- NTGVVP
- GGF Habitat

Threatened Fauna Species

- ★ SLL
- ◆ GGF

Native Vegetation

- Escarpment Shrubland (EVC 895)
- Heavier soils Plains Grassland (EVC 132_61)

Threatened Flora Species

- Arching Flax-lily
- Matted Flax-lily
- Rye Beetle-grass
- Slender Bindweed
- Slender Tick-trefoil
- Spiny Rice-flower
- Tough Scurf-pea

Key facts

- Size medium
- All grassland will be lost to development through poor planning action
- Owned by Dennis Family
- **EPBC referrals**
- Unknown

Potential outcomes

Salvage and translocation of Striped Legless Lizard. Salvage of threatened flora and genetic rescue. Opportunity for improving understanding of Spiny Rice-flower habitat requirements (especially the soil biome).