



Grassy Plains Network

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

17 September 2021

Dear Councillor,

We are writing to you today to urge you to use your influence to help protect the highly significant grassland landscape at the Solomon Heights and River Valley estates in Sunshine North. Please speak up for this remarkable patch of remnant urban nature.

GPN represents land management professionals, academics, ecologists and community concerned about the ongoing decline of grassy ecosystems across Melbourne and its surrounds. We advocate for improved grassland protection and management.

Grasslands are critically endangered, with only 2 percent remaining, much of which is in far poorer condition than the richly biodiverse grassland of the Solomon heights and River Valley estates, which represents some of the best quality grassland in Melbourne.

Grasslands communities such as these are fundamental to the identity of Melbourne's West, and are home to numerous threatened species, including Striped Legless Lizard, Golden Sun Moth, Growling Grass Frog and Spiny Rice-flower. Located on the important conservation corridor of the Maribyrnong River, this is the only site on the River's urban length where Kangaroo Grass extends from the uplands down the escarpment to the River.

Conserving large patches of Melbourne's original ecology such as these is a key to building a resilient and liveable Melbourne capable of retaining its best aspects in the face of the imminent impacts of climate change. The protection of these crucial remnant areas can create a genuine, profound and irreplaceable legacy for future generations in a way that no residential development ever could.

We must act now. We understand that these two estates have been the subject of much contention and frustration for many years. But as time passes, these sites degrade through lack of care and good management. In particular, some of the larger owners have shown considerable disregard for council processes and for the environmental values of these sites, with dumping of contaminated soil and the construction of an illegal bund wall two recent examples of wilful destruction.

GPN believes the best achievable outcome for these estates involves the creation of a conservation reserve to the north, and permitting development to the south, as outlined in the recommendations of the Council-commissioned Solomon Heights Biodiversity Report (Biosis, 2016).

The proposed conservation area has significant potential to provide an offset site for both State and Federal legislative requirements. 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

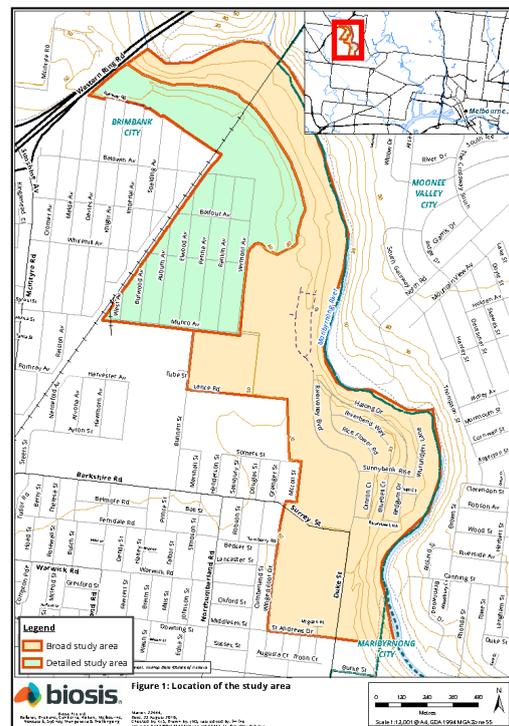
these biodiversity values are retained within the municipality. Areas of open space between the proposed conservation area and the Maribyrnong River should be retained and managed in the long term for their habitat corridor values. This is the only remaining corridor in Brimbank for the broader movement of large mammals such as Eastern Grey Kangaroos.

This is an urgent matter that needs Council’s full attention now. GPN recognises that to move ahead with this, it is likely that Council will have to commit time and money to further strategic planning and biodiversity assessment. Brimbank has an excellent record of environmental leadership in protecting the priceless environmental assets it has within its extent, but it cannot now relinquish its responsibilities and fail to resolve this issue.

The Grassy Plains Network would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters in greater detail with you. We intend to extend our advocacy to the other agencies involved in this site: VicTrack and ARTC, DELWP and Melbourne Water. We are keen to help create a vision for this remarkable place.

Yours sincerely,

Adrian Marshall,
Facilitator, Grassy Plains Network
0413 757 173



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).