



Response to the City of Charles Sturt Draft Business Plan 2023-2024

The Western Adelaide Coastal Residents' Association (WACRA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Business Plan 2023-2024. Our members believe that the environmental challenges we face require an urgent response at all levels, including additional strategies and policies that could be implemented in the upcoming budget.

Some of the key points in our submission include:

- Options for addressing the likely shortfall in achieving the 2045 targets for tree canopy.
- The need to direct funding at addressing our community's carbon emissions problems rather than carbon offsets that have questionable environmental and ethical value.
- Establishing additional community engagement and education projects such as *Energy Friends* that help individuals reduced energy costs and provide educational opportunities for addressing climate issues.
- Appointing a qualified arborist to independently assess applications for tree removal and evaluate development proposals for the replacement of trees.

We recognise that staff and councillors have worked hard, with great results to implement initiatives such AdaptWest, installation of LEDs on council buildings and street lighting, electrification, renewables and engineering adaptations. We also commend council's creation of the position of the Open Space Community Planner. This is a relatively unique initiative and one that will make a strong contribution towards council's goals.

We appreciate it might be hard for some in the community to accept the rapidly growing body of science when global developments do not seem to be affecting their day-to-day lives. It is clear in information coming through from the Climate Council and the Australia Institute and many other sources, that global climate developments are continuing to accelerate. This means we need to prioritise Climate Change and its local impacts.

Trees

The tree planting on council land (\$210K in 2023-24) and whole street planting (\$200K in 2023-24) are a substantial improvement on last year and we fully support them. It is also good to also see incremental increases to both in future years.

There is data coming in however, that points to the need for a much stronger response. Our 2022-2023 'mild' La Nina summer was still was hotter and drier on average, and we are now very likely to go straight into a El Nino weather system which could lead to less rainfall this winter. Data coming in on rising ocean temperatures and their wider impact on our local climate means there will be even more stress on established vegetation and reduced the chances of new plantings.¹

We note that a water strategy is to be developed by June 2023 to guide future decision making. We hope this will address the urgent need to improve irrigation and watering across the city.

Meeting the 25% canopy goal will require increased tree planting initiatives and additional initiatives to encourage tree retention and planting on private land. Enhanced management practices are needed to ensure saplings grow into healthy specimens that can survive harsher conditions.

Education and incentives

Much more public education on the environmental and social value of trees and the need for residents to cherish and care for their verge trees is needed as we head into more extreme weather conditions. Incentives for residents to plant trees, care for their verge trees and create verge gardens, would go a long way to changing attitudes and getting more buy in.

There is research to show that a more imaginative approach to helping residents and developers adopt a positive approach to retention and replacement of trees is possible.

The *Global Review of Incentive Schemes*² found that developing policies that go above minimum standards by being specific about private lands, requiring payments up front, and developing specific standards for tree protection or retention in

¹ Why are ocean temperatures warmer than ever? Even experts are scratching their heads
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/apr/26/accelerating-ocean-warming-earth-temperatures-climate-crisis>

² *Global review of incentive schemes for the retention and successful establishment of trees on private urban land (NY18002)*
<https://www.horticulture.com.au/contentassets/1e501dd16cde47328ac42d355fc7b7fb/ny18002---final-report-complete.pdf>

development context can make a big difference. It also recommends developing incentives that go beyond business-as-usual practices by establishing clear minimum standards and keeping track of rebates and protected trees.

The study also argued for community-based activity and support for protecting private trees by nurturing and supporting social activism aimed at protecting trees and developing a better understanding of the underpinning values and attitudes that their communities have towards trees and towards local government.

This could involve council encouraging and supporting community groups to get more involved at the neighbourhood level to monitor and educate people on the value of greening as well as emissions reduction initiatives.

Some of these approaches involve the state government, but council could provide leadership on rethinking our existing strategies.

There are also significant cost-benefit possibilities in getting developers and residents on board. The costs of incentives together with more resources for enforcement and monitoring could be offset by the additional benefits that come from getting the community more involved in helping reach our canopy targets.

We understand some of the difficulties associated with enforcement, particularly when there is significant pressure to focus on building at the expense of vegetation impacts of developments.

To help address this issue, WACRA recommends that council appoint a qualified arborist to independently assess applications for tree removal and evaluate development proposals for the replacement of trees.

Greening is a much harder equation than some of the other climate positive actions such as solar, given that the numerous benefits of trees are not easily monetised, and more trees will ultimately also increase maintenance costs.

While tree planting on council land cannot be included in official statements of carbon neutrality, we believe Council can still use this marketing statement with a caveat such as:

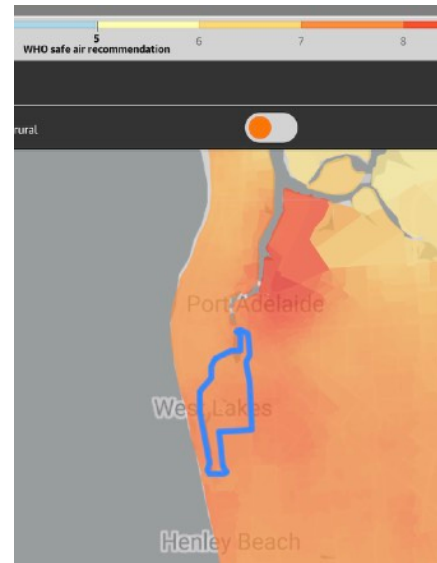
“CCS has made the decision to put funding that was initially allocated for carbon offsets towards additional tree planting on our own properties. This keeps the benefits within our own communities and has the same net result of carbon neutrality if we factor these in – we just can’t officially use tree plantings on our own land as legitimate offsets under current rules (Even though they are!). We made this decision given the commitment we have to greening across the City of Charles Sturt,

and in recognition of the lack of transparency across many of the international carbon offset schemes”

Health and heat island impacts

This focus on the climate impacts of council policies does not begin to address the wider community benefits such as in health and heat island impacts.

Current research on air quality and heat maps shows that pollution levels are disproportionately high in areas where Australians on lower incomes live. Air pollution in many parts of Australia, especially around city centres, experience levels much higher than what is considered “safe”.³ The proposed redevelopment of Lots 100 and 101 Frederick Road, West Lakes is a good example of an area where the air pollution profile is well above the World Health Organisation’s recommended level.



Trees play an important role in maintaining air quality, yet it is likely we will lose a significant quantity of trees and open space if the development goes ahead as proposed.

Carbon offsets

The budget’s proposed bid to purchase \$160,000 of carbon offsets next financial year and spending \$500,000 buying offsets over three years will show council achieving net zero on paper but would not change Charles Sturt’s actual carbon footprint now, or in the future.

There is little transparency in the carbon offset scheme to show that high ethical standards are being met and that it is actually doing what we are paying for. And money is taken out of our community rather than being used for our own mitigation strategies.

³ *How bad is air pollution in Australia? Search for your postcode on our interactive map*
https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2023/may/04/air-pollution-in-australia-interactive-map-pm25-polluted-hotspots-search-postcode-suburb-where-i-live?utm_term=6452ca04b30a5526d16237405294c876&utm_campaign=MorningMailAUS&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=morningmailau_email

Offsets are not a viable option when we have just 12% canopy cover and a stated commitment to increase to 25% by 2045. The projections will be affected by tree loss through removal and projected increased levels of die-back.

The long lead time for realising the benefits of what is planted now means there are likely to be significant climate and weather events that could hinder progress. What would be seen by some as an over-investment now is simply an insurance policy against inevitable setbacks.

Council could work with the community on projects such as *Home Solar Hubs* in identified low income areas. A model for this is the "*Energy Friends*" initiative created by WACRA and taken up by the SA Government.⁴

Other options include using some of that half a million dollars of residents money on working towards a community battery pilot project. Federal subsidies are available for this and there are examples of electricity suppliers coming onboard to help subsidise the project.⁵

Solar panels installed on community buildings could feed electricity into the community battery for use by all residents, particularly those on low incomes, who could get access to cheap power. Surplus electricity could be used to power more local EV charging stations which would be an added incentive for people who work in the City to use EVs.

These initiatives would make a significant contribution to reducing our emissions while helping keep spending in the community through jobs for tradies and local service providers. Money not spent on fuel and external energy suppliers is available for spending in local businesses.⁶

Clearly offsets should not be pursued, but this funding definitely should be retained and directed to solutions that directly address our own community's carbon emissions problems.

⁴ *Listen to the people: 50 years of community activism*, pp 111-114 WACRA, 2022
<http://wacra.org.au/listen-to-the-people/>

⁵ *Totally Renewable Yackandandah*
<https://totallyrenewableyack.org.au/watts-happening/yack01-community-battery/>

⁶ *The Wires That Bind- Electrification and Community Renewal*:
<https://www.quarterlyessay.com.au/author/saul-griffith>

Community Emissions Reduction Plan

It is good to see community being brought together to work on a Community Emissions Reduction Plan group and stress the importance of continued funding for this project. It can play a very important role in developing adaptation strategies as well as educating participants in options and strategies.

AdaptWest

We acknowledge the work being done through cross-council collaborative projects such as AdaptWest in developing climate change mitigation strategies for residents such as the upcoming series of webinars which will be a valuable source of information.

Food Organics Green Organics (FOGO)

This is an excellent initiative that we hope will be rolled out across the Council in the coming years. We understand that residents need to be on board with these changes to minimise contamination, so public education will be important given the importance of keeping food waste out of our landfill system where possible.

We also recognise that given the race against time to reduce our emissions, proactive and assertive decision making by council is needed that considers the planet's health above potential resident pushback due to their lack of willingness to make relatively small changes to their waste management practices.

Community Garden Projects

It is good to see these being supported, as they are excellent value for money for the community and a good way to get people to understand and advocate for larger scale environmental initiatives such as biodiversity plantings in pocket reserves.

Waste and storm water

Capturing rather than wasting our stormwater is important to help drought-proof the City. Aquifer Storage Recharge is important – especially given groundwater levels are likely to decline and become more saline.

Simple changes are needed to engineering such as Water-sensitive urban design using porous gutters that stop water bypassing tree roots and ending up in the stormwater system. These need to be deployed for every engineering project to capture water and take pressure of our increasingly stressed stormwater system. We have an urban environment that was never designed to cope with the extent of impermeable surfaces stemming from a decline of the backyard and increasing levels of urban infill.

Summary

The pressing need for council to lift its Climate initiatives for tree canopy cover requires a rethink of the Draft Plan. A 'Needs against Wants' review of budget bids is essential at this stage, especially given that the present draft would take a rate increase to around 8%, which is far too high, and above the genuine inflationary costs council is having to manage. Cost of living pressures will make this very high increase difficult for many residents. Some non-urgent budget initiatives and “nice to have” options should be deferred to bring the overall rate increase down.

A unified effort involving council, community groups and individuals is needed to ensure that resources are targeted at tackling the existing environmental issues and create buffers against significant disruptions that have been predicted.

Western Adelaide Coastal Residents' Associated

PO Box 72

Henley Beach SA 5022

WACRAnews@gmail.com

6 May 2023