



# NATURE STRIP POLICY

COUNCIL POLICY	
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# Nature Strip Policy

September 2014



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## Introduction:

Nature strips are an important component of the streetscape; they form an area of public land between the property boundary and the edge of the roadway, excluding any footpath or other assets such as driveways, utility pits, or fire hydrants. In most cases a nature strip is grassed.

***This policy only relates to formalised nature strips within urban areas.***

It is important to note any utility service authority such as water, gas, electricity, postal service, fire services and telecommunications, all have access rights to the road reserve. Such service authority may be required to dig up the nature strip periodically. Residents, who modify their nature strip, will not be compensated for any subsequent loss of vegetation or landscaping items due to works being undertaken in the nature strip by service authorities and Council.

Council acknowledges that appropriately vegetated nature strips provide a range of benefits to the community, the environment and seeks to maximise these without incurring a raft of management and / or enforcement costs.

## Policy objectives:

The objective of this policy is to ensure that nature strips are landscaped and maintained appropriately. Council needs to minimise the risk to the community that could arise from such activity. Council needs to provide for the unobstructed and safe flow of pedestrian traffic, access for postal deliveries, access for utility service providers, the unimpeded access to fire hydrants, the safety of vehicles using the road, unimpeded kerbside parking of vehicles as well as the safe and practical conditions required for emptying rubbish and recycling bins.

Council will accept nature strips have been turfed or grassed, however, some alternative landscape treatments are unacceptable. The following provides some options and the guidelines for such nature strip treatments.

## Who maintains nature strips?:

It is a commonly accepted practice, throughout Australia, that the property owners or residents of abutting properties maintain the nature strip (excluding council specified and approved street trees). Generally, this amounts to weeding, mowing and edging turf. **Council does not carry out renovation or maintenance (including mowing and watering) of nature strips.** (Note: GV Water policies do not allow the direct connection of nature strip watering systems to its network. It also enforces rules governing access to water supplied by it under the auspices of its Permanent Water Saving Plan and the effect of such restrictions).

(Refer: BCS/ Governance/ Policies and Procedures/ Council Approved Policies/ Policy – Public Road Register).

## Benefits of nature strips:

Vegetated nature strips provide a range of benefits to the community and the environment. Nature strips can:

- absorb rainwater and reduce stormwater runoff.
- help to cool the surrounding area (transpiration by plants cools the air).
- complement the natural neighbourhood settings its street trees and residential gardens.
- provide fauna habitat.
- visually soften the hard surface of road, footpath and driveway paving, fences and buildings.

## Approval process:

Applications to plant in the nature strip need to be submitted to Council, for approval, as per the "Application to modify a nature strip or advise of existing modifications" form attached. The application must contain a simple sketch plan (Scale 1:200 is preferred) that details the site including:

- Property boundaries.
- Foot path (Notional footpaths – 2m wide) and driveways.
- Existing street tree.
- Proposed planting.
- Schedule of plant species and densities per m<sup>2</sup>.
- ***Work must not commence on any alterations to the nature strip without written prior consent from Council.***
- Landowners/ Residents are advised to call 'Dial before you dig' (phone: 1100), to determine the location of underground services within the nature strip area and copies attached to the written Application form submitted to Council for approval.
- Prior to commencing any work in the nature strip a 'Non-Utility Minor Works Within Municipal Road Reserves' Permit must be obtained from council, as per the requirements of the *Road Management Act 2004*, and copies attached to the written Application form submitted to Council for approval.

### ***Council will consider requests for nature strip alteration subject to the following criteria:***

- That the proposal is approved by Council prior to implementation.
- That the cost of establishment, maintenance, renewal and removal of the planting is borne by the landowner/ resident and is approved by the Landowner in all instances where the applicant is not the landowner.
- Council and Utility companies that supply water, gas, electricity and telecommunications may from time to time require access to the nature strip to perform maintenance work. Service authorities reserve the right to access existing and future infrastructure assets. Disturbance, resulting from access works, will be reinstated to a neat finish only and plants will not be replaced. Additional costs incurred to reinstate the planting will be borne by the landowner/ resident.

- Council cannot guarantee that any of the maintenance contractors will replace plants and mulch to match the condition that existed prior to maintenance work.
- Council will not be responsible for replacing plants lost as a result of such works.
- Residents will be required by Council to remove any inappropriate or inadequately maintained nature strip landscaping.
- Council has the right to remove any landscape considered inappropriate.

## Nature strip planting options.

### A. Grassed nature strips:

Strathbogie Shire Council supports the improvement of nature strips with alternative plants to turf grass. Grassed nature strips remain the most common form of nature strip treatment within Strathbogie Shire. The use of drought-tolerant grasses provides a low maintenance treatment which requires periodic mowing and weeding to maintain.

***No permit is required to install and maintain a natural grass nature strip.***

### B. Approved permeable surface treatments - mulch:

An alternative to natural grass nature strips is a permeable surface treatment such as Council Approved graded material. (Note that granitic sand is not approved due to the leaching of fines into the storm water system). While this treatment does not require watering or mowing, it will require periodic weeding and maintenance. Such surface treatment requires more material, labour and skill than a grass treatment.

Two mulch types that may be used:

- fine gravel mulches (75mm depth) such as Tuscan or Lilydale toppings.
- organic mulch (75mm depth) such as a graded bark or multi-bark mix that is resistant to disturbance by wind and rain/ runoff, provided that it is not directly adjacent to footpaths or kerbs, unless fully planted out, and is properly contained.

**Please note:** river pebbles, polished pebbles, scoria, blue metal and other loose stones are **not acceptable** alternatives.

***Residents must not modify public property (i.e. nature strips) without written permission from Council (see application form attached).***

### C. Approved plantings:

Another alternative to grass or plain mulch, is a planted and mulched nature strip. This provides a soft and visually pleasing alternative (when well maintained). This treatment involves the use of the nature strip area as a garden bed with the area being mulched with organic mulch and planted with low growing native plants.

#### The basic guidelines are as follows:

- a clear footpath zone of at least 2.0 m (minimum) or 2.5 m (desirable) is to be retained.
- a minimum buffer zone of 1.0 metre from the back of kerb is to be retained.
- one approved street tree per allotment (refer to street tree guidelines, available on Council web site).
- all approved plantings are to be maintained below a height of 500 mm.
- hard landscaping elements such as rocks, timber, retaining walls, ornaments must **not** be used.
- mulch material must be kept stable under foot and remain contained within the nature strip. Recommended treatment includes a finely ground organic mulch, pine bark mulch, recycled wood chip mulch such as soft fall material. Larger materials such as stones or crushed rock greater than 10 mm or chunky woodchips are not to be used.
- irrigation systems must not be placed within the nature strip (Refer GV Water requirements).

***Landowners/ residents must not plant trees or shrubs of any kind on public property (i.e. nature strips) without written permission from Council (see application form).***

### D. Synthetic turf:

Use of synthetic turf is discouraged on nature strips within Strathbogie Shire due to the adverse effect this has on the environment. However, if the application for synthetic turf adheres to the following criteria, it may be permitted in some circumstances:

- the synthetic turf must be installed by a qualified and insured professional company.
- the synthetic turf product used must comply with Australian Standard AS 4422:1996.
- the synthetic turf must be maintained in a neat and weed-free condition.
- Council retains the right to request removal of synthetic turf, in the case of non-compliance with this policy, at the resident's cost.

## **Additional Design Guidelines.**

### **1. *Safety and Access:***

Nature strip landscaping works must maintain adequate clearance, accessibility and visibility for pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular traffic when using, entering or exiting an intersection or driveway or footpath. Council will require that any works it considers hazardous be removed and made safe by the abutting landowner/ resident.

To ensure the nature strip planting is safe for all road users and does not inhibit access:

- Maintain vegetation below a height of 0.5 metres to ensure adequate sight lines. Medium to large shrubs and trees must not be planted.
- Allow sufficient space so that people can access the street from the footpath and can open a car door and easily get into and out of a car. The notional 2.0 to 2.5 m parallel to the property boundary (as above) must be kept clear at all times.
- Hard landscaping elements, such as rocks and pavers, garden edging and planter boxes, must not be used as they can be trip hazards.
- Retain some level ground space for hard rubbish collection, garbage, recycling and green waste bins behind the kerbs.
- The Landowner must maintain an appropriate current Public Liability Insurance Policy that indemnifies Council against legal action and provide a certificate of currency annually to Council. (Note that Council's interest must be noted on the policy document). A copy is to be attached to the Application and a certificate of currency as at 30<sup>th</sup> June be provided annually therefrom.

### **2. *Plant selection:***

The following are important considerations when selecting plants for nature strip beautification:

- Plants considered to be environmental weeds must not be planted
- Plants must be low growing (0.5metres including the flowering height) to avoid any traffic sighting problems
- Indigenous plants can enhance biodiversity and are more likely to provide habitat for local insects and birds.
- Able to survive with natural rainfall. Current water restrictions should be followed and irrigation systems are not to be installed.
- Able to cover the ground effectively to compete with weeds and withstand occasional pedestrian traffic.

### Suggested plants for nature strips.

Plant Type	Scientific Name	Common Name	Density (plants/ m <sup>2</sup> )
Grass and tussock plants	<i>Dianella longifolia</i>	Pale Flax Lily	4
	<i>Dianella revoluta</i>	Spreading Flax Lily	9
	<i>Lomandra longifolia</i>	Spiny-headed Mat-rush	4
	<i>Lomandra filiformis</i>		9
	<i>Themeda triandra</i>	Wattle Mat-rush	9
	<i>Poa labillardieri</i>	Kangaroo Grass	4
	<i>Poa morrissii</i>	Common Tussock Grass	9
Lawn plants	<i>Microlaena stipoides</i>	Weeping Grass	16
	<i>Dichondra repens</i>	Kidney weed	16
	<i>Austrodanthonia geniculata</i>	Kneed Wallaby Grass	16
Ground covers	<i>Myoporum parvifolium</i>	Creeping Boobialla	4
	<i>Einadia nutans</i> subsp. <i>nutans</i>	Nodding Saltbush	4
Wildflowers	<i>Arthropodium strictum</i>	Chocolate Lily	16
	<i>Brachyscome multifida</i>	Cut-leaf Daisy	9
	<i>Bracteantha viscosa</i>	Everlasting Sticky	9
	<i>Chrysocephalum apiculatum</i>	Common Everlasting	9
	<i>Kennedia prostrata</i>	Running Postman	4
	<i>Linum marginale</i>	Native Flax	9
	<i>Pelargonium australe</i>	Austral Storks Bill	16
	<i>Teucrium racemosum</i>	Grey Germander	4
	<i>Wahlenbergia communis</i>	Tufted Bluebell	16

### 3. Construction:

Changes to nature strip levels that might interfere with drainage, or pedestrian access, will not be permitted.

No staking of plants or any net covering of plants is permissible, as nature strips are a public domain and such items could create a hazard/ risk.

Excavation and cultivation will alleviate soil compaction, improve plant growth and increase the infiltration of rainwater and must be by hand as mechanical excavation/ cultivation (bobcat/dingo or rotary hoe) may damage infrastructure and services that may be located underground. Avoid cultivating under the canopy of existing trees, as this activity may cut their roots and impact on their health. **Hand (spade or fork) excavation and cultivation only will be permitted.**

The landowner/ resident is responsible for repairing any damage to infrastructure caused by any landscaping works.

#### **4. Maintenance:**

Nature strip surface levels, including mulch, should be maintained within 40mm relative to the level of the footpath or kerb i.e. no raised beds are allowed.

Plant material must be maintained strictly within the area of the nature strip as per the plan lodged by the successful applicant.

Residents are to keep nature strips free of litter.

Dead plants, seed heads and weeds should be removed regularly to keep the site tidy (this is particularly critical in order to remove harbours for pests and diseases and stop potential seed dispersal).

#### **5. Risk management, safety and insurance:**

Strathbogie Shire Council is very aware of the need to provide a safe environment within urban and rural areas in the municipality. As the nature strip is public land, Strathbogie Shire Council must be vigilant when it comes to identifying a threat to public safety.

Any feature within the Road Reserve that is deemed, by Strathbogie Shire Council, to be a risk to the public as a tripping hazard, a falling hazard, an obstruction or other hazard, may be removed from the nature strip without consultation or warning at the landowners/ residents cost.

Council will take action, dependent on risk, to rectify problems in relation to tripping hazards or safety issues. Council officers will contact the relevant property landowner/ resident requesting that they attend to the identified problem within a specific time frame, subject to assessed risk.

If the property landowner/ resident fails to take action within the time frame a delegated council officer will issue a 'Notice of non-compliance', requesting that the specific problem be fixed by a declared date (a 28-day notice is usually given, subject to assessed risk).

Failure to take action following a 'Notice of non-compliance' will result in an on-the-spot fine. All fines would be issued under Strathbogie Shire Council Community Local Law No. 6. Should Council become involved in remedial works the landowner will be invoiced at commercial rates.

The landowner is required to provide an annual certificate of currency as at 30<sup>th</sup> June for public liability insurance that indemnifies Council against any claim in respect of all approved works carried out on the Nature Strip for such length of time as the nature strip remains modified and agrees to keep the policy current at all times.

## 6. **Items not permitted on nature strips:**

- Hard surfaces such as concrete, pavers, asphalt or stepping stones are not permitted in residential areas. If a hard surface is required for vehicle access purposes, a vehicle crossing permit should be obtained from Council.
- Irrigation systems are not permitted in nature strips.
- Rocks, bluestone pitchers, railway sleepers or retaining walls are not permitted as these items are all potential trip hazards.
- Letterboxes and the like must be established **entirely** on private property whilst ensuring that easy and practical access to Australia Post delivery service is maintained.
- Temporary or permanent electrical wiring must not be installed on to the nature strip (e.g. lighting of trees is not permitted).
- Any building, structure or construction that extends over any part of the Road Reserve, is not permitted and Council will enforce its removal.

## 7. **Existing modified nature strips:**

If your nature strip is already modified, the Landowner/ Resident are required complete the application form attached and submit this to Council's Engineering Department to determine what is required to ensure your nature strip complies with this policy.

## 8. **Overhanging trees and branches:**

Trees and other vegetation overhanging the nominal footpath section of the nature strip, or obstructing views at intersections can be dangerous and contribute to accidents.

Under Strathbogie Shire Council's Community Local Law No. 6 sub-section 10, Council requires residents to trim trees and shrubs, that are located inside their property but have grown out over their boundary, back to the property boundary vertically and to maintain a minimum clearance of at least 3.0 m horizontally under any tree overhanging the nominal footpath area.

If overgrown trees and shrubs on your property are forcing pedestrians to move off the footpath area or duck under overhanging branches, you may be in contravention of Strathbogie Shire Council's Community Local Law No. 6.

Compulsory clearing work can be undertaken by council if property owners do not carry out the necessary maintenance on any vegetation infringing on the required footpath zone. In these circumstances, property owners may be responsible for the commercial costs associated with such clearance works.