

## Proposal Investigation Summary

CPP67	Great Ocean Road Service Road (Torquay to Bellbrae) Landscape Plan Proposal – (Referral of draft community landscape vision to community engagement plan for Strathmore Drive to Bellbrae Reserve bike route project)
<b>Proposal Description</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A community led landscape vision for a 3.7km ridgeline ‘greenway’ trail through a 15 hectare ecological corridor extending from Duffields Road in the east to Bellbrae Reserve in the west. Seeks a holistic partnership approach to the values protection and enhancement of the ‘ridgeline trail’ environment and experience.</li> </ul>
<b>Background Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proposal area covers 3.7km of road reserve to the north of the Great Ocean Road currently defined by two distinct sections:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section 1 – a 2.6km service road (the old Great Ocean Road) from the Christian College entry to Bellbrae Reserve (near School Road) with vegetation on both sides for the majority of the way. Currently used as a cycling route to school, a recreational cycle and pedestrian path, an access road for private properties and also a service road for utility providers with assets in the road reserve.</li> <li>Section 2 – a 1.1km section of road reserve with less vegetation. An informal ‘goat’ trail through this section is used as a walking and cycling link.</li> </ul> </li> <li>This proposal is considered to have great value and significance as it:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>connects communities (Torquay and Jan Juc to Bellbrae)</li> <li>is located next to and at the start of the Great Ocean Rd, a major tourist road</li> <li>offers ocean and hinterland views from the highest point in the landscape</li> <li>connects 2 schools, a regional tourism connector (close to Bells Beach and Surf Coast Walk, links to Anglesea MTB network) and is a public transport connector</li> <li>is considered “invisible, hidden in plain sight, waiting to be discovered”</li> </ul> </li> <li>Two pathway projects in Council’s Developer Contributions Plan (DCP) will improve the pathway infrastructure from one end of the proposal area to the other including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2022/23 DCP pathway project to upgrade the 2.6km service road / pathway section from Christian College to Bellbrae Reserve</li> <li>2025/26 (subject to change) DCP pathway project to provide a new 1.1km pathway link from Duffields Rd to Christian College.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The two DCP pathway projects (refer images below) connect Torquay and Jan Juc to Bellbrae via a continuous off road trail, boosting active travel opportunities to schools.</li> </ul>



- The community priority is to complement the DCP pathway plans (limited primarily to the pathway infrastructure and associated assets) with a holistic long term 'green infrastructure' landscape vision focused on enhancing the environment and the experience (via weed removal, vegetation restoration, creating playful pathway elements and uncovering stories of interest). The pathway is valued as more than just a means to get from A to B.
- Green (or living) infrastructure, integrated with built or hardscape infrastructure assets can protect biodiversity and provide environmental, social and economic benefits.
- Strategically, this proposal aligns to:
  - Council Plan 2021-25 - Theme 3 Environmental Leadership - Strategy 7 to 'protect significant habitats, landscapes and biodiversity'
  - Community Vision (developed through the People Place Future engagement) - Principle 1 to 'protect, conserve and restore our natural environment'
  - Distinctive Areas Landscape Report 2020 (Surf Coast Landscape Assessment Review) "to protect and increase indigenous vegetation throughout the landscape, particularly adjacent to roads, in waterway corridors and within vegetation reserves, with consideration of the most appropriate EVCs to strengthen landscape character."
  - Climate Emergency Corporate Response Plan (2021-31) focuses on adapting to a changing climate, with Council having a role in helping the community and environment to thrive in a safe climate for generations to come. The community have the desire to be innovative, to lead direct action from a grassroots level, collaborating with Council and other stakeholders in an approach that values 'green infrastructure' in effecting environmental, social and climate change.
- A landscape architect has been engaged to reflect the community aspirations via a 'light touch' landscape concept plan for the 'ridgeline trail' and in doing so to articulate the site constraints and land management requirements and provide a range of opportunities to be progressively planned and implemented.
- Extensive weed and biodiversity assessments and reporting have been undertaken through the project area and summarized within the landscape plan documentation.
- Bellbrae Primary School's commitment to "caring for the places we live, learn and play" has been reflected in the work to address safe routes to school, encourage active travel, participation in planting programs along the 'ridgeline trail' and through the valuable insights of students and families into the landscape vision for the trail.
- Christian College (currently to Year 4) is preparing a school masterplan in preparation for incremental growth of the school population (to Year 9) and expanding site infrastructure. Collaborations have commenced into the integration of school pathway plans to proposed 'ridgeline' pathway alignment.
- Surf Coast Energy Group (SCEG) are taking the lead, involving other environmental groups and stakeholders in local action to protect and enhance the biodiversity of many areas of the Surf Coast including the Spring Creek valley and ridgeline.

## Engagement

- Community stakeholders associated with Bellbrae Primary School and SCEG have driven the direction of the landscape vision and have extensively consulted within their own groups.
- Conversations have been facilitated with Barwon Water, Department of Transport, Christian College and private landowners.
- Informal community conversations with pathway users including dog walkers, runners, bike riders, people just experiencing the views, kids building informal jumps.
- Council officers across relevant service areas have been consulted about proposal.
- Seeking broad community awareness of and feedback to the plan is the key next step with the community landscape vision to be included in Council's upcoming DCP pathway planning and engagement process (likely to commence early 2023).

## Key Findings

- This is a complex linear corridor with varying land management and maintenance responsibilities (Council and Department of Transport / DoT), multiple services (i.e. power, water, sewer, gas, communications), emergency management vehicles and private properties requiring access.
- A key investigation success has been the clarification of the land management and maintenance puzzle through this linear road reserve corridor (via Victoria Government Gazette No. S 174 - 30 May 2017 - Code of Practice - Operational Responsibility for Public Roads) with land management responsibilities sitting with Council and the Department of Transport (DoT)
  - Within 60km/hr or less (urban zone) - Council have responsibility for entire road reserve from back of roadside table drain to private property boundary (DoT responsible for table drain through to and including Great Ocean Road surface)
  - Within 80km/hr (rural zone) - Council have responsibility for the old Great Ocean Road Service Road pavement, the 1.2m shoulder both sides of the service road and the road reserve through to the private property boundary (DoT have responsibility for the remaining road reserve between the service road shoulder and the edge of the Great Ocean Road pavement)
- Council's service levels (for weed control, vegetation management and asset maintenance and renewal) within the corridor are defined by current capacity and resourcing with opportunity to review service levels as part of the asset handover process for the 2022/23 (Developer Contributions Plan) Regional Bike Route Project (Strathmore Drive to Bellbrae Reserve). There is broad agreement on the active transport and biodiversity values of this road reserve, however capacity to manage and maintain all Council managed roadside reserves within budget and resource allocations will always be a challenge.
- There is a high level of community expectation about the potential of the 'ridgeline trail' and for the realization of their landscape vision. The community's initial focus is on the eradication and management of weeds and enabling native vegetation to thrive and also suitable infill planting to enhance the corridor's existing biodiversity.
- A consolidated, collaborative approach to weed eradication and control will provide the best chance of success, with community and environmental groups working in conjunction with Council, DoT and private landowners in ongoing weed management efforts within this road reserve. The community have the skills, expertise and passion to drive their vision and to lead local action from the grassroots up.
- Council's renewed understanding of our maintenance responsibilities through the road reserve has resulted in an initial 2022/23 Environment Team operational budget allocation for initial woody weed control works within the road reserve under Council's responsibility and further weed control in this area will be undertaken into the future and weed treatment prioritized in accordance with Council's Pest, Plant and Animal Strategy 2020-2023.
- Conversations facilitated with DoT Sustainability and Environment Team through this investigation provided some confidence that there is now a good understanding of the community vision and the value of consolidating weed control efforts. Further investigation is to take place into DoT's 'Adopt a Highway' model involving community led action and partnerships.
- A draft landscape concept plan has been developed to visualize and articulate the community's vision that provides:
  - an upgraded active transport link connecting communities and providing way finding signage and interpretation signage (uncovering a variety of stories of interest)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ a 'greenway' nature connection with significant biodiversity to be protected and enhanced for current and future generations (with a managed weed eradication program and opportunities for new planting determined)</li> <li>○ informal playful pathway elements for exploration and interaction along the way</li> <li>○ places for rest and reflection, with seating along the ridgeline to take in views north to Spring Creek valley and south to Jan Juc Creek valley (and Bass Strait)</li> </ul>
<b>Potential funding partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Passionate community members and groups have worked hard to obtain funding for some 'demonstration' weed eradication and planting projects and will continue to work hard (using the landscape plan as an advocacy piece) to approach a range of potential funding partners to implement priority projects.</li> <li>● Two DCP pathway projects (to a total length of 3.7km and creating an end to end pathway link) will provide significant capital investment to the local pathway network.</li> <li>● Management and maintenance of the road reserve will be undertaken by Surf Coast Shire and Department of Transport within resource and capacity levels. An understanding of the values and significance of this road reserve (captured in the community vision) will assist in the consolidation and prioritization of works.</li> <li>● Barwon Water, RACV and KeyStone Civil have expressed interest in further involvement through this corridor aligned to the community landscape vision.</li> <li>● Environmental actions of the business community (within the Spring Creek valley and ridgeline) also appear to be gaining momentum with works and funding interest from groups such as Rip Curl, Patagonia and Quiksilver.</li> <li>● Opportunity for further community conversations with local funding partners including the Rotary Club of Torquay and Torquay Lions Club.</li> <li>● Opportunity to consider community and road safety, active travel and climate change, related funding programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Officer Summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Refer the draft community landscape vision developed within the investigation phase of the Great Ocean Road Service Road (Torquay to Bellbrae) Landscape Plan Proposal (CPP67) for inclusion in the community engagement plan for the 2022/23 (Developer Contributions Plan) Regional Bike Route Project (Strathmore Drive to Bellbrae Reserve).</li> <li>● This integration of the community's vision for the landscape with Council's pathway infrastructure project planning and delivery process acknowledges the community's desire for a holistic partnership approach that values protection and enhancement of the 'ridgeline trail' environment and experience and that understands the value of "green infrastructure"</li> </ul>