SCS-059 Residential Nature Strip Policy

TRIM Reference:	D23/88619	Due for Review:	June 2027
Responsible Officer:	Manager Assets & Engineering		

Purpose

In recognising that the management of nature strips impacts a variety of stakeholders including property owners, residents, commuters, emergency management agencies, service authorities and Council, this policy outlines Surf Coast Shire Council's commitment to the management of nature strips within Council managed road reserves.

Scope

This policy applies to nature strips located within the road reserve in township boundaries where Council is the managing authority. This generally includes all residential areas which are serviced by local roads.

This policy does not apply to, nor does it permit works to be carried out in the following areas:

- nature strips on arterial roads, including high-capacity roads or main roads);
- areas covered by a heritage planning overlay;
- the median or other areas of the road reserve;
- nature strips containing existing native vegetation; and
- areas in which, because of the local conditions (e.g. terrain), it is not safe or feasible to modify the nature strip, including Lorne and Aireys Inlet.

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Council acknowledges that the townships within the Shire are not all the same and implementing this policy and its supporting Guidelines may not be achievable within some townships where other factors such as terrain, specific precinct streetscaping or local character need to be considered.

Policy Principles

This policy outlines the principles which Council will apply when determining the type of landscaping works which may be carried out on, and treatments which may be applied to nature strips within the Shire by community members.

The following policy principles are endorsed by Council:

- Nature strips are a public space that contribute to a sense of place and community.
- Nature strips must be safe and accessible spaces.
- Nature strips contribute to a healthy environment for people, plants and animals.
- Nature strips play an active role in supporting Council's Climate Change Response including the management of the risk of fire to community and infrastructure.
- Nature strips perform a role in housing essential services to the community including water mains, gas and power.

Principle 1: Nature strips are a public space that contribute to a sense of place and community

- Council recognises that well-kept and functional nature strips can have a positive impact on the look and feel of streets. At their best, they can exhibit the community's pride in the place where they live and support harmonious relationships between neighbours and the wider community.
- Council encourages residents to take pride in management of nature strips and supports the use of these spaces in accordance with these policy principles and the associated guidelines.

Principle 2: Nature strips must be safe and accessible spaces

- Nature strips must offer safety for pedestrians and prevent them from having to walk on the road. This may take the form of a constructed pathway or simply a smooth unobstructed path of travel. If this is not practical, there should be a safe space for pedestrians to step off the road to avoid oncoming traffic.
- They must allow sufficient space for people to safely exit cars parked on the road.
- Plantings, trees and other structures within the nature strip must not be placed in a position that can cause obstructions for people crossing the road and drivers exiting their driveways or at intersections.

Principle 3: Nature strips contribute to a healthy environment for people, plants and animals

- Council supports well-kept grass and modest plantings due to their environmental benefits and their ability to soften the streetscape.
- Council supports the planting of vegetation in nature strips that provide safe places for birds and other animals.
- Vegetation within nature strips should be in keeping with the local environment or neighbourhood character and/or provide a positive fire risk or heat outcome.
- Vegetation within nature strips should not include noxious weeds or plant species that may be dangerous to people or animals.
- Council also supports the planting of some other forms of approved vegetation within nature strips in addition to grass to enhance nature strip appeal.

Principle 4: Nature strips play an active role in supporting Council's Climate Change Response including the management of the risk of fire to community and infrastructure

- Nature strips should support the actions of Council's Climate Action Plan through the "greening" of nature strips by planting grasses and other vegetation.
- Planting of street trees and grass within nature strips reduces the urban heat effect. The temperature within urban areas during the hotter periods of the year is increased due to the amount of asphalt and concrete. Trees and grassed nature strips can contribute to reducing the overall heat effect, whereas gravel type nature strips increase the urban heat effect.
- Nature strips need to be maintained in a way that helps manage the risk to the community and infrastructure in the event of bushfire.

Principle 5: Nature strips perform a role in housing essential services to the community

- Nature strips are the home for essential service infrastructure, and easy access to this infrastructure needs to be maintained for the various service authorities. These services include, but are not limited to, power, telecommunications, water, sewer, stormwater and gas.
- Residents need to have space available in the nature strip to place their bins for collection on garbage collection days.
- Property owners and residents understand the impact that maintenance undertaken by service authorities may have on nature strips.

Other Matters

Nature Strip Guidelines

Council has developed "Residential Nature Strip Guidelines" which will support the delivery of this policy. It is proposed that the Guidelines will be incorporated by reference in the Community Amenity Local Law to give practical effect to these policy principles.

The Guidelines will provide clear guidance for property owners and residents by outlining what landscaping works may be undertaken and what acceptable standard treatments may be applied to nature strips within the Shire without requiring Council approval through the issuing of a permit.

If a property owner wishes to undertake works on a nature strip that varies from the acceptable standard works and/or treatments outlined within the Guidelines, a permit under the Local Law will need to be obtained. As part of this permit application process, officers will need to individually assess any proposed works against the Guidelines, these Policy principles and any other requirements of Council.

Street trees

Planting and maintaining street trees is solely Council's responsibility. Property owners or residents are not permitted to remove or alter existing trees or plant new trees without Council's permission. Planting the wrong type of tree can make the streetscape unsightly and unsafe. Unsuitable species can grow into power lines, and their root systems can damage roads, drains, pathways and kerb and channel or increase fire risk.

Property owners and residents are not permitted to undertake any form of pruning of street trees, nor can they make any alterations such as boxing around the tree base or placing a planter box or similar around the base of the tree which can have a detrimental effect on the health of the tree.

Nature strip maintenance

Council does not carry out maintenance or renovation of nature strips. Property owners and residents are encouraged to maintain the grass and any plants on the nature strip directly abutting their property (excluding street trees). This includes regular mowing, weeding, edging and litter collection to the standards specified in the guidelines.

Council and service authorities assets within nature strips

Council and service authorities that supply gas, water, electricity and telecommunications may, from time to time, require access to nature strips to undertake maintenance work. These service authorities are required to reinstate the nature strip following maintenance work, but are not required to reinstate residential nature strips that have been modified or landscaped in any treatment other than grass.

Land owners and residents must consider possible impact of works by service authorities when planning nature strip landscaping works.

Risk

Property owners and residents are responsible for the cost of maintaining and carrying out works in nature strips, including all materials, labour, watering and any incidental damage to public infrastructure.

Property owners and residents entering the nature strip to carry out maintenance and other works must take reasonable care for their own safety and for the safety of other persons in the immediate vicinity.

When planning works, property owners and residents must check the location of underground services using Dial-Before-You-Dig and Council should be notified of any hazards in the nature strip for which Council may be responsible.

Local Government Act 2020 Principles

Principles	Applicable to policy	If yes, provide details
Governance Principles (Consideration of the Governance Principles under s.9 of LGA 2020)	Yes	Priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the community, including future generations.
Community Engagement (Consideration of Community Engagement Principles under s.56 LGA 2020)	Yes	Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.
Public Transparency (Consideration of Public Transparency Principles under s.58 of LGA 2020)	Yes	Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.
Strategies and Plans (Consideration of Strategic Planning Principles under s.89 of LGA 2020)	No	
Financial Management (Consideration of Financial Management Principles under s.101 of LGA 2020)	Yes	Financial risks must be monitored and managed prudently having regard to economic circumstances.
Service Performance (Consideration of Service Performance Principles under s.106 of LGA 2020)	Yes	Services should be provided in an equitable manner and be responsive to the diverse needs of the community.

Definitions

Nature strip - A nature strip is the area of public land that is generally located between a property boundary or footpath adjacent to that property boundary and the back of kerb, edge of a road or table drain.

Related Procedure

Not applicable.

References

- Road Management Act 2004
- Local Government Act 2020
- Surf Coast Shire Residential Nature Strip Guidelines
- Surf Coast Shire Road Management Plan
- Surf Coast Shire Community Amenity Local Law 2021
- Otway District Strategic Fire Plan 2024
- Surf Coast Shire Council Climate Action Plan

Document History

Version	Document History	Approved by – Date
1	*Adopted*	*Council Resolution – 23 May 2023*