Appendix B: Previous Studies
Previous Studies

Recognition of the environmental, recreational, landscape and aesthetic values of the Yarra River corridor have been evolving over the last 30 years.

Several key studies have been completed in relation to development within this section of the river corridor, and provide the background to this project.

Lower Yarra River Studies

The study area has been considered in several of studies of the Lower Yarra River which were undertaken between 1988 and 2001. These studies focussed on a variety of issues including the protection of recreation, landscape and environmental values. Recommended implementation measures included public land management and planning scheme controls.

The Lower Yarra studies are:
- Lower Yarra River Concept Plan (Punt Road to Dights Falls), MMBW 1986
- Lower Yarra River Landscape Guidelines (Punt Road to Dights Falls), MMBW 1988
- Lower Yarra River Urban Design Guidelines, 1992

Review of Policies & Controls for the Yarra River Corridor: Punt Road to Burke Road (2005)

The State Government Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) commissioned Planisphere to review the policies and controls for the section of the Yarra River between Punt Road and Burke Road in 2005.

This study (the 2005 Review) applied the principles of landscape protection to the Yarra River corridor by assessing the river’s values, distinguishing broad river interface character types and identifying planning objectives that are relevant to this section of the river. Three river interface character types were identified in the study area, as shown on the map opposite.

Recommendations to protect and enhance the valued qualities of the corridor were made. This included non-statutory recommendations such as public land management and improved access, as well as a range of overlay controls in specific locations, including the Design and Development Overlay, Environmental Significance Overlay and the Significant Landscape Overlay.

Specifically, the study identified two distinct river interface character types within the Stonnington section of the Yarra River - Urban Residential and Leafy Suburban, as well as the extensive parklands along the river’s edge.
DDO3 Review (2012 & 2014 update)

Schedule 3 to the Design and Development Overlay (DDO3) was introduced to the Stonnington Planning Scheme to implement the 1986 Lower Yarra River Concept Plan (Punt Road to Dights Falls). It applies to the Yarra River between Punt Road and Grange Road.

The 2005 Review recommended that further strategic landscape and built form character assessment for this part of the Yarra River be undertaken with a view to revising DDO3 to introduce stronger built form guidelines, including building height controls, into the Stonnington Planning Scheme. In particular, the report recommended further exploration of the impact of development on hill faces, skylines and ridgelines.

Piansphere was commissioned in 2012 to undertake this review of DDO3 and to assess the strategic justification for revised built form controls. The study analysed the river’s landscape character in detail and identified five typologies within the broader ‘urban residential’ typology identified in the 2005 Review (shown on map, top right).

The study recommended height controls for each typology within the DDO3 area (shown on map, bottom right), and that these be introduced to the Planning Scheme as discretionary controls for public use land or public open space, and mandatory height controls for all other sites. It also recommended that the boundary of the overlay be expanded in several locations to encompass areas of elevated land. The study was reviewed in 2014 in order to align its recommendations with the introduction of the new format residential zones.

Of particular relevance to the preparation of the Lower Yarra River Study are the recommendations for Typology 1: Riverfront Apartments and Typology 4: River Ridgeline which are included in the revised DDO3.

Typology 1: Riverfront Apartments

The key character elements for this typology are noted as:

- Topography slopes gradually up from Alexandra Avenue to the south. To the north of Alexandra Avenue, the river embankment drops steeply down to the Yarra River. Darling Street forms a topographical high point within the area.
- Public open space includes the Yarra River open space corridor and Alexandra Avenue Precinct.
- Private property fronting Alexandra Avenue has a vegetated landscape character that is complemented by vegetation within public open space. The presence of trees and creepers on buildings softens built form and contributes to the vegetated landscape character of the area.
- Boulevard street tree planting of predominantly English Plane trees and Golden Elms along Alexandra Avenue contribute to the landscape character of the area.

- Built form comprises predominantly apartment blocks of between three to four storeys (approx. 9-12m). A number of six storey developments (approx. 30m) are located along Darling Street.
- Architectural styles include a notable collection inter-war Art Deco buildings, with occasional post-war and contemporary infill apartments. The area forms part of Heritage Overlay 122: Alexandra Avenue Precinct.
- Built form is oriented at varying angles to maximise views of the Yarra River and city skyline. Roofs are predominantly pitched, with flat roofs prevalent on contemporary development.
- Fencing is predominantly low (<1.2m).
- Most properties have high site coverage.

The recommended building height for this typology is 12 metres.

Typology 4: River Ridgeline

The key character elements for this typology are noted as:

- Topography slopes sharply up from Alexandra Avenue to the high embankment and ridgeline to the south. Natural topography has been modified to accommodate the road, resulting in a tall rock escarpment alongside Alexandra Avenue. To the north of Alexandra Avenue, the river embankment drops steeply down to the Yarra River.
- Public open space includes the Yarra River open space corridor and Alexandra Avenue. Some areas are visible from Herring Island, particularly development located high up on the ridgeline.
- Public open space includes the Yarra River open space corridor (and the associated shared path network).
- Private property has a semi-vegetated character, consisting mainly of formal gardens and low-scale exotic vegetation. An overall lack of vegetation/weedy vegetation within the public realm detracts from the landscape character of the area.
- Built form within this area consists predominantly of large contemporary houses on moderate to large blocks. Building heights are typically two to three storeys (approx. 6-9m).
- Development is located high up along the embankment/ridgeline, taking advantage of available views across the Yarra River corridor. Built form is often highly visible from the river corridor and Alexandra Avenue. Some areas are visible from Herring Island, particularly development located high up on the ridgeline.
- Built form is oriented at varying angles with large frontages of glass, to maximise views of the Yarra River and city skyline.
- Light shades e.g. creams, whites and tans are dominant.
- Site coverage is generally high, with large building footprints and swimming pools a common feature of properties.

The recommended building height for this typology is 9 metres.
Planning Scheme Amendments

Amendment C155

Amendment C155 proposed to implement the recommendations of the DDO3 Review. It was exhibited in 2012 and submissions were referred to a Planning Panel.

The Panel was generally supportive of the proposed changes to DDO3 and the strategic assessment undertaken in the DDO3 Review. The Panel supported the introduction of mandatory height controls through most of the study area, with the exception of the 12m and 9m height limit areas proposed between River Street and Como Park which it recommended be applied as discretionary controls.

The Panel considered that these areas have significant variations in topography, viewpoints and existing building scale that make it impossible to define an appropriate mandatory maximum height limit. Additionally, the Panel agreed that a number of existing high scale buildings in this area which exceed the proposed height limits are of a high quality and fitting to the varied context, therefore justifying the approach of a site by site assessment of appropriate building height.

Several changes to the objectives and decision guidelines of the proposed DDO were also recommended, particularly in relation to the assessment of proposals under discretionary height limits.

Amendment C187

Amendment C187 introduced the suite of new format residential zones to the Stonnington Planning Scheme. The new zones applied mandatory height controls to residentially zoned land across all of the study area through the zone schedules. The mandatory heights reflect the recommendations of the DDO3 Review, with the exception of a minor boundary re-alignment between DDO3-1 and DDO3-4, relating to the site at 61 Kensington Road, South Yarra.

Stonnington Yarra River Biodiversity Linkages Project

In 2010, Council commenced one of the biggest regeneration projects in Yarra River’s recent history. In order to achieve the City of Stonnington’s commitment to enhancing and improving biodiversity and habitat values, Council developed and approved the Yarra River Biodiversity Linkages Project Master Plan in April 2010.

The Master Plan is broken into six project stages along a 3km stretch of the Yarra River that falls within the City of Stonnington from Grange Road to Punt Road. It aims to increase habitat connectivity, improve water quality and provide recreational and educational opportunities for the community to interact with Melbourne’s landmark river. The works have included:

- Indigenous riparian revegetation (planting of over 110,000 plants).
- Construction of an ephemeral wetland system, bioretention garden and installation of a gross pollutant trap for stormwater treatment.
- Construction of a 3m wide pedestrian boardwalk made from recycled plastic.
- Construction of two river viewing platforms.
- Widening and upgrade of bicycle path and installation solar bike path markers.
- Increased recreational spaces for improved interaction with the Yarra River.