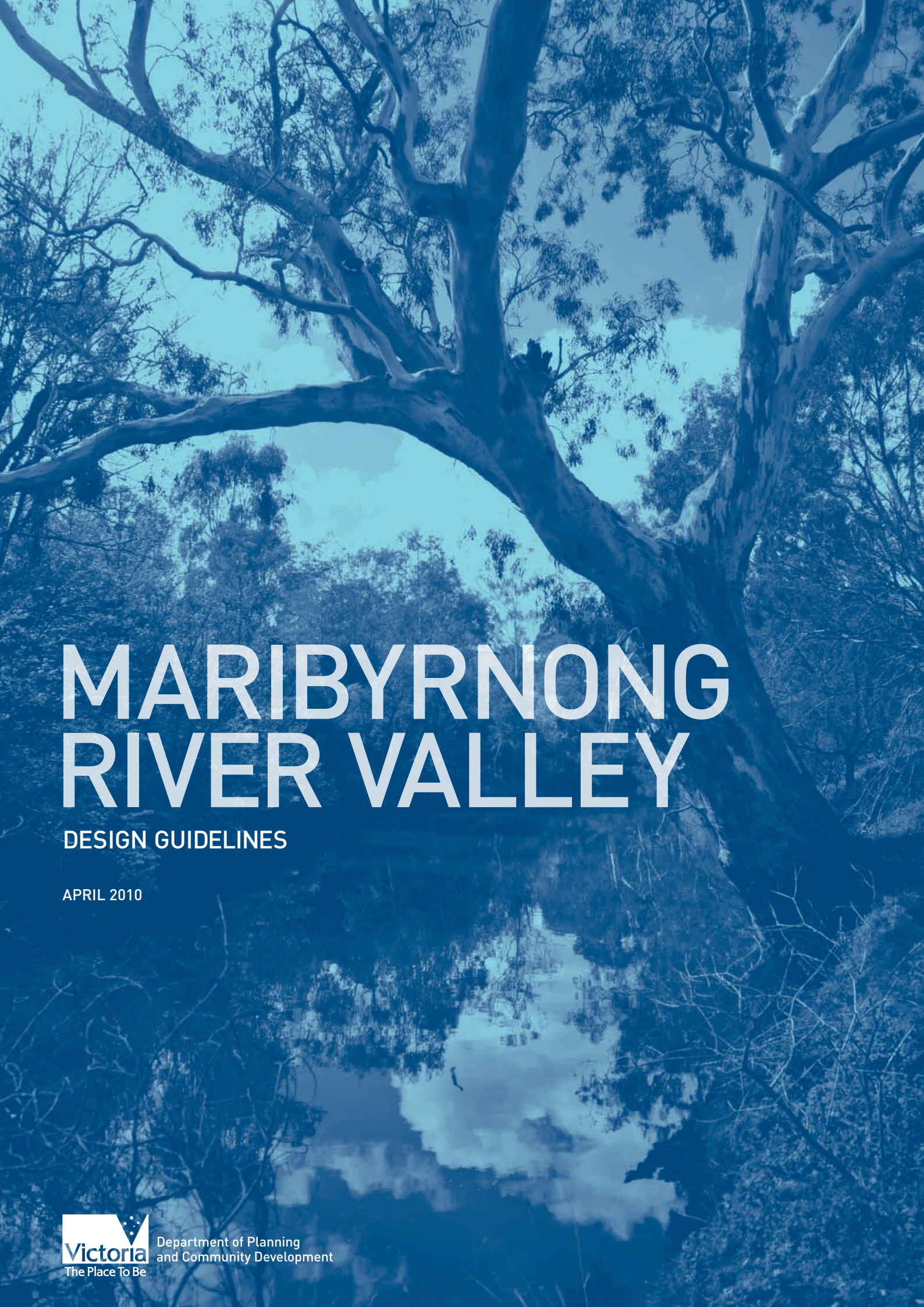

MARIBYRNONG RIVER VALLEY

DESIGN GUIDELINES

APRIL 2010

Victoria
The Place To Be
Department of Planning
and Community Development

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BRIMBANK CITY COUNCIL

HUME CITY COUNCIL

Maribyrnong CITY COUNCIL

CITY OF MELBOURNE

Moonee Valley

Melbourne Water

Parks Victoria – Healthy Parks Healthy People

Victoria – The Place To Be

Department of Planning and Community Development

MINISTER'S FOREWORD

Consistent and coordinated planning is essential for protecting the natural and built character of our treasured waterways. The Maribyrnong River is one of Melbourne's most used and loved assets, with thousands of Melburnians relaxing along the river every day.

Home to the Wurundjeri people for thousands of years, the river valley has seen dramatic changes since the arrival of Europeans a little over 200 years ago. Over this time it has been used for grazing, industrial development, housing and recreational use.

But as Melbourne grows, so do the pressures from public and private development and these, if not carefully managed, could undermine the valuable features people love about the Maribyrnong.

Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines is an overarching planning framework – developed by all major agencies with planning responsibility for the river – that will achieve greater planning consistency along the river valley. It was also informed by the views of many passionate people in the local community.

The Guidelines set out a broad vision for a healthy, vibrant river with quality open space, good walking and cycling trails and sensitive development that protects the Maribyrnong's natural and urban features.

The Guidelines also contribute to the government's wider vision of a more liveable, sustainable city, as outlined in *Melbourne 2030: a planning update – Melbourne @ 5 million*, where people have access to high quality transport, housing and open space.

Many agencies have contributed to the development of these guidelines: Brimbank, Hume, Maribyrnong, Melbourne and Moonee Valley councils, the Department of Planning and Community Development, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water and the Port of Melbourne Corporation.

This work is a great example of the renewed collaboration and cooperation that will serve the river well for current and future generations.

Justin Madden MLC
Minister for Planning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Maribyrnong River is one of Melbourne's most treasured and well-used waterways. Thousands of Melburnians spend time on or near the river every day – from its source above the Organ Pipes National Park through Keilor, Essendon, Footscray and Yarraville to where it meets the Yarra River near the West Gate Bridge.

Coordinated planning is essential to protect and enhance the river valley's natural and built environment for current and future generations.

Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines is the result of extensive collaboration between Brimbank, Hume, Maribyrnong, Melbourne and Moonee Valley councils, the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water and the Port of Melbourne Corporation.

Within these pages are detailed guidelines for river health, habitat protection, heritage, parks and recreation, tourism and planning that will provide greater certainty and clarity on development and a consistent approach to the protection of the Maribyrnong River Valley.

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines is intended as an overarching planning framework to protect open space and guide development along the river, as well as expand and link existing parkland, walking paths and cycling trails.

This report sets out a broad vision for the built form and landscape of the river valley and presents a range of *priority actions* for further work from the Organ Pipes National Park right through to the river mouth. This includes the Hume and Brimbank Green Wedges which are outside the current Urban Growth Boundary.

Priority actions over the next five years include steps to enlarge the open space corridor, new capital works, further detailed planning, improved governance and greater community engagement.

In addition to these priority actions are a set of *design guidelines*, which apply to the river's urban length downstream of the Urban Growth Boundary to the river mouth. They do not cover the Hume and Brimbank Green Wedges which are predominantly rural in character.

These design guidelines are intended to influence the form of proposed buildings and works along the river and to inform prospective developers, land managers, landowners and the wider community.

VISION

"A healthy river flowing through a continuous network of open spaces and cultural landscapes that reflect its journey from a natural river to a working river. A river that provides a range of recreation experiences that value local landform and landscape character and preserve cultural heritage, including significant plantings. A river that supports indigenous vegetation and fauna."

THE STUDY AREA

The Maribyrnong River Valley offers a wide variety of public open space for residents and visitors – from natural bushland, secluded gorges and formal parks to historic wharves, industrial heritage and spectacular views over the Port of Melbourne.

The river is part of the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people and their ancestors have frequented its banks for at least 40,000 years. It has also played a significant role in Melbourne's development as a city.

In the second half of the 19th century much of Melbourne's industry was located along the Maribyrnong River but since the closure of many factories in the 1960s and 1970s the waterway has fast become a place of recreation and leisure.

Today the river supports a range of native vegetation and animals. The upper river valley includes native grasslands, escarpment shrublands and woodlands and provides a habitat for a range of mammals and bird species.

Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines focuses on the characteristics of the river valley that need to be conserved, repaired or enhanced. To help guide future development, the river has been divided into seven 'lengths', each with a preferred character type.

1. Brimbank length – a natural river

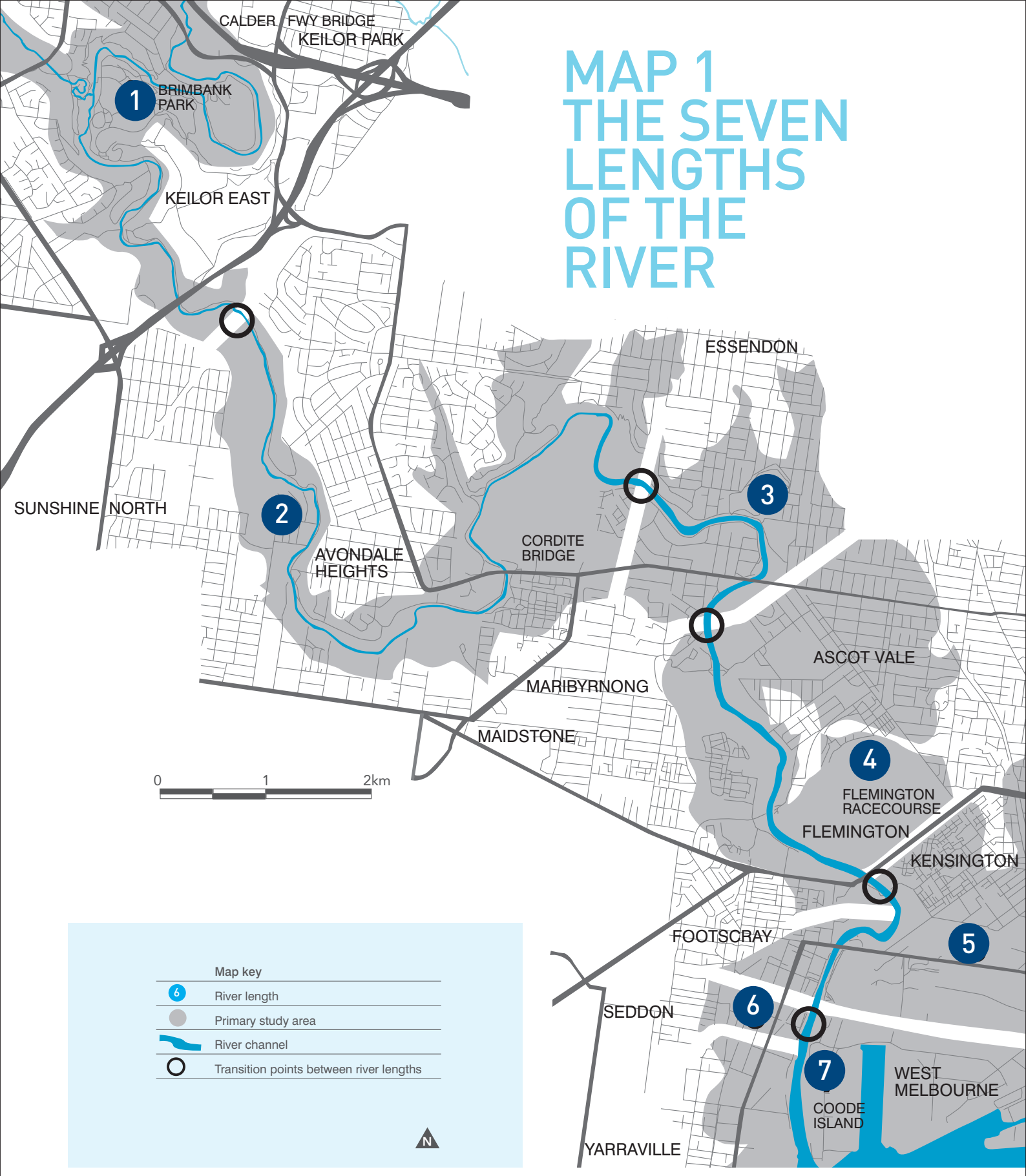
The remote character and natural features of this length of the river are its most valuable assets. In terms of future development, there is a need to strike a balance between protecting these natural values and providing facilities for residents and visitors.

2. Steele Creek length – a secluded river

Here the river flows through a steep valley with significant vegetation along its banks including prominent river red gums. It is important to preserve the remote character of this part of the river by ensuring new development is minimised or setback and appropriately landscaped.

Redevelopment of sites such as the Defence Site Maribyrnong will allow the creation of significant areas of public open space.

MAP 1 THE SEVEN LENGTHS OF THE RIVER



3. Maribyrnong length – a suburban river

This part of the river has a long history of recreation and leisure. There are numerous sporting facilities, formal open parks, picnic areas and cafes in the area. Retaining an active, people-friendly environment will be a priority.

4. Racecourse length – river flats

Here the river opens out into broad river flats. Visible from the water's edge is Flemington Racecourse, the home of Australia's most famous horse race, as well as a range of suburban housing. Future development needs to remain relatively discrete to retain the sense of an open floodplain.

5. Footscray length – an urban river

Melbourne's early industrial history is prominent here. Old wharves and warehouses are clearly visible and there is a mix of industrial uses and medium density housing. With spectacular views of the Port of Melbourne, this is where is the working heritage of the river can be celebrated.

6. Footscray Wharf length – an urban river

This area on the western bank of the river is tied to Melbourne's industrial and commercial fishing industries. However, its proximity to major petrochemical facilities and the Port of Melbourne means it is not suitable for residential development. Its future is likely to include some public access to the river and redevelopment as a commercial marina.

7. Port length – a working river

Shipping and heavy industrial activities define and dominate this part of the river. There is potential for further industrial and commercial development that could include advanced manufacturing, maritime and service industries that have a strategic need to be near the Port of Melbourne.

WHAT IS BEING DONE

Improving river governance

To achieve the vision outlined in the *Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines*, a coordinated governance structure for the river valley will be established as a two-year trial.

Membership of the new Maribyrnong River Valley Coordinating Committee will include Brimbank, Hume, Maribyrnong, Melbourne and Moonee Valley councils, the Department of Planning and Community Development and Parks Victoria.

Although individual projects will remain the responsibility of each agency, the committee will oversee the planning of all priority actions on public and private land along the river valley. The committee will also develop a comprehensive website and promotional materials about the river's attractions, environmental heritage and history.

Enlarging the open space corridor

One of the major aims of these Guidelines is to maximise the amount of public open space along the Maribyrnong River and provide a consistent framework for how it should be managed. Actions include:

- *Creating linked parkland along the river* – further residential development in the upper reaches of the river valley will be avoided and funding sought to acquire suitable areas for public open space.
- *Enhancing public amenity at Footscray Wharf and the Port of Melbourne* – work is being carried out on a non-riverfront path linking the Maribyrnong Trail with the Bay Trail. Options for maximising views of the Port of Melbourne's Swanson Dock are being explored.
- *Investigating an Upper Maribyrnong Linear Park* – work will be carried out to determine the boundaries of a proposed Upper Maribyrnong River Linear Park as part of the Green Wedge Management Plans being prepared by Hume and Brimbank Councils.
- *Strategic planning in Sunshine North* – to establish preferred land uses and identify areas of open space and native vegetation to be protected has been completed.
- *Completing detailed planning for the Defence Site Maribyrnong* – following handover of this site to the Victorian Government, an integrated landscape and development strategy will be prepared that ensures public open space is set aside along the entire length of the river corridor.

Improving precinct planning

There are a number of critical locations along the Maribyrnong River where more detailed, integrated planning is required to improve access and amenity. Actions include:

- *Ensuring nodes of activity complement the river environment* – small-scale cafes and visitor facilities will be encouraged where they complement the local environment and create a direct relationship with the river.
- *Creating points of transition between river lengths* – clear transitions between each river length will be designed to create an abrupt but artful change of character, rather than having long sections where the character is unclear.
- *Improving parkland along the river* – masterplans will be developed to improve planting and facilities at several undeveloped areas of parkland along the river.

Undertaking new capital works

Works are required along the Maribyrnong River to improve recreational use and enjoyment. Actions include:

- *Improving trails and related infrastructure* – funding will be sought to complete works on both sides of the river to create a continuous trail along the water's edge, wherever possible and practical.
- *Upgrading river-based infrastructure* – funding will be sought for new pedestrian and cycling crossings over the river and side trails to attractions such as Highpoint Shopping Centre and Victoria University. Other new infrastructure will also be installed such as signage, seats, shade, lighting, drinking fountains, toilets, bicycle parking and landing points for water craft.

Amending planning controls

Giving effect to the *Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines* requires specifically drafted overlay provisions in local planning schemes.

The Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO) is the most appropriate planning mechanism to use as it will ensure a broad range of actions that may threaten the river valley are subject to permit approval. However, an ESO also allows for local circumstances to be taken into account in all planning decisions.

The future

As well as the priority actions outlined above, *Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines* includes a set of detailed design guidelines for achieving future planning consistency for both private and public land downstream of the Urban Growth Boundary.

These Guidelines will be introduced as a reference document into all relevant planning schemes and reflected in council Municipal Strategic Statements.

The main purpose of the Guidelines is to protect open space and guide development along the river, as well as expand and link existing parkland, walking paths and cycling trails.

The Guidelines will be used to reinforce the preferred character of the seven river lengths and provide direction on:

- Additional open space
- Open space management – landscape
- Open space management – access
- Landform
- Urban development interface
- Site layout and building visibility
- Building design
- Infrastructure design.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Commonwealth Department of Defence

Department of Transport

Department of Victorian Communities (former)

Environment Protection Authority Victoria

Friends of the Maribyrnong Valley

Heritage Victoria

Local and peak interest groups including friends groups, Environment Victoria, Green Wedge Coalition, Bicycle Victoria

Local Members of Parliament

Major developers with an interest in the study area

Melbourne Airport

Port of Melbourne Corporation

Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority

Recreational and boating clubs

Tourism Victoria

VicRoads

VicUrban

This report is based on an earlier report, Maribyrnong River Valley Vision and Design Guidelines (Consultant report to the Maribyrnong River Valley Project Steering Committee), April 2006.

Introduction

1

1.1 WHY THESE GUIDELINES ARE NEEDED

The Maribyrnong River is one of Melbourne's most treasured and well-used rivers.

Thousands of Melburnians spend time exercising and relaxing along it every day – from its source above the Organ Pipes National Park through Keilor, Essendon, Footscray and Yarraville to where it meets the Yarra River near the West Gate Bridge.

Coordinated planning is essential to protect and enhance the Maribyrnong River's natural and built environment for current and future generations.

The *Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines* are intended as an overarching framework to achieve planning consistency along the river valley. The main purpose of the Guidelines is to protect open space and guide development along the river, as well as expand and link existing parkland, walking paths and cycling trails.

This report sets out a broad vision for the built form and landscape of the river valley and presents a range of priority actions for further work from the Organ Pipes National Park right through to the river mouth. This includes the Hume and Brimbank Green Wedges which are outside the current Urban Growth Boundary. Priority actions over the next five years include capital works, planning scheme amendments, enlarging the open space corridor, further detailed planning and community engagement.

In addition to these priority actions, this report includes a detailed set of design guidelines, which apply only to the river's urban length from the Urban Growth Boundary to the river mouth. They do not cover the Hume and Brimbank Green Wedges, which are predominantly rural in character. These design guidelines are intended to influence the form of proposed buildings and works along the river and to inform prospective developers, land managers, landowners and the wider community.

The Guidelines will be introduced as a reference document into all relevant planning schemes and reflected in council Municipal Strategic Statements.

Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines is the result of extensive collaboration between all of the major agencies with planning responsibility for the river, including the Department of Planning and Community Development, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, the Port of Melbourne Corporation and the five local councils through which the river runs (Brimbank, Hume, Maribyrnong, Melbourne and Moonee Valley).

Within its pages are design guidelines for river health, habitat protection, heritage, parks and recreation, tourism and planning. The overall aim is to provide greater certainty and clarity on development and a consistent approach to the protection of the Maribyrnong River.

This report sets out a broad vision for the built form and landscape of the river valley and presents a range of priority actions for further work from the Organ Pipes National Park right through to the river mouth.

1.2 POLICY CONTEXT

Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines is informed by three major areas of Victorian planning policy: *Melbourne 2030: Planning for Sustainable Growth*, the State Planning Policy Framework and five Municipal Strategic Statements.

Melbourne 2030

The Victorian Government's long-term strategy for metropolitan Melbourne, *Melbourne 2030*, and the related planning update, *Melbourne @ 5 million*, are the overarching planning policies for all urban development in Melbourne.

These two planning documents outline how the Victorian Government will meet the housing needs of the city's growing population – projected to increase by 1.8 million people between 2006 and 2036 to 5.5 million – while still maintaining high quality services and preserving Melbourne's extensive and prized open space network.

One of *Melbourne 2030*'s major policies (5.7) is to "rectify gaps in the network of metropolitan open space by creating new parks and ensuring major open space corridors are protected and enhanced".

A number of initiatives are set out under this policy including creating four continuous open space links and trails in Melbourne, one of these along the Maribyrnong River.

Melbourne 2030 also proposes reviewing the adequacy of planning controls related to the Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers to ensure long-term protection of open space and conservation values. Among other initiatives, it specifies adding to the recreational and tourism potential of the Yarra and Maribyrnong river corridors by:

- identifying and completing high priority infrastructure, landscaping works and enhancement of pedestrian and bicycle trail links along the lower Maribyrnong River
- completing links between the Maribyrnong Trail and Bay Trail at Williamstown.

State Planning Policy Framework

Also informing the development of these guidelines is the State Planning Policy Framework, and in particular Clause 14.02-2.

This clause states that environmentally sensitive areas of Melbourne with significant recreational value such as the Maribyrnong River should "be protected from development which would diminish their environmental, conservation or recreation values".

Municipal Strategic Statements

All relevant local councils with planning responsibility for the Maribyrnong River also recognise and acknowledge its importance in their Municipal Strategic Statements.

The range of issues covered in the existing Municipal Strategic Statements of Brimbank, Hume, Maribyrnong, Melbourne and Moonee Valley councils include:

- protecting public access to parkland
- developing new parks and open space
- completing linear pathways
- protecting vegetation and natural features
- conserving water resources and managing stormwater
- facilitating specific uses in nominated locations
- managing development in the floodplain
- managing the scale, siting and bulk of new developments in the Maribyrnong River Valley to protect significant features
- preparing and updating park masterplans.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF THE RIVER

Major physical features

The Maribyrnong River Valley was formed over millions of years, with water eroding through the basalt plains west of Melbourne to create a complex landscape of gorges and river flats. Its topography can be simplified into three basic areas:

- the flat basalt plain hinterland
- the valley escarpment
- the floodplain and valley flats.

The river has eroded gorges up to 55 metres deep in the basalt plain. Six thousand years ago sea levels were substantially higher than today and the whole of the present day river flats was covered by water.

Flooding

The Maribyrnong River is Melbourne's second largest waterway. It has a catchment of some 1,400 square kilometres, stretching from the Macedon Ranges to Port Phillip Bay.

The Maribyrnong River has a history of flooding dating back to the 1880s, with the largest flood recorded in 1906. The depth, duration and flow characteristics of flooding vary greatly along the river in any particular flood event. Flooding from the river poses an ongoing safety and property damage hazard.

There are currently about 250 residential and about 55 industrial and commercial properties within the Maribyrnong River floodplain. It is essential to continue to manage development in the floodplain of the river.

Melbourne Water is the floodplain management authority for the Melbourne metropolitan region. All developments referred to Melbourne Water are assessed to ensure that new development does not increase the risk to public safety, or increase the risk of damage to property resulting from a flood.

The Maribyrnong River Valley offers a wide range of public open space and recreational opportunities to residents and visitors.

Open space

The Maribyrnong River Valley offers a wide range of public open space and recreational opportunities to residents and visitors.

A number of important public parks are situated along the river including Brimbank Park and Horseshoe Bend Farm, situated approximately 15km north-west of Melbourne in Keilor East. These parklands offer ideal settings for picnics, walking, fishing, canoeing and bird watching.

Other important parks along the river include Canning Reserve, Fairbairn Park, Pipemakers Park, Footscray Park and Newells Paddock Wetlands. Formal open space areas and sporting grounds are found on the river flats at Aberfeldie Park and Maribyrnong Park.

A range of commercial vessels and water taxis operate on the river as well as private and club-based recreational vessels. Several rowing and canoe clubs have facilities along the river's edge and the river is increasingly popular for angling. There are also a number of private jetties along the river providing exclusive access to the water.

Natural assets

The Maribyrnong River Valley supports a variety of remnant vegetation, flora and fauna.

The upper lengths of the river valley include remnant native grasslands, escarpment shrublands and riparian woodlands, which are home to threatened flora species such as the Slender Tick-trefoil *(Desmodium varians)* and the Tough Scurf-pea *(Cullen tenax)*.

The river valley also supports a range of migratory and resident bird species including Egrets, Herons and many species of ducks. There are also records of Galaxias, Australian Grayling, Common Long-necked Tortoise and Platypus in the river. Brushtail Possums, Echidnas, Gould's Wattled Bats, Growling Grass Frogs and Striped Legless Lizards are just some of the mammals, frogs and reptiles that live in the valley.

Heritage

The Maribyrnong River has played a major role in the occupation and development of western Victoria. The river is part of the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people and their ancestors have frequented its banks for at least 40,000 years.

Originally known by Europeans as Saltwater River, the first party of Europeans to explore the Maribyrnong was led by Charles Grimes, Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales, in February 1803. However, Europeans did not to start to settle along the river until after Melbourne was established in 1835.

During the second half of the 19th century much of Melbourne's industry was located along the Maribyrnong River and the river became severely degraded. But with the closure of many industries since the 1960s and 1970s, large areas of river-front land were opened up to form parkland and residential estates.

There are also many important maritime, industrial and farming archaeological sites along the river. Some of these have been recognised and conserved but more work is needed particularly in the upper reaches of the river.

Urban development

Historically, rivers were not desirable locations for residential development and much of the land along the Maribyrnong River was originally given over to industrial uses and quarrying.

Most notable were large areas of Commonwealth land associated with the munitions industry and industrial and abattoir uses in Footscray and Kensington. Much of this land has since been developed for residential use (Waterford Green, Edgewater Estate), or is expected to be developed in the near future (Defence Site Maribyrnong). In the more intensively developed parts of Footscray and Melbourne, industrial uses have given way to office and residential development.

There are a number of current proposals for new development or redevelopment within the river valley.

Nodes of activity

Several places of interest or nodes of activity are found along the Maribyrnong River. Most of these are small in scale such as cafes, pubs, retail outlets and recreation and visitor facilities, which draw people to the riverside. The main nodes of activity include:

- Brimbank Park Visitors Centre
- Poyntons Nursery
- Clubs and cafés in Maribyrnong Park and nearby Incinerator Arts Centre
- Anglers Tavern
- Clubs in Fairbairn Park
- Melbourne's Living Museum of the West in Pipemakers Park
- Café and boating facilities at Edgewater Estate (under construction)
- Footscray Boat Club and Function Centre
- Footscray Wharf and Arts Precinct.

Trail network

There is generally good trail access along the Maribyrnong River Valley but there are a number of gaps where new paths are needed to create a continuous trail on both sides of the river. There are five pedestrian river crossings but opportunities exist for new river crossings to create loop trails and improve public access. There is also a need to improve public access in Footscray on both sides of the river. However, vital Port of Melbourne operations prevent any significant increase in access to the river in the Port length.

See Appendix A for detailed maps showing the above features of the Maribyrnong River.

1.4 STUDY AREA

These Guidelines cover the entire urban section of the Maribyrnong River downstream of the Urban Growth Boundary. To help guide development, the river has been divided into seven river lengths, each with a basic character type. These are:

Brimbank length – a natural river

Steele Creek length – a secluded river

Maribyrnong length – a suburban river

Racecourse length – river flats

Footscray length – an urban river

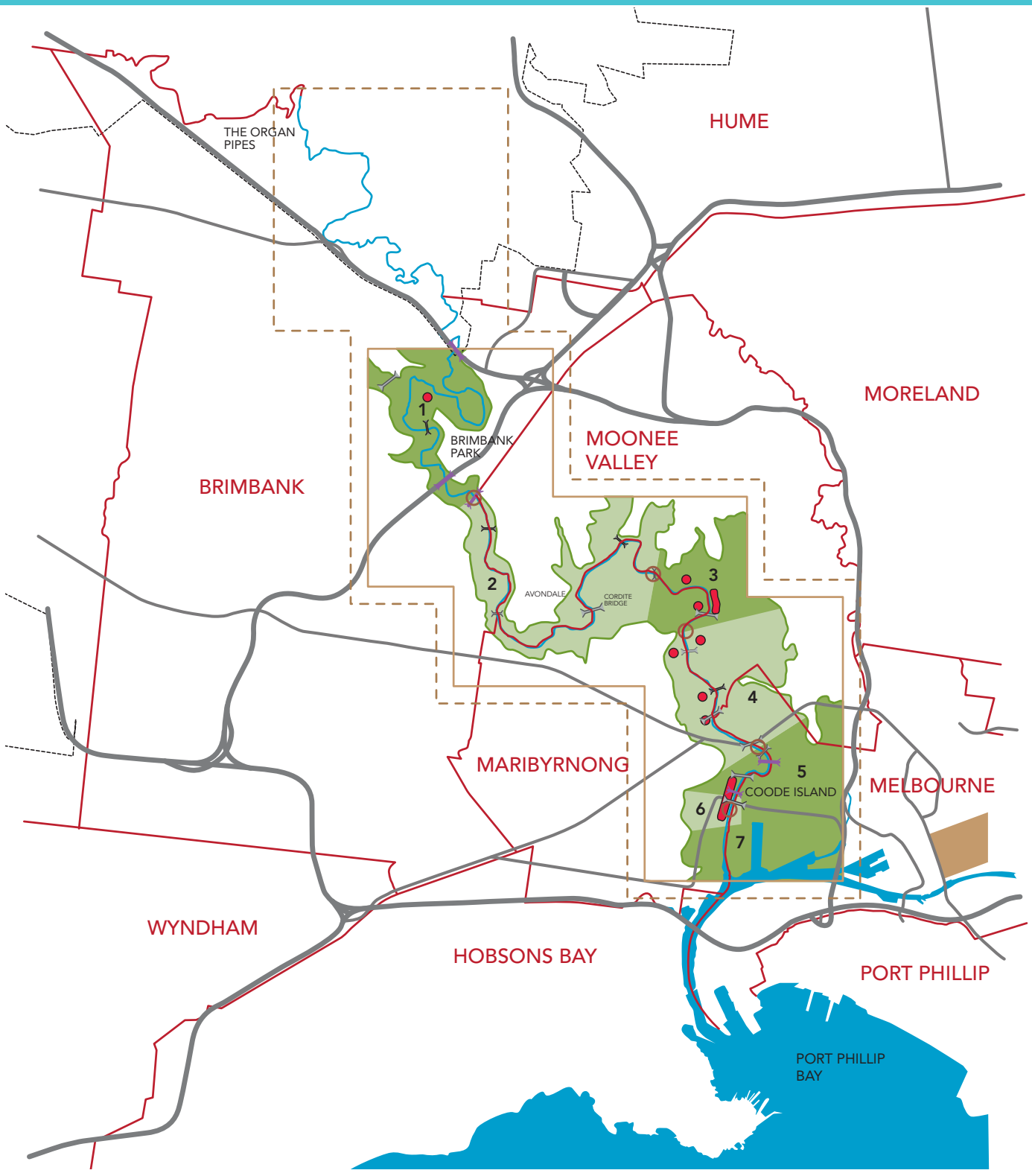
Footscray Wharf length – an urban river

Port length – a working river

These basic character types were developed following extensive community consultation. See Appendix B for more information about the consultation phase.

The basic character of each river length provides the context for a more coordinated approach to planning along the river. Preferred characteristics for each river length will be discussed in more detail in section 2.2.

Map 2: The study area



- Area covered by priority actions
- Area covered by design guidelines
- Local Government Area boundary
- Freeway/Major road
- Primary study area (the river valley) – design and development guidelines
- River lengths
- Existing nodes of activity
- Urban growth boundary

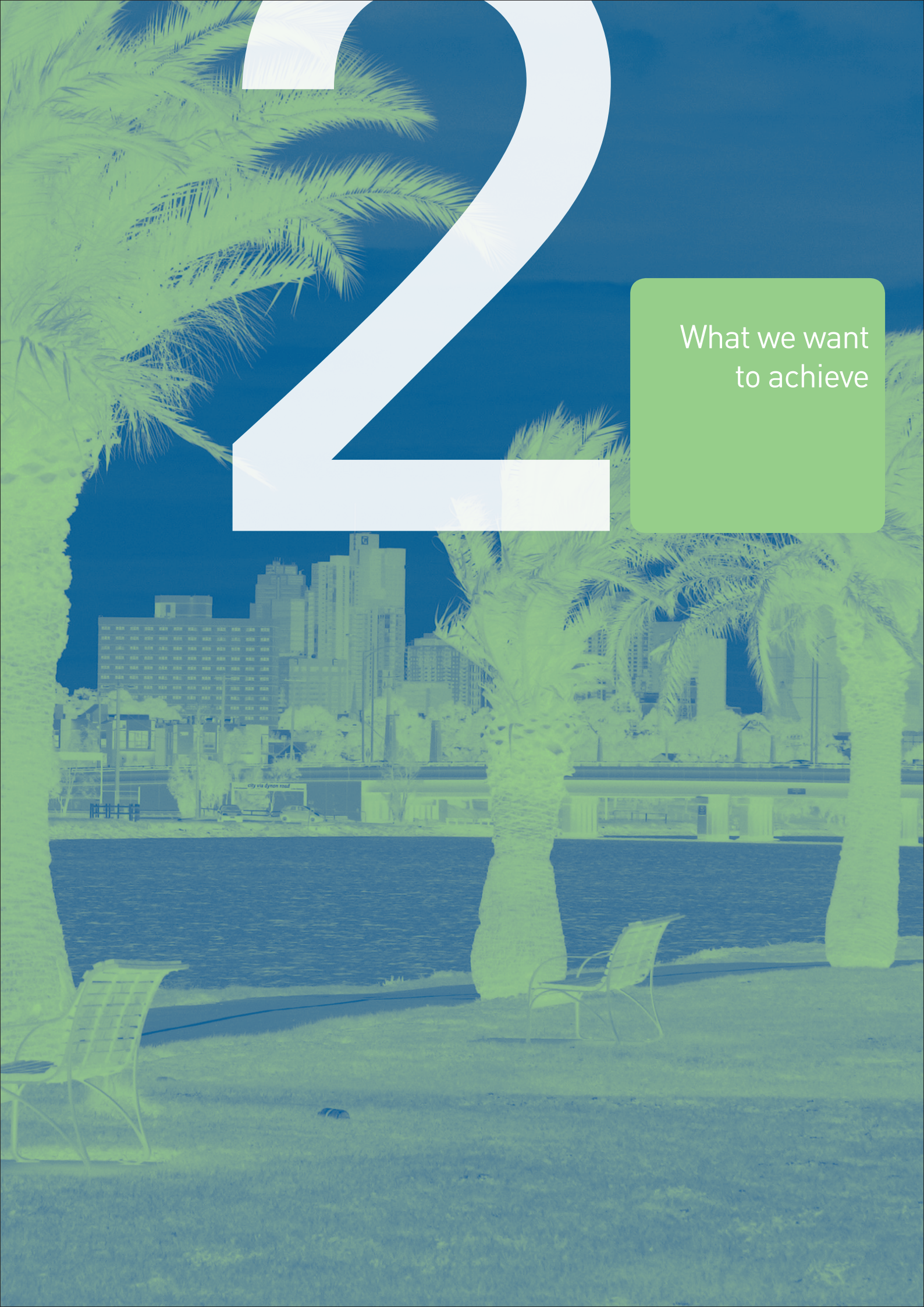
- River channel/ocean
- Melbourne Central Business District
- T1 Transition points between river lengths
- Bridge – freeway/rail
- Bridge – car/bike/walking existing
- Bridge – bike/walking existing
- New bike/walking trail/bridge opportunities

River valley lengths:

1	Brimbank
2	Steele Creek
3	Maribyrnong
4	Racecourse
5	Footscray
6	Footscray Wharf
7	Port

2

What we want to achieve



2.1 VISION

"A healthy river flowing through a continuous network of open spaces and cultural landscapes that reflect its journey from a natural river to a working river. A river that provides a range of recreation experiences that value local landform and landscape character, and preserve cultural heritage, including significant plantings. A river that supports indigenous vegetation and fauna."

This vision was informed by a review of past strategies and current government policy relating to the Maribyrnong River, an analysis of the river valley and extensive consultation (see Appendix B). It is supported by a set of broad objectives under the following themes:

River health
Improve aquatic habitat and water quality, reduce pollution, establish appropriate flows, maintain flood storage capacity and reduce the risk of contaminated sites.

Valley and river use
Continue to provide diverse recreational opportunities, protect significant areas, consolidate intensive recreational or tourism use in activity nodes, support sustainable water-based activities, and ensure the river can support future growth in Port of Melbourne activity downstream of Footscray Road.

Valley landscape
Protect indigenous vegetation and biodiversity, control weeds, protect and enhance the landscape character of the river valley, conserve plantings with heritage significance.

Valley development
Ensure river structures and new development is sympathetic to the river valley, protect and enhance the character of each river length.

River access
Optimise public access to the river for people of all abilities (where possible), provide continuous public open space along both sides of the river (where practical), create an integrated trail network with appropriate support facilities.

Valley heritage
Identify and maintain records of heritage assets, conserve sites with Aboriginal heritage value and sites of significant industrial and post-contact heritage value.

Valley governance
Improve existing cooperation between relevant planning agencies, involve the community in river valley management, ensure planning provisions reflect agreed policy, objectives and guidelines.

For more information about the principles and strategies that underpin these objectives see Appendix C.

2.2 PREFERRED RIVER CHARACTER

The Maribyrnong River Valley changes dramatically in character as it flows from the Organ Pipes National Park to its meeting with the Yarra River.

These Guidelines focus on what characteristics of the river should be reinforced or conserved, what aspects should be repaired, and what new characteristics should be created or enhanced. Determining the preferred character of the Maribyrnong River is based on community values and planning objectives.

To help manage its character, the river has been divided into seven river 'lengths'. These lengths provide a starting point for identifying the preferred character of the river and developing design guidelines around river health, landscape, development, access, use and heritage.

Brimbank length: a natural river

Existing condition

The river flows between complex rolling slopes and rural parkland. Bounded at the valley rim by urban settlement, the Calder Freeway to the north and the railway trestle bridge to the south, there is an absence of urban settlement in the river valley.

Preferred character

The naturalistic and remote character of this length of the river is its most valued characteristic. Extensive pest control and revegetation has restored much of the natural feel of this length of the river valley.

Brimbank Park is a major attraction in the area. The park caters for a vast array of users and plays an important role in the recreation opportunities for the people of Melbourne's west and north-west. There is a need to continue to strike a balance between recreation and conservation/revegetation outcomes. There is also a need to control urban intrusions in order to maintain the uninhabited and remote feel of this length.

Steele Creek length: a secluded river

Existing condition

The river flows through a generally steep and relatively straight valley, with a few narrow river flats. There are areas of significant vegetation along the river banks including river red gums and grasses. Significant residential development has been approved and is under construction.

The river flows around a large horseshoe bend at the confluence of Steele Creek, creating a natural amphitheatre with the Defence Site Maribyrnong at its centre.

Landscape values predominate. Building development is generally set back from the river to create a secluded landscape corridor. Buildings are mostly contained to the top of the escarpment.

Preferred character

There is potential to preserve the character of this part of the river by ensuring new development is landscaped to preserve its relatively 'natural' condition. There is also a need to limit urban development to maintain the uninhabited, remote feel of this length.

With the proposed redevelopment of the Defence Site Maribyrnong and development in and around the Highpoint Activity Centre, there are opportunities to enhance the urban river setting, including conservation measures, secluded riverbank settings and significant areas of public open space.

Maribyrnong length: a suburban river

Existing condition

There is a long history of recreation and leisure on this part of the river including competitive rowing, a popular pub, cafés, promenades, boulevards, picnic areas, children's playgrounds and sports fields.

Preferred character

All public open space is in the form of urban parkland with minor 'natural bush' areas. There are numerous sporting and tourist facilities. Riverside boulevards and formal shared paths along both banks have a promenade function in the areas with more pedestrian activity.

Racecourse length: river flats

Existing condition

Here the river opens out to a large, open floodplain, with sparse urban parkland, sports fields, a golf course and mixed urban settlement at the valley edges. In addition, it contains some major facilities including Flemington Racecourse and Victoria University. These valley escarpments include conventional suburban housing from a range of eras and more recent medium-high density housing.

Preferred character

A broad, open landscape with settlement generally some distance back from the river and discrete nodes of settlement on the river. Development is clearly visible but mostly appears at a distance and is screened by trees at the interface with public spaces.

Footscray length: an urban river

Existing condition

Melbourne's early industrial history is prominent. The old wharves of the working river are visible and there is a mix of land uses adjoining the river ranging from heavy industry on the eastern bank through to warehousing, medium density housing and the Footscray Community Arts Centre on the western bank.

There is an active river edge in some parts of this length, including an access road, goods rail line, wharves and jetties. There are numerous bridge crossings including a freight rail line and a pedestrian bridge over an historic stock crossing.

The working heritage of the river dominates here. The river is a place for activity and urban life. One of the most impressive features of this part of the river is a spectacular view of Swanson Dock in the Port of Melbourne – day and night.

Preferred character

There is potential for mixed use or commercial development in some sections. Industrial and commercial uses could include new advanced manufacturing and service industries, with opportunities for riverside recreational facilities such as cafés and other facilities.

Footscray Wharf length: an urban river

Existing condition

The history of this small area on the western bank of the river has been strongly tied to the Port of Melbourne, industry, rail transport, recreational boating and a working fishery. Recent development has focused on office and light industrial uses with construction of new buildings in the Riverside Industrial Park and reuse of existing heritage buildings. The area also plays a key role in providing access to trail networks.

Preferred character

Due its proximity to Coode Island and the Port of Melbourne, residential development is not supported in this area. Some level of public access to the river will be maintained and a high level of amenity for pedestrians and cyclists will be provided. The old wharf has the potential to be redeveloped as a commercial marina.

Port length: a working river

Existing condition

As the river nears the bay, container ports and commercial and industrial settlement cover most of the valley. Here is a full working river with its dedicated wharves, commercial shipping and goods rail line. Public access to the river is limited for operational and safety reasons.

Preferred character

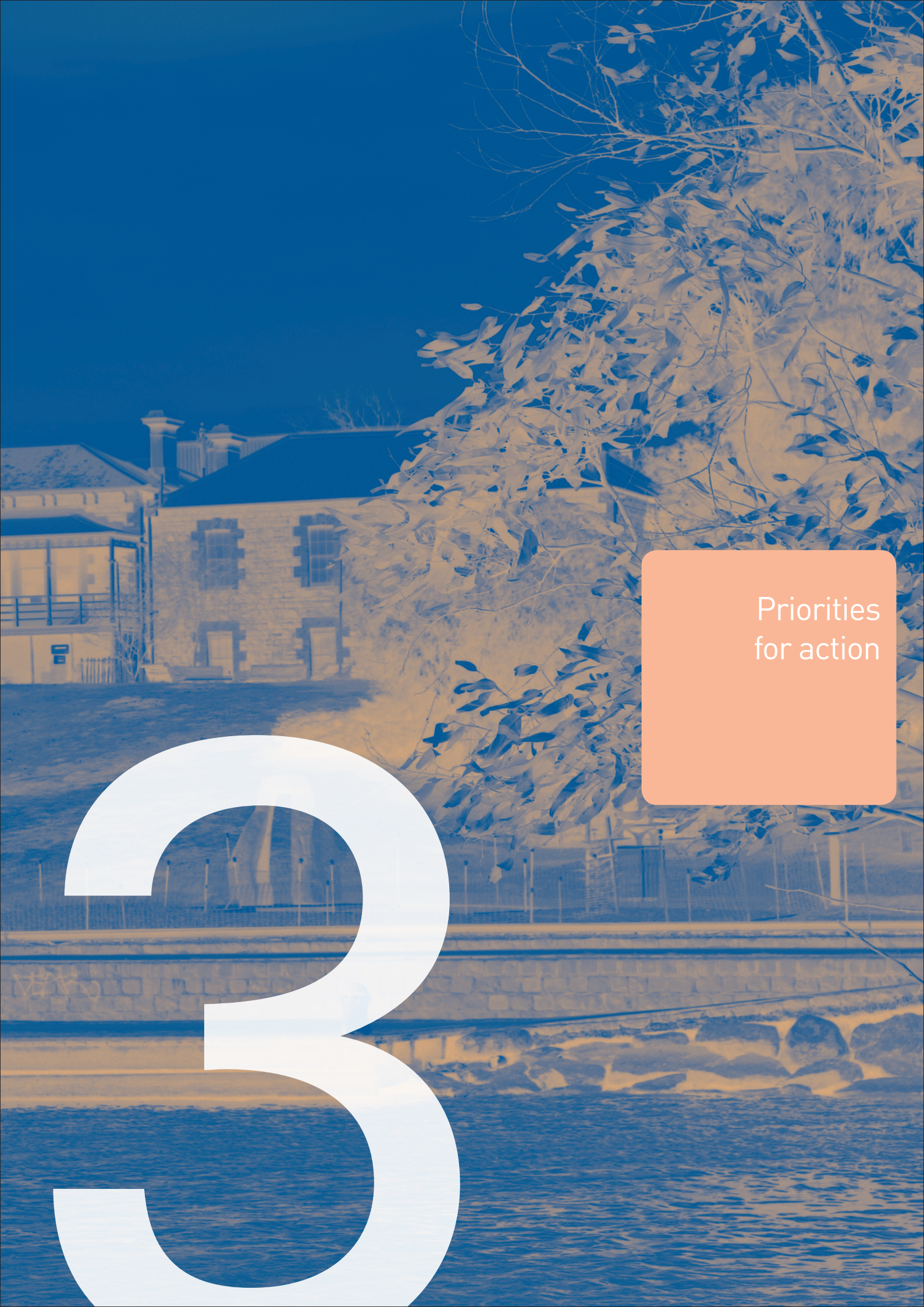
Shipping and heavy industrial activities define and dominate the river corridor. There is potential for further industrial and commercial development that could include new advanced manufacturing, maritime and service industries that have a strategic need to be near the Port of Melbourne.

Beyond the Urban Growth Boundary

Upstream of the Urban Growth Boundary to the Organ Pipes National Park, the Maribyrnong River is within the Hume and Brimbank Green Wedges. As the Hume and Brimbank Green Wedges are predominantly rural, this section of the river is not covered by the design guidelines component of this report. Land uses in this area include grazing of modified pastures, irrigated seasonal horticulture, quarrying and rural residential development.

Indigenous heritage sites have been identified in this stretch of the river, along with significant native plant species. Pest and weed management and soil erosion are some of the issues affecting this part of the river. This length of the river also abuts Melbourne Airport.

These issues, together with the broad vision and the priorities for action in this report, are being considered as part of the *Green Wedge Management Plans*, which are currently being prepared by Hume and Brimbank City Councils.



3

Priorities for action

Below is a set of actions for priority work along the Maribyrnong River to preserve and enhance its preferred character. These actions relate to the entire length of the river from the Organ Pipes National Park to the river mouth. They include capital works, planning scheme amendments, enlarging the open space corridor, further detailed planning, improved governance and community engagement.

Some of these actions are already underway. Others will commence over the next five years. Many reflect recommendations listed in a previous consultant report released in April 2006. Proposed timeframes for the commencement of these actions are as follows:

Immediate – underway or will commence within 12 months

Short term – will commence within 1-2 years

Long term – will commence within 2-5 years

3.1 ENLARGE THE OPEN SPACE CORRIDOR

A critical issue for the management of the river valley is how much land should be managed as public open space along the river.

Create linked parkland along the river

Creating linked parklands along the Maribyrnong River Valley is an important aim of *Melbourne 2030*. It is also a long-term aim of Parks Victoria's 2002 strategy, *Linking People and Spaces*.

Significant progress has been made in recent years to extend public open space along the river. For example:

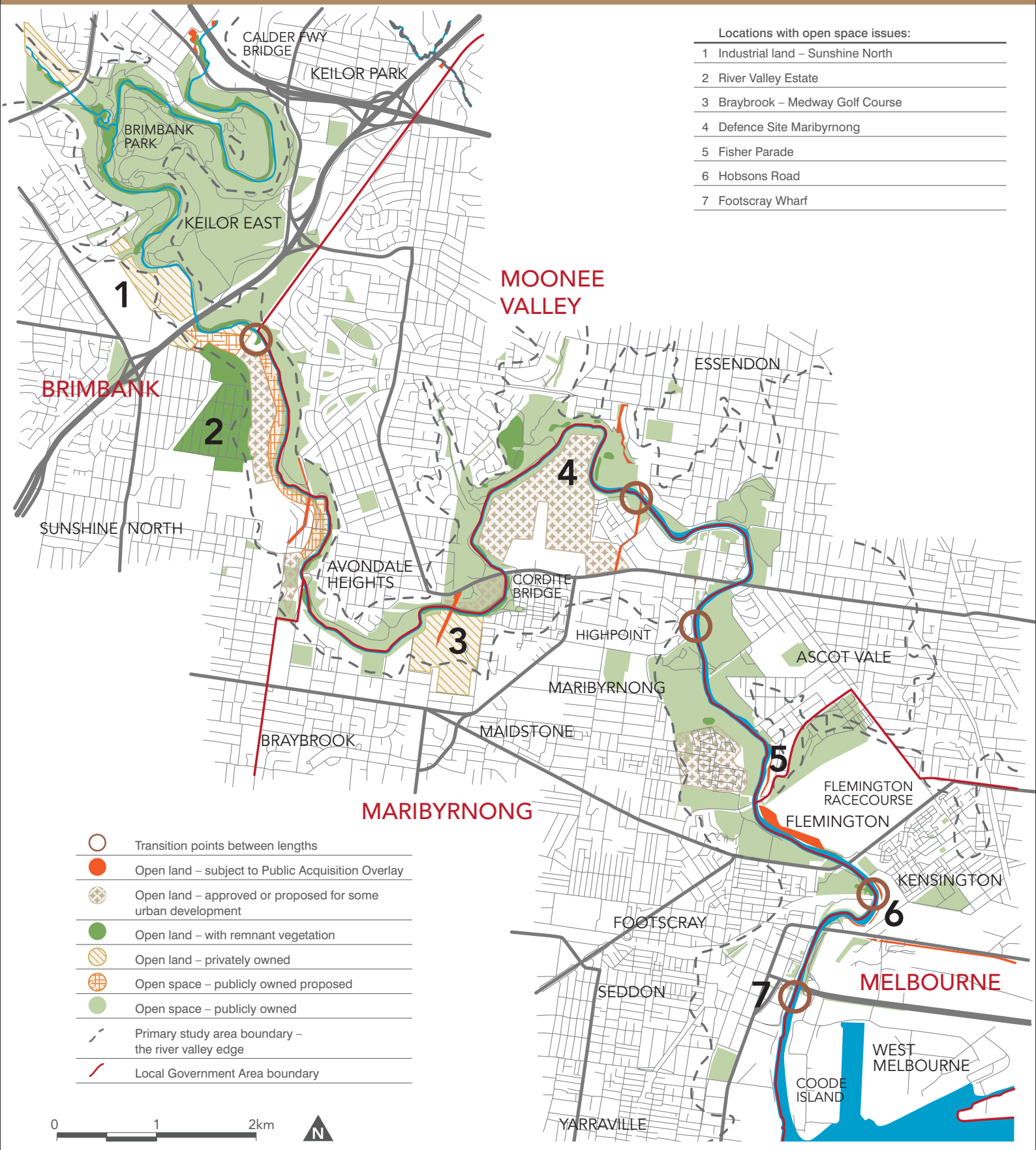
- redevelopment of the disused abattoir site in Kensington and Footscray in the 1990s created river parkland and wetlands
- development of Edgewater Estate on the old ammunition factory site in Footscray created a riverside park
- the River Valley Estate development in Sunshine includes a riverside park and footbridge
- the Afton Street Conservation Park is being developed as a wetlands and public park.

Further redevelopment of the Defence Site Maribyrnong over the next few years offers the prospect of even greater river access, nature conservation and continuous public open space.

To date, the creation of public open space along Maribyrnong River Valley has largely been a by-product of urban development on privately-owned land. While this strategy is generally appropriate for the preferred character of the lower lengths of the river it is affecting the 'natural' character of the upper lengths of the river with the conversion of open space to urban housing.

Although significant residential development is already underway in the upper lengths of the river, further development in the valley should be avoided and efforts should be made to directly acquire the remaining escarpment land for public open space. However, given the financial constraints faced by councils seeking to acquire riverside frontages, other sources of funding for land acquisition need to be investigated.

Map 3: Open spaces



Locations with open space issues:

1	Industrial land – Sunshine North
2	River Valley Estate
3	Braybrook – Medway Golf Course
4	Defence Site Maribyrnong
5	Fisher Parade
6	Hobsons Road
7	Footscray Wharf

Enhance public amenity at the Port of Melbourne and Footscray Wharf

A strategic planning process for the Port of Melbourne has been underway since 2002.

Released in August 2009, the *Port of Melbourne Port Development Strategy* provides clear direction on how the Port of Melbourne Corporation (PoMC) will address the rapidly changing requirements of managing Australia's largest container and general cargo port over the next 30 years.

Also released in August 2009, *Port Futures* identifies the critical need to facilitate port planning and protect ports from encroachment by surrounding sensitive uses as well as protecting neighbouring communities from the impacts of port operations. It proposes a range of initiatives to strengthen and streamline planning processes and protections.

Within the Footscray Wharf length, PoMC owns a narrow strip of river frontage land on the western side between Footscray Road and Youell Street. The future of the Footscray Wharf has been the subject of extensive discussions between PoMC and Maribyrnong City Council.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the parties was agreed in late 2006, covering Port of Melbourne and adjoining land between Napier and Francis Streets.

The MoU provides for public use of Footscray Wharf on the basis that PoMC has secured the Anne Street Pier in Williamstown for Port services. The intention is for redevelopment of Footscray Wharf to improve public amenity. A commercial marina is the preferred use subject to commercial viability, mooring capacity and public benefit. The shared trail along this stretch of the river will be retained near the wharf.

The MoU also provides for consideration of improved landscape treatment to enhance the appearance and function of Port of Melbourne and industrial areas to the south, retention of the freight rail line, upgrading of the riverfront at the end of Francis Street, and further investigation of a non-riverfront bike path route between Napier and Francis Streets.

Within the Port length of the river, which encompasses the Coode Island chemical storage facility and container terminal on the east bank and Yarraville wharves and industries such as CSR and Mobil on the west bank, public access is not possible.

South of Footscray Wharf, the preferred route for a shared path linking the Maribyrnong Trail and the Bay Trail has been defined and is under construction. Ideally, this link would follow the western bank of the river but as this is not possible due to Port of Melbourne operations, an alternative inland route has been identified with provision for landscaping and connections and views to the river.

There is also an opportunity to maximise views of Port of Melbourne activities, including spectacular night-time views of illuminated port and industrial activity.

Investigate an Upper Maribyrnong Linear Park

Creating an open space link between Brimbank Park and the Organ Pipes National Park is a long term priority in the Parks Victoria's 2002 strategy, *Linking People and Spaces*.

In 1991, Melbourne Water suggested a boundary for this proposed linear park in its *Upper Maribyrnong Concept Plan* but the recommendations, including areas recommended for public acquisition, were not acted on.

Due to the length of time since this study was done, it is necessary to review these recommendations carefully to see whether the suggested boundary is still appropriate and determine the objectives of a future open space link.

Undertake strategic planning in Sunshine North

There are sites of significant vegetation on the basalt plain adjacent to the Maribyrnong River Valley in Sunshine North. The valley slopes in these areas are steep and also contain remnant escarpment vegetation.

Riverside open space would normally be created by negotiating the transfer of land as an 'open space contribution' when it is developed. However this approach may not be sufficient to protect significant vegetation in this area and prevent further development on the escarpment.

Resolution of open space and native vegetation issues in Sunshine North is important to protect the valued characteristics of the river corridor in this area and its significant native vegetation. Detailed planning has been undertaken with the completion of the Brimbank Escarpment Study in March 2009 in areas of Sunshine North to address open space issues along the river between Orbital Drive and Balfour Avenue, including the remaining undeveloped section of the River Valley Estate.

Some public acquisition of land will be necessary to ensure the long term protection of areas of native vegetation and to maintain the remaining escarpment land free of urban development. Other mechanisms, such as licences and agreements, also need to be investigated and may form part of an overall solution.

While it is no longer feasible to acquire a wide public open space corridor in areas currently undergoing (or approved for) residential development, it is appropriate that buildings are set back as far as practicable to maintain the open landscape area alongside the waterway.

Complete detailed planning for the Defence Site Maribyrnong

Detailed planning for the Defence Site Maribyrnong will occur when the land is officially transferred from the Federal Government to VicUrban following extensive site remediation.

In April 2009 the Victorian Premier, John Brumby, announced a Federal-State partnership to build a new suburb on the site comprising more than 3,000 new homes. This development will open up three kilometres of river frontage to the public. Key open space issues that need to be considered as part of this development are:

- panoramic views over the river valley and linking areas of open space into one continuous valley landscape
- trail links from these high vantage points down into and across the valley and connecting these to riverside trails
- protecting and enhancing biodiversity
- making the terracing escarpment a significant landscape feature and using it as a natural boundary, defining a more secluded riverside landscape along the valley floor
- integrating the heritage of the site (buildings and landforms) into wider parkland accessible by walking and cycling from both sides of the river
- investigating the potential for a pedestrian/bicycle bridge to connect the trail system and parks on the opposite bank
- investigating the potential for riverside activity nodes such as rowing boat and canoe/kayak landing facilities
- resolving what to do with the levee bank at the flood-prone 'horseshoe bend' taking account of flooding, site remediation and redevelopment – whether to remove it or retain it as a landscape feature and screening element
- complete a major 3km gap in the linear trail along the Maribyrnong side of the river.

Part of the challenge of the Defence Site Maribyrnong redevelopment will be to optimise the recreation and conservation potential of this part of the river. VicUrban and Maribyrnong City Council have already identified the need for an Urban Design Framework to consider the balance between enhancing views to the river and retaining the secluded feeling of the area.

Investigate open space options between Canning Street rock ford and Waterford Green

Open space along the southern bank of the river between the Canning Street rock ford and Waterford Green in Maidstone (immediately south of Cordite Avenue) needs to be reviewed to ensure long term security of access.

This will become increasingly important as the Defence Site Maribyrnong is redeveloped and the river frontage is opened up north of Cordite Avenue. While the only gap in public access is the eastern frontage of the Medway Golf Club, some river frontage land in the vicinity of Burke Street (west of Cranwell Park) is in private ownership, which means long term public access is not guaranteed. Potential expansion of existing open space also needs to be considered in this location with a view to protecting the valley escarpment.

Increase public open space at Fisher Parade and Hobsons Road

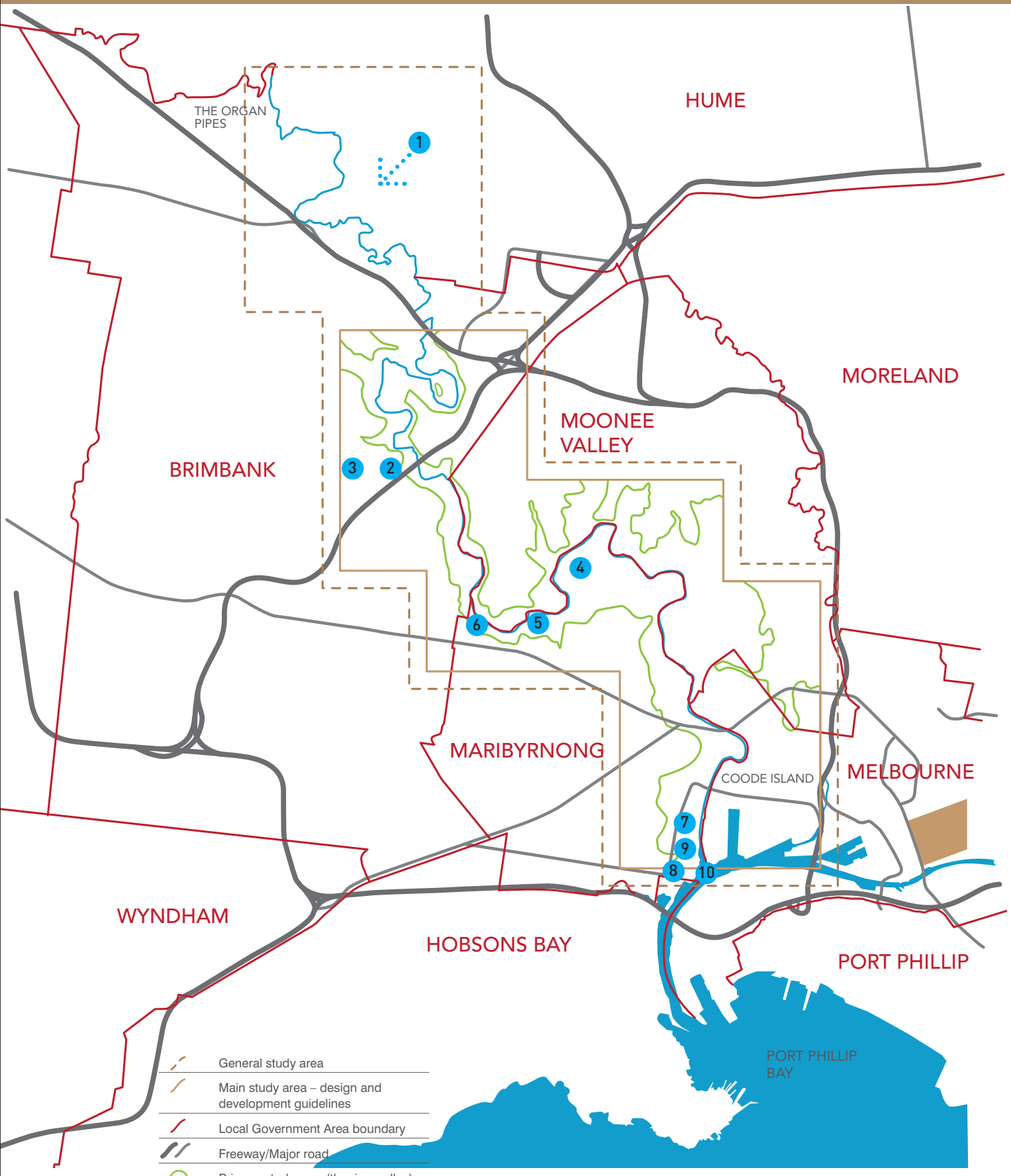
As properties are being redeveloped along Fisher Parade, a strip of private land adjacent to the river is being transferred to public ownership. This is being achieved through negotiations between Moonee Valley City Council and developers.

River frontage in the vicinity of Flemington Racecourse and Hobsons Road is now in public ownership and opportunities to enlarge the amount of public open space along this frontage should be sought.

Enlarge the open space corridor

Action		Responsibility	Priority
1.	Investigate the boundaries for the proposed Upper Maribyrnong River Linear Park as part of developing the *Green Wedge Management Plans*.	Hume and Brimbank City Councils, DSE, Parks Victoria	Immediate – Brimbank Short term – Hume
2.	Undertake detailed strategic planning in Sunshine North between Orbital Drive and Balfour Avenue, to establish preferred land uses and identify areas of open space and native vegetation to be protected.	Brimbank City Council, DPCD, DSE	Immediate (underway)
3.	Investigate mechanisms to protect remaining, undeveloped Brimbank escarpment land including seeking funds for acquisition for public open space.	DPCD, DSE, Brimbank City Council	Immediate
4.	Following disposal of the Defence Site Maribyrnong by the Federal Government, prepare an integrated landscape and development strategy for future development of the entire site. This strategy must ensure public open space is set aside along the entire length of the river corridor.	Maribyrnong City Council, DPCD	Immediately following disposal of site by the Federal Government
5.	Seek funding options for the acquisition, from the Medway Golf Club, of a narrow strip of land suitable for a shared path alongside the river, east of the footbridge.	DSE, DPCD, Maribyrnong City Council	Immediate
6.	Review open space provision and ownership between Cranwell Park and the rock ford with a view to enlarging public open space to protect the escarpment and transferring any private river frontage land to public ownership.	Maribyrnong City Council, DSE, DPCD	Short term
7.	Investigate the optimum non-riverfront route for a shared path south of Lyons Street linking the Maribyrnong Trail with the Bay Trail south of the West Gate Bridge.	Maribyrnong City Council, PoMC	Completed
8.	Upgrade landscaping and access where there is public access to the river at the eastern end of Francis Street.	PoMC, Maribyrnong City Council	Short term
9.	Investigate opportunities for landscape treatment of the riverfront and improvements to local amenity, transport and access between Lyons Street and Francis Street on the western side.	PoMC	Short term
10.	Seek opportunities to provide spectacular views of Port activities, consistent with safety and security requirements, on both sides of the river.	PoMC	Short term

Map 4: Open space actions



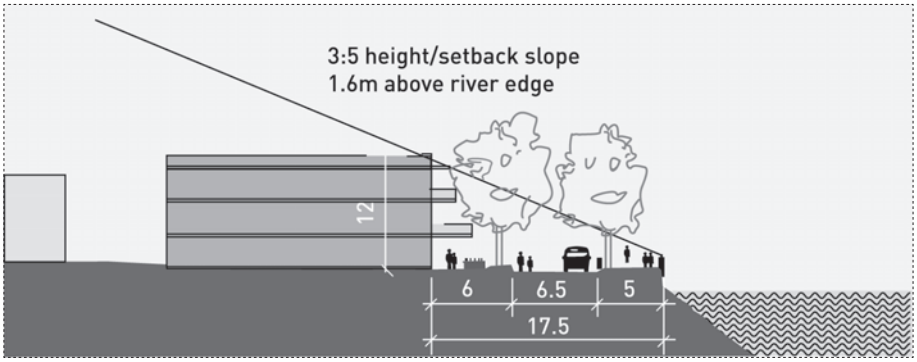


Figure 1: Riverside nodes of activity

3.2 IMPROVE SITE AND PRECINCT PLANNING

There are a number of critical locations along the Maribyrnong River where more detailed, integrated planning is required to improve access and amenity along the river. These include:

- locations where more intensive activity is appropriate (nodes of activity)
- transition points between the preferred character of each river length.

Parks Victoria's *Water and Land Access Plan* for the river south of Canning Street provides some guidance for more detailed planning.

Ensure development in nodes of activity complements the river environment

In areas where intensive nodes of activity are appropriate, these should complement the river environment and be close enough to the water to create a direct relationship with the river.

In these areas, a setback from the river bank of around 17.5 metres would create the close connection needed. Development up to 12 metres in height may be appropriate to allow for a range of uses.

However, the character of each node of activity should reflect the preferred character of that river length. For example, urban development adjoining Footscray Wharf may be up to 12 metres in height, reflecting the urbanised environment, whereas development in Brimbank Park should reflect its naturalistic setting, where public infrastructure is rustic and low-key, and private development is distant and largely screened from public parkland.

Create points of transition between river lengths

Moving up and down the river should be an engaging and enjoyable experience for visitors. Clear transitions between river lengths need to be designed to highlight the preferred character of each river length.

The aim should be to achieve an abrupt but artfully designed exit from one river length into another, rather than having long sections of gradual change where the character is unclear.

These transition points are shown on Map 5. Some of these transitions coincide with other possible nodes of activity and should be considered in the design and planning for these sites. Plans should be developed for each of these transition points to direct landscape development of public land and guide the landscape and urban development on adjoining private land.

Improve parkland along the river

Several new residential developments close to the river are underway. These developments need to consider their potential impacts on the valley and ensure outcomes that are consistent with the objectives and guidelines in this report.

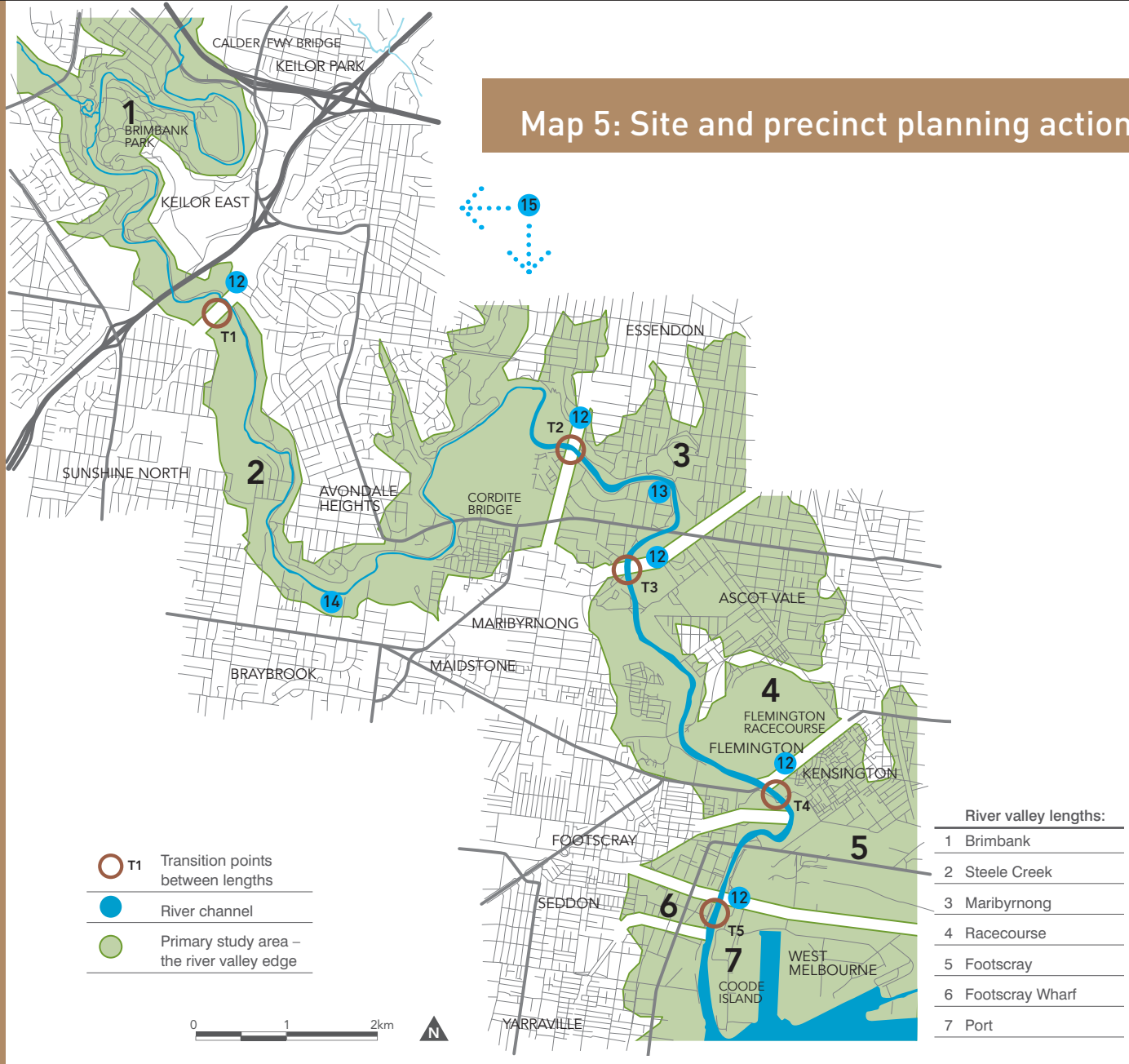
Current park plans in preparation or due to start soon include:

- Afton Street Park
- River Valley Estate frontage
- Keilor Park.

In addition, an area of public open space north of the Anglers Tavern along Chifley Drive is an important part of the open space corridor. It could benefit from a masterplan and landscaping works to consolidate open space areas and improve planting and facilities, with appropriate regard to flood risks.

Upstream of Waterford Green towards the rock ford, the river's edge is relatively inaccessible, under-developed and difficult to maintain. The entire open space corridor between Afton Street and Brimbank Park would benefit from a masterplan to guide future management, capital works and other improvements.

Map 5: Site and precinct planning actions



Improve site and precinct planning

Action		Responsibility	Priority
11.	Develop structure or masterplans for potential nodes of activity. Also implement approved plans such as The Footscray Riverside Masterplan.	Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moonee Valley and Brimbank City Councils, Parks Victoria	Short to long term
12.	As part of the master planning process for the valley, take into account transitions between different 'river lengths' and their preferred characters.	Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moonee Valley and Brimbank City Councils, Parks Victoria	As masterplans are developed
13.	Prepare a masterplan for the areas of undeveloped parkland near Chifley Drive.	Maribyrnong City Council, Melbourne Water	Long term
14.	Following completion of Action 6, prepare a masterplan for open space along the southern side of the river between Waterford Green and the rock ford.	Maribyrnong City Council	Long term
15.	Prepare a masterplan for the area of open space between Afton Street and Brimbank Park.	Maribyrnong, Moonee Valley and Brimbank City Councils, Parks Victoria	Long term

3.3 UNDERTAKE IMPORTANT CAPITAL WORKS

Improve trails and related infrastructure

A continuous trail along both sides of the Maribyrnong River Valley is highly desirable and feasible except in two key locations:

- *within the Port length* – although the Port of Melbourne Corporation, Maribyrnong City Council, Bicycle Victoria and VicRoads have agreed on an appropriate non-riverfront route between Lyons and Francis Streets in Yarraville and this is under construction.
- *along the Woods Street frontage in Ascot Vale* – a decision has been made to reaffirm Moonee Valley City Council's policy of upgrading trail connections along the street network rather than providing access via the river frontage.

During the 1990s an investigation was carried out about acquiring river front land and/or constructing a pontoon near Woods Street in Ascot Vale to provide continuous public access along this stretch of the river.

However, many residents were opposed to the proposal and engineering tests, also conducted in the 1990s, indicated a boardwalk near Woods Street would be impractical. No further investigation of a riverfront connection along Woods Street is proposed.

More pedestrian and cycling crossings in the upper lengths of the Maribyrnong River would also greatly improve recreational opportunities for river users.

Moonee Valley City Council is currently creating a new trail linking the chain of parks along the north-east escarpment of the Steele Creek river length. Brimbank City Council has negotiated with developers for a pedestrian/bicycle bridge as part of the River Valley Estate to link Avondale Heights and North Sunshine. Other new developments such as the Defence Site Maribyrnong could also provide trail links and new crossings, but some public capital works will be required to complete these links.

Completing a riverside trail beyond the Urban Growth Boundary to link Brimbank Park with the Organ Pipes National Park is identified as a long term priority in Parks Victoria's *Linking People and Spaces* strategy. However, significant land acquisition will be necessary to achieve this link.

New trails should also meet *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* standards and other relevant standards. In addition, consistent and adequate signage would help to raise awareness of the Maribyrnong River Valley and improve navigation for walkers and cyclists.

Undertake important capital works

Action		Responsibility	Priority
16.	Seek funds to complete the trail network along the river and extend into surrounding areas. Priority works include: > a non-riverfront link between the Maribyrnong trail and the Bay trail (See Action 7) > a connection between Afton Street bridge and a future trail through the Defence Site Maribyrnong as well as works to complete missing links along the western river bank in Braybrook > an improved connection along Woods Street to link Maribyrnong and Fairbairn parks.	Maribyrnong, Moonee Valley and Brimbank City Councils, PoMC, Parks Victoria	Short to long term
17.	Seek funds to develop a secondary trail network along the top edge of the valley open space where appropriate.	Maribyrnong, Moonee Valley and Brimbank City Councils, Parks Victoria	Long term
18.	Seek funds for improved pedestrian/bicycle crossings, including bridge approaches, in the following locations: > Shepherd bridge > Lynch's bridge > Maribyrnong/Raleigh Road bridge > Canning Street/Cordite Avenue bridge > review options and priorities for the two rail bridges in the lower Maribyrnong.	Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moonee Valley and Brimbank City Councils, Parks Victoria, DSE, DOT	Short to long term
19.	Seek funds for new footbridges in the following locations: > between Brimbank Park and Sunshine North > between Steele Creek and future open space within the Defence Site Maribyrnong > between Edgewater Lake (Burndap Park) and Fisher Parade.	Maribyrnong, Moonee Valley and Brimbank City Councils, Parks Victoria, DSE, DOT	Short to long term
20.	Develop trails to nearby attractions (e.g. Highpoint Shopping Centre and Victoria University) and links to residential areas and schools.	Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moonee Valley and Brimbank City Councils, Parks Victoria, DPCD	Short to long term
21.	Develop and implement a consistent signage plan for the entire valley, including route identification, nearby destinations, facilities along the valley, public transport and interpretation of the valley's history and assets.	Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moonee Valley and Brimbank City Councils, Parks Victoria, DSE, PoMC	Short term
22.	Develop priorities for upgrading ancillary facilities including seats, shade, lighting, fountains, toilets and bicycle parking.	Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moonee Valley and Brimbank City Councils, Parks Victoria	Long term
23.	Seek funds for river-based infrastructure based on the Water and Land Access Plan when finalised. High priority works include: > reinstating the Flemington Racecourse landing > a new pontoon for the Footscray Boat Club > a canoe/kayak landing at Pipemakers Park > a floating landing at the Tea Gardens > a floating landing at Poyntons Nursery > improving access for disabled people.	Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moonee Valley and Brimbank City Councils, Parks Victoria, DSE	Short term

Map 6: Capital works actions

3.4 IMPROVE OVERALL GOVERNANCE

This report sets out an overall vision for the Maribyrnong River, which identifies how development can be managed to reinforce the preferred character of the river valley.

Significant, ongoing commitment by all parties is needed to achieve this vision, particularly in relation to recommendations for the acquisition of land to connect linear trails, and to protect landscape values by excluding or limiting development in some sections of the river.

At present there is no coordinated, whole-of-Government governance structure for the Maribyrnong River corridor although the Victorian Government's 2004 White Paper, *Our Water, Our Future* appointed Melbourne Water as the caretaker of river health for the entire Port Phillip and Western Port region.

However, in practice, coordination of planning and management of public and private land alongside rivers and creeks relies largely on local councils. Appendix G summarises the key roles and responsibilities of the various government agencies with an interest in the Maribyrnong River.

All five local councils and relevant Victorian Government agencies (DPCD and Parks Victoria) have committed to the establishment of a Maribyrnong River Valley Coordinating Committee for a two year trial period to take responsibility for implementation of the actions in this report.

The purpose of this committee will be to provide a forum for local councils and relevant Victorian Government agencies to work together on strategic planning for the river valley, ensure consistent and effective planning controls, seek funding from a range of sources, oversee consistent public land management and design elements, maximise community engagement and promote the river valley to the wider community.

The broad objectives of the committee will be:

- to improve existing cooperation to achieve effective and efficient management
- to involve the community in river valley management
- to inspire and facilitate action to improve the valley and river
- to ensure planning provisions reflect agreed policy, objectives and guidelines.

Improve overall governance

Action		Responsibility	Priority
24.	Establish a Maribyrnong River Valley Coordinating Committee as a two-year trial involving the five councils, DPCD, and Parks Victoria. This committee will commence implementation of key priorities, including coordinating the introduction of planning scheme amendments where needed. The effectiveness of the committee will be reviewed within two years.	All councils, DPCD, Parks Victoria	Immediate

3.5 REFINE PLANNING CONTROLS

The Maribyrnong River Valley is governed by a range of planning controls, summarised below:

Skyline controls

Design and Development Overlays apply to skyline areas in:

- Maribyrnong DDO1 – skyline areas
- Moonee Valley DDO1 – skyline areas
- Brimbank DDO1 – skyline areas.

The design objectives for each of these overlays are similar but not identical. The design objectives of the Maribyrnong and Brimbank DDOs are to:

- protect areas along the Maribyrnong River from visual intrusion caused by inappropriate siting or appearance of buildings and works
- encourage development in keeping with the character and appearance of the area
- protect and enhance the skyline when viewed from the river and its banks
- encourage development consistent with the objectives of the *Lower Maribyrnong River Concept Plan 1986*
- protect and enhance remnant vegetation and sites of biological significance.

A permit is generally not required for buildings or works less than six metres in height in a residential zone.

The Moonee Valley Planning Scheme contains the Maribyrnong River Corridor Policy (Clause 22.11) to provide greater clarity over appropriate development where permits are required under the overlay.

Lower Maribyrnong River Concept Plan

Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley Planning Schemes apply an Incorporated Plan Overlay to a 30 metre strip of land next to the river. The overlay introduces a range of considerations for permits and in particular, consideration of the *Lower Maribyrnong River Concept Plan 1986*.

Maribyrnong Planning Scheme has a policy (Clause 22.10) that applies to all park areas within the Maribyrnong Regional Parklands (defined as the area between Maribyrnong Road and Ballarat Road) and serves a similar function.

Vegetation protection

Moonee Valley Planning Scheme has two Environmental Significance Overlays to protect specific areas of vegetation:

- ESO3: Upper Maribyrnong River – riparian strip with river red gums and silver wattle
- ESO4: Maribyrnong River Escarpment – area of significant indigenous vegetation.

Management of development

Additional controls and policies apply in some areas to manage specific issues:

- Brimbank Development Plan Overlay (Schedule 3) applies to the River Valley Estate (RVE). Lots within the River Valley Estate are also subject to covenants requiring compliance with RVE Design Guidelines.
- Maribyrnong Footscray Riverside Precinct Policy (Clause 22.04-2) sets out objectives and policy for the Footscray Wharf area. The policy provides guidance on the type and range of uses that are encouraged.

Floodplain management

A Land Subject to Inundation Overlay has been applied in all planning schemes to identify the extent of the 1 in 100 year floodplain. Further analysis needs to be undertaken to better identify high hazard areas which have the greatest risk and frequency of being affected by flooding.

Melbourne Water is the floodplain management authority for the Melbourne metropolitan region, and is the nominated referral authority for planning permit applications made under the provisions of the Land Subject to Inundation Overlay. All developments referred to Melbourne Water are assessed to ensure that new development does not increase the risk to public safety, or increase the risk of damage to property resulting from a flood.

Heritage controls

There are a range of significant heritage sites along the river and many (but not all) are covered by a Heritage Overlay in planning schemes. A number of reviews of heritage assets have been completed by Victorian Government, agencies and councils. These studies should be reviewed in an integrated way along the valley, with gaps identified particularly north of Afton Street, and planning schemes updated, where needed.

The need to specify clear outcomes

A review of the existing planning controls for the Maribyrnong River revealed they were often complex, inconsistent and out of date.

The issue was not the lack of controls along the river but rather the way they were structured and the associated lack of clarity in terms of guidance about what development was acceptable.

Recent planning decisions along Melbourne's waterways have highlighted the need for clear, specific provisions to guide development decisions, especially in areas where residential or commercial development (and associated loss of vegetation) could potentially have a major impact on the more secluded parks and natural areas of open space. For this reason, specific design guidelines have been developed (section 4 of this report).

Development pressures along the Maribyrnong are expected to increase as the valley becomes a desirable place for people to live. Areas that require particular attention in terms of guidance are locations where large-scale redevelopment is anticipated or already underway – the Defence Site Maribyrnong, the remaining stages of River Valley Estate plus areas further north undergoing land use change in the City of Brimbank.

Deciding on appropriate planning tools

Giving effect to the priority actions and design guidelines recommended in the *Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines* will require specifically drafted overlay provisions in local planning schemes.

There are a number of possible overlays that could be used, however in the case of these Guidelines, the Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO) provides the necessary permit triggers, while other possible overlays do not. The ESO has the ability to provide control over buildings, earthworks, removal of vegetation, landscaping (or works) and subdivision.

In addition, Guidelines included in an ESO would not be mandatory, allowing local circumstances to be taken into account in planning decisions. The purposes of ESOs in the Victoria Planning Provisions are:

- to implement the State Planning Policy Framework and the Local Planning Policy Framework, including the Municipal Strategic Statement and local planning policies
- to identify areas where the development of land may be affected by environmental constraints
- to ensure development is compatible with identified environmental values.

ESOs would be applied by drafting a schedule to the overlay for each municipality along the Maribyrnong River. The schedule must contain a) a statement of environmental significance and b) the environmental objectives to be achieved.

The design guidelines outlined in section 4 of this report form the basis of the schedule to the overlays and the environmental objectives of each. The statement of environmental significance will need to address:

- vegetation protection and landscape
- recreation
- landform, site layout and building interface
- building visibility and design
- infrastructure design.

Determining the land area to be covered

The first priority for application of these new ESOs is where there are existing overlay controls (e.g. DDOs) in the planning scheme. These are areas that have been identified as requiring control but where the existing controls provide insufficient guidance.

The design guidelines outlined in section 4 form the basis of all ESOs but locations will be specified clearly on ESO planning scheme maps. Ultimately ESOs should be applied to:

- areas of biological significance – this includes sites of national, state, regional and local significance as well as sites required for habitat links
- sites of faunal and habitat significance
- the river itself and abutting private and public land
- land adjacent to public land along the river
- areas where development could impact on the landscape quality of the river.

As a result implementing these changes, existing overlays (Skyline DDOs and IPOs) and other local policies would be removed from the planning scheme. However, the Port length of the river is unlikely to be subject to new ESOs.

In the short term, ESOs may not be appropriate in areas where comprehensive master planning has recently taken place or is about to occur such as the River Valley Estate or the Defence Site Maribyrnong. In these areas, detailed guidelines associated with approved structure plans consistent with this report would be incorporated as part of the planning scheme during the development phase. Following completion of residential development, special overlays such as DPOs would be lifted and replaced with ESOs, as the most appropriate tool to manage subsequent small-scale redevelopment.

On public land, the desired outcomes are achieved through works carried out by relevant government authorities rather than through planning scheme provisions. However, the *Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines* may be used to help guide park master and management planning.

Analysing if planning scheme / policy changes are needed

Flood protection controls

The entire 1 in 100 year floodplain of the Maribyrnong River study area is covered by a Land Subject to Inundation Overlay (LSIO) with the exception of the Defence Site Maribyrnong.

Some areas of the Maribyrnong Township which were previously reserved for Public Open Space, were included within an Urban Floodway Zone when the new format Maribyrnong Planning Scheme was prepared in the 1990s. Refer to Appendix A (map 12) to see the Land Subject to Inundation Overlay in the planning scheme.

Given the depth of flooding over much of the floodplain, it may be appropriate to replace parts of the LSIO with a Floodway Overlay (FO). The purpose of an FO is to identify high hazard areas with the greatest risk and frequency of flooding.

Further work may need to be undertaken to identify high hazard areas along the Maribyrnong River on the basis of flooding depth, frequency and velocity.

Changes to Municipal Strategic Statements

As part of introducing new overlay controls for the Maribyrnong River there is a need to revise the Municipal Strategic Statements of relevant local councils to:

- identify land at a subregional level for stormwater treatment, wetlands and retarding basins
- undertake cooperative planning and works with other councils to improve open space along waterway corridors by establishing contiguous open space along both sides of the municipal boundary
- discourage noisy, potentially smelly or visually detrimental uses and developments from locating close to the river
- make provision for a shared path in areas where a path does not currently exist or along the upper edge of the valley
- provide a safe shared path with a variety of entry points at regular intervals along one side of the waterway for its complete length except along the Port length.

Permit conditions

A number of issues covered in the design guidelines in section 4 are best dealt with by planning permit conditions.
Appendix D identifies possible conditions.

Public acquisition of land

Any commitments to acquire land for public open space would need to be reflected in Public Acquisition Overlays (PAOs).

Green wedge planning

The *Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines* should be considered in developing the *Green Wedge Management Plans* and in the review of the Parks Victoria regional open space strategy, *Linking People and Spaces*.

Refine planning controls

Action		Responsibility	Priority
25.	Review and document heritage assets along the river valley, including Indigenous and post-European settlement, prior to considering the need for planning scheme amendments.	Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Brimbank, Moonee Valley City Councils, Parks Victoria, Heritage Victoria, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria	Long term
26.	Prepare coordinated planning scheme amendments according to listed priorities.	Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Brimbank, Moonee Valley City Councils, Melbourne Water, DPCD	Immediate

Summary of planning scheme amendment priorities

Priority 1:

- Rationalise and revise ESOs and DDOs, using ESOs as the overlay to incorporate the design guidelines outlined in section 4 of this report. Areas already covered, or about to be covered, by development plans incorporated into planning schemes will be excluded.
- Revise council Municipal Strategic Statements to incorporate the agreed vision and design guidelines outlined in section 4 of this report, and delete any redundant local policies.
- Review and introduce PAOs to reflect any commitments to land acquisition for open space.
- Define appropriate exemptions for public land managers in any overlay controls.
- Remove redundant controls such as IPOs relating to the *Lower Maribyrnong River Concept Plan 1986.*
- Include the *Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines* as a reference document in all planning schemes.

Priority 2:

- Consider the need for additional overlay controls (e.g. ESO, SLO) in areas further back from the river.
- Introduce Heritage Overlays (HOs) where needed.
- Consider introduction of Floodway Overlays (FOs) in high hazard areas along the Maribyrnong River on the basis of flood depth, frequency and velocity.
- Introduce ESOs in areas now undergoing large scale redevelopment, at the same time as introducing 'final' zones when development is complete.
- Implement any planning scheme changes in the green wedge, according to approved Green Wedge Management Plans.

3.6 ENHANCE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A number of previous studies relating to the Maribyrnong River Valley have recommended coordinated action to raise its profile, including promoting its attractions, upgrading public infrastructure, encouraging investment in tourism and retail development, facilitating major events and interpreting the valley's history (both Indigenous and industrial).

Some of these studies include: the *Maribyrnong River Investment and Marketing Strategy, 2002*; the *Western Melbourne Region Tourism Strategy, 2002*; the *Maribyrnong River Tourism Strategy, 2000*; the *Moonee Valley Tourism Strategy, 2003* and the *Maribyrnong River Vision for Recreational and Tourism Development, 1996*. In the past activities to raise the river's profile have been left to individual local councils or Parks Victoria to address, resulting in outcomes specific to individual municipalities or attractions, rather than the valley as a whole.

The establishment of a Maribyrnong River Valley Coordinating Committee provides a mechanism for raising the profile of the valley as a whole. The Maribyrnong River Valley Coordinating Committee could give priority to the following activities:

- compiling relevant information for a Maribyrnong River Valley website
- production of a regular newsletter and mailing list
- development of a signage plan
- development of a trail map
- development of a calendar of events
- development of an interpretive program including signage and brochures
- raising the profile of the valley to encourage private investment consistent with the *Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines*
- prioritising capital works and seeking funding through all available sources.

A Maribyrnong River Valley website would provide a guide to the river valley, including:

- summary of current policies and relevant reports for the entire river valley
- links to more detailed information on Victorian Government and council websites
- summary of roles and responsibilities of government agencies
- access to relevant data and information, such as a list of indigenous plant species and information on river depths
- contact points for friends and other community groups
- calendar of events
- maps of trails
- newsletters and media releases.

Enhance community engagement

Action		Responsibility	Priority
27.	Develop a whole-of-government Maribyrnong River Valley website.	Maribyrnong River Valley Coordinating Committee	Immediate
28.	Develop a Maribyrnong Valley Heritage Strategy, based on the information collected as part of Action 25. The strategy should detail opportunities to interpret the history of the river valley and recommend priority works for the conservation and protection of heritage assets.	Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Brimbank, Moonee Valley City Councils, Parks Victoria, Heritage Victoria, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria	Long term

4

Design guidelines

4. DESIGN GUIDELINES

Coordinated planning is essential to protect and enhance the Maribyrnong River Valley's natural and built environment for current and future generations.

The *Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines* are intended as an overarching framework for achieving planning consistency along the river's entire urban length. They apply to the river from the Urban Growth Boundary to where it meets the Yarra River near the West Gate Bridge. They do not cover the Hume and Brimbank Green Wedges, which are predominantly rural in character. The main purpose of the Guidelines is to protect open space and guide development along the river, as well as expand and link existing parkland, walking paths and cycling trails.

The Guidelines will improve clarity and certainty for planners and developers and benefit the wider community who enjoy the Maribyrnong River for leisure and recreation, and want developments in keeping with the riverside.

The Guidelines will also reinforce the preferred character of the seven river lengths discussed in section 2 of this report.

4.1 ADDITIONAL OPEN SPACE

In a number of areas along the Maribyrnong River, new public open space will be created as part of development or redevelopment projects where the developer contributes open space as part of the development approval process. There is a need to set out objectives and specific design guidelines for these situations.

These design guidelines should apply to all new subdivisions, although there is limited potential for further open space provisions associated with subdivision in lower reaches of the river. In some places, the existing pattern of development will mean the guidelines cannot be achieved. Land is required for a riparian vegetation corridor, for a shared trail (including allowance for maintenance access) and for an effective buffer and landscape screening.

Design guideline 1

Provide a publicly-managed vegetation corridor along the river, upstream of the Port.

Subdivision and development should provide for a vegetated corridor along both sides of the waterway. Land identified in Table 1 should be provided as public open space.

Table 1: Vegetation corridor to be achieved

Length	Land to be provided as open space	Vegetation corridor outcome to be achieved
Brimbank	Greater of: land subject to flooding plus 22 metres, or 52 metres from the top of the bank of the waterway	Provision of a riparian vegetation corridor, shared trail and landscape buffer to development
	Land on valley slopes	Protection of uninhabited feel, and development of recreation opportunities
	12 metres from the top of any escarpment	Provision of vegetation screening of development
	Sites of botanical or zoological significance	Protection of significant flora and fauna
Steele Creek	52 metres from the top of the bank of the waterway	Provision of a riparian vegetation corridor, shared trail and landscape buffer to development
	12 metres from the top of any escarpment (except where development has already been approved)	Provision of vegetation screening of development
	Sites of botanical or zoological significance	Protection of significant flora and fauna

Note 1: The nominated land widths are based on 30 metres for riparian vegetation corridor (SPPF clause 15), 12 metres for effective buffer/screening and landscaping (based on testing of screening effects along the Merri Creek corridor) and 10 metres for trail corridor (includes allowance for maintenance access and meeting Austroads guidelines).

Note 2: The riparian vegetation corridor can include land subject to flooding.

Design guideline 2

To provide public access and trails along the river valley where identified.

Continuous public open space, including public access, should be provided along both sides of the Maribyrnong River Valley, through building setback requirements associated with subdivision and development, and/or land acquisition, except within the Port of Melbourne and in the vicinity of Woods Street, Ascot Vale.

Land identified in Table 2 should be provided as public open space, including for public access. In some parts of the Footscray length, part of the minimum recommended width for open space may remain in private ownership with buildings set back to help achieve the minimum requirement. Where buildings are set back, fencing and screening should be permeable in line with guideline 14.

The siting of trails should take into account habitat conservation objectives, avoiding sensitive riparian areas and significant grasslands. Some trails, particularly in the upper reaches, should be low-key paths for pedestrians only (refer to guideline 6).

Table 2: Access to be achieved

Length	Land to be provided as public open space and for public access	Access outcome to be achieved
Brimbank – Steele Creek	Greater of: land subject to flooding plus 22 metres, or 52 metres from the top of the bank of the waterway	Riverside trail in conjunction with floodplain, a riparian vegetation corridor and landscape buffer to development
	Where upper level trail is proposed, 15 metres from the top of any escarpment	Provision of a shared escarpment pathway and screening and setback of development The nominated land width of 15 metres allows for shared trail, planting, vehicle and pedestrian access to the development fronting the escarpment
Maribyrnong		Retain continuous public access to the river except in vicinity of Woods Street
Racecourse	The land required to maintain the floodway	Protection of the floodplain of the waterway
	Land covered by a Public Acquisition Overlay at Fisher Parade	Continuous public access to the river
Footscray	15-30 metres setback from the top of the bank of the waterway, unless specified otherwise in a plan*	Provision of public access along the river's edge to accommodate the range and intensity of urban activity The nominated land width of 15-30 metres allows for a landscape and streetscape treatment that can accommodate a range of access requirements for river frontage activities including boating, as well as access to the abutting property frontages where needed

*A plan can either be a strategic plan, landscape plan, masterplan, urban design framework, or guidelines included in the planning scheme.

4.2 OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT – LANDSCAPE

Existing open spaces in the Maribyrnong River Valley can be characterised as:

Bushland–grassland	areas of significant size managed and maintained to reflect natural conditions primarily for nature conservation rather than intensive recreation
Conservation parkland	parkland of indigenous or native plants with a landscape character suited to informal recreation
Sporting reserves	areas developed for formal sports with associated facilities
Urban parkland	formally designed parkland that may include a mix of exotic species
Promenades	urban public spaces set aside as a sociable walkway; would normally include appropriate shade planting; may or may not be paved
Undeveloped	areas with no parkland design objective, usually mown grass
Derelict land	former grazing or quarrying areas – some with areas of significant vegetation – that have remnants of their former uses but are now simple open areas with no regular management or maintenance.

Not all of these open space types reinforce the preferred character of the individual river lengths. Table 3 identifies opportunities and threats in terms of preferred character.

Table 3: Opportunities and threats – parkland type

Character type	Length	Conserve or create	Avoid
Natural river	Brimbank	Bushland–grassland, conservation parkland	Sporting reserves, urban parkland, promenades, Undeveloped, derelict land
Secluded river	Steele Creek	Bushland–grassland, conservation parkland, sporting reserves	Undeveloped, derelict land
Suburban river	Maribyrnong	Sporting reserves, urban parkland, promenades as part of activity nodes	Undeveloped, derelict land
River flats	Racecourse	Conservation parkland, sporting reserves, urban parkland	Bushland–grassland, promenades (except in defined activity nodes), undeveloped, derelict land
Urban river	Footscray & Footscray Wharf	Promenades or shared pathways	Bushland–grassland, sporting reserves, urban parkland, undeveloped, derelict land
Working river	Port	None	Derelict Land

Broad objectives related to managing open space landscapes are to:

- protect and improve indigenous vegetation and biodiversity
- control and remove weeds along the valley corridor
- protect and enhance the visual integrity of the river valley's landscape character
- conserve plantings with heritage significance
- protect and re-establish naturalistic land forms where practical.

Maintaining views into and along the Maribyrnong River Valley is also an important aspect of reinforcing the preferred character of the different river lengths.

To maintain a sense of remoteness in the upper lengths, views will often need to be screened and truncated. In contrast, on the lower lengths, the long views across the floodplain are a distinctive feature and these should be preserved and reinforced. Table 4 identifies opportunities and threats in terms of preferred character.

Table 4: Opportunities and threats – views

Character type	Conserve or create	Avoid
Natural	Views and vistas of bushland and open grassland	Views to urban areas
Secluded	Views and vistas of bushland and open grassland and intimate riverside views	Views to urban areas
Suburban	Views to important landmarks in the surrounding urban landscape	
River flats	Long views	Obstructing views across valley
Urban	Views to river infrastructure and cranes	
Working	Views to port activities	

Design guideline 3

Protect the long term survival and viability of remnant native vegetation and enhance the natural biodiversity of the waterway corridor.

Areas of remnant vegetation should be protected and conserved. Remnant local native vegetation should be protected and should not be disturbed.

Design guideline 4

Ensure vegetation species mix reinforces the preferred character of the river length.

Landscape works should not:

- include environmental weed species
- increase flood levels by impeding flood flows.

Landscape works along the river corridor should:

- use local native plants
- maintain non-indigenous vegetation of cultural heritage value
- reflect local native plant communities appropriate to the location and site conditions
- provide shade protection for trail users
- provide shade and in-stream food sources for native fauna
- provide habitat for local fauna.

Table 5: Vegetation outcomes to be achieved

Length	Guideline	Outcome to be achieved
Brimbank Steele Creek	The river and its tributaries should be revegetated with local native plant species matched to the plant communities characteristic of the site and the original landscape character Land within 30 metres of the banks of the waterway should be revegetated and maintained as a riparian corridor	Protection of environmental values and landscape character of the waterway corridor
Maribyrnong Racecourse	Planting should use local native plants where possible Plantings of heritage significance should be conserved	To improve the amenity of open spaces for users in relation to weather protection and appearance
Footscray Footscray Wharf	Planting that is proven in highly trafficked or paved settings should be used Plantings of heritage significance should be conserved	To improve the amenity of open spaces for users in relation to weather protection and appearance

Design guideline 5

Ensure planting creates views that reinforce the preferred character.

Landscape works should not obscure or hide clear visual corridors that coincide with public access ways to and from the hinterland to the river.

Landscape works should visually reinforce clear access ways to and from the river.

Planting should manage views as set out in Table 6.

Table 6: Views to be achieved

Length	Guideline	Outcome to be achieved
Brimbank	Planting should restrict views from public open spaces of signs of human habitation	Maintenance of naturalistic and secluded sense of river
Steele Creek	Planting should moderate views from public open spaces of signs of human habitation Planting should allow for long distance views from lookout points, paths and roads along the top of the escarpments	Maintenance of naturalistic and secluded sense of the river Preservation of views across valley
Maribyrnong	Planting should allow for visual links to nearby activity centres	Improved connection between activity centres and the river
Racecourse	Planting should maintain long distance views across floodplain	Maintenance of open scale of floodplain
Footscray	Planting should reinforce vistas of important buildings and infrastructure and visually reinforce access points to and from the river	High urban amenity and attractiveness and safe and legible movement network both within, to and from the river frontage