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

Map key
- River length
- Primary study area
- River channel
- Transition points between river lengths
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.
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.

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.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Key stakeholders

- 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.