

**Preparation of a Yarra Park Master Plan –  
Submission to Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs, and Minister  
for Environment and Climate Change**

## **1. Preparation of a Master Plan for Yarra Park**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Yarra Park is Crown land, which was permanently reserved as a Public Park in 1873 and has been managed by the City of Melbourne since that time.

The park has a rich sporting, recreational and cultural history although drought, climate change and ongoing intensive uses have recently highlighted the need for rejuvenation works. There is also a need to establish how to develop the park into a more resilient space for public use while determining its optimum capacity.

To achieve these outcomes, a Master Plan is required for Yarra Park to provide a clear vision for the future development and management of the park and to provide guidance and direction for immediate works.

This document has been prepared as a submission to the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change to inform the development of the Master Plan.

### **1.2 Preparation of the plan**

This submission includes background information about landscape character, uses and activities in the park as well as access, amenity and safety. It also includes a proposed vision and principles to guide the future development and management of the park.

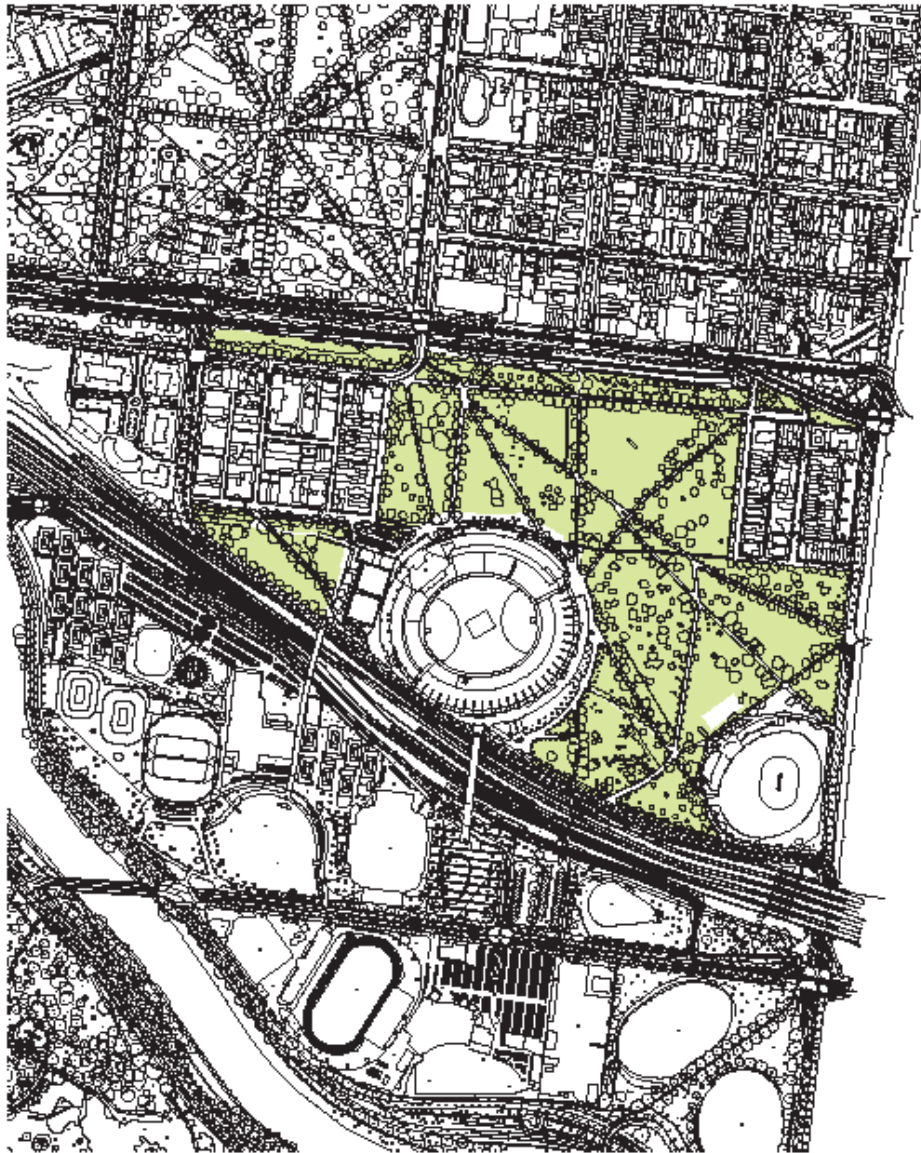
The City of Melbourne believes it is vital to examine the park as a whole to balance all of its uses and activities. The park also needs to be examined in the context of the precinct as a whole, especially in relation to pedestrian and cycling activity.

This submission includes an analysis of the implications of climate change and continued car parking in Yarra Park, and presents a range of proposals to reduce these impacts. It also contains a summary of key issues gathered from initial consultation with community groups.

The City of Melbourne has established a sound and fair process for preparing park Master Plans, involving a high level of community participation. We are hopeful a similar process is used when developing the next Master Plan for Yarra Park as the benefits of engaging with the community are significant.

### **1.3 Yarra Park**

Yarra Park is currently 28.6 hectares in size. Lieutenant-Governor of the Port Phillip District, Charles La Trobe's, original vision was for parkland from the city to Hoddle Street. The original reservation for Yarra Park was significantly larger than its current size. This history is well documented in the *Yarra Park Conservation Analysis*, (Patrick J and Raworth B, 2001).



**YARRA PARK 2008 CONTEXT PLAN**



#### **1.4 Master Plan Vision**

Yarra Park is a much loved place where a diverse range of recreation activity is enjoyed in a magnificent setting of significant tree avenues and open, spacious lawns. It is a beautiful entrance and landscape surrounding a major sporting venue, the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

#### **1.5 Principles for the Master Plan**

The City of Melbourne's Parks Policy (1997) states the following, which forms the principles for a Master Plan:

"The City of Melbourne will ensure that:

1. Melbourne's parkland areas are maintained with no net reduction in area and new opportunities for parkland are explored and developed where appropriate.
2. A lead advocacy role is taken in park management.
3. Parks and gardens are managed to excellent standards.
4. The planning of the parks and gardens acknowledges Melbourne City Council's capital city role, taking into account the national significance of the City of Melbourne's parks and the needs of local users.
5. The broad community is consulted regarding matters of significance to parks and gardens.
6. Adequate resources are provided for an ongoing asset replacement program.
7. The overall park network is developed to provide excellent facilities for residents, city workers and visitors including the provision of recreation and leisure opportunities.
8. Facilities and services are provided to enhance visitors' experience of the park.
9. No permanent advertising is displayed in parks and gardens.
10. Park management practice is environmentally sensitive.
11. Parks are accessible to all groups in the community.
12. Car parking on parkland is reduced as alternatives become available."<sup>1</sup>

To reflect emerging issues, a range of additional principles for the Yarra Park Master Plan may include:

- Address and plan for the impacts of climate change on the park, particularly securing water sources for ongoing horticultural health.
- Maximise opportunities for tree avenue renewal.
- Enhance the capacity of the park to cater for a wide range of recreation activities, in addition to its other uses.

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<sup>1</sup> Parks Policy, City of Melbourne, 1997

- Manage use to encourage participation and reduce conflict, while enhancing the quality of the landscape character and park amenity.
- Ensure all heritage values are integrated in the park planning and management.

## 1.6 Benefits of parks

Vegetation and open space in cities have major social, environmental and economic values. These values are summarised below.

### ***Social benefits***

Recent public health research demonstrates that plants and nearby vegetation can have profound positive effects on individuals, groups and entire neighbourhoods.

A 2002 Parks Victoria study found the benefits of being around plants included: better healing outcomes among the elderly and mentally disadvantaged; improved mental capacity and productivity of office workers; improved job and life satisfaction of residents; and enhanced community cohesion and identity. Nearby parks were also important for attracting consumers and tourists to shopping districts.<sup>2</sup>

According to the study, the relationship between social capital and open space was still being explored. The study concluded it was likely that human interaction with nature through parks and gardens had significant, long-term social benefits.

As well as providing passive enjoyment through activities such as walking, picnicking and sitting down to read a book, parks offer a diverse range of active recreational and sporting pursuits for individuals and groups that directly contribute to their health and wellbeing. Parks and gardens are also used as the backdrop for many events, festivals and city celebrations that bring diverse groups and people together.

Melbourne's parks and gardens are much loved community assets, and are free and accessible to all. Those residing, working and visiting the City of Melbourne often have a strong, intergenerational connection with its parks and gardens. Visitor experiences are often influenced by the environment, and if parks and gardens are degraded by a lack of water or other factors, the experience is likely to be less satisfying.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Environmental benefits***

Parks are increasingly recognised as vital to the urban environment. They act as permeable 'sinks' for groundwater recharge and stormwater flows and important habitat for native fauna in cities.

Trees in open space and streets provide a shady refuge and contribute to an overall reduction in temperature levels in a city, which in turn reduces the energy demand for air conditioning. The value of parks and gardens in combating the urban 'heat island effect' is considerable and underestimated. Trees also sequester a significant amount of carbon, with studies showing that a typical mature tree can store as much as 10 tonnes of carbon.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Maller, C, Townsend, M, Brown, P & St Leger, L (2002), *Healthy Parks Healthy People: The health benefits of contact with nature in a park context*, Report to Parks Victoria and the International Park Strategic Partners Group, Deakin University and Parks Victoria.

<sup>3</sup> Water Management Plan (2009 – 2013) Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces, City of Melbourne, October 2009

<sup>4</sup> Water Management Plan (2009 – 2013) Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces, City of Melbourne, October 2009

### ***Economic benefits***

Melbourne's quality open spaces contribute to the city's liveability and overall attractiveness. They are desirable venues for many activities, which are a key feature of the city's economic prosperity.<sup>5</sup> Melbourne's stunning parks and gardens are one of the key reasons why the city is successful in securing major international sporting and cultural events. Parks are also an important part of the city's attractiveness to international tourists and business visitors.

## **2. Key issues and future directions**

All proposals for future works in Yarra Park should be developed to achieve the overall vision of enhancing the landscape character of Yarra Park, managing a wide variety of uses, and improving opportunity for quality recreation experiences.

As part of this vision achievable strategies must be put in place to remove car parking from Yarra Park.

### **2.1. Landscape character**

Yarra Park's landscape character is primarily defined by a series of long, straight pathways bordered by avenues of trees. These pathways frame open, spacious lawns.

Many of the pathways follow mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century pedestrian routes that were in place before the formal development of the park. Over time, the pathways have become more complex to accommodate access to sports venues and the Jolimont and Richmond railway stations.<sup>6</sup>

There are three scarred trees in Yarra Park. These scarred trees are of local historical and cultural significance because of their connection to Aboriginal people before the arrival of European settlers.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Tree planning and management***

#### ***Existing Trees***

Yarra Park is dominated by avenues of deciduous trees (Elm Trees mostly), with eucalyptus, figs and conifers in the adjacent areas. The range of species is typical of City of Melbourne parks planted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, except for the relatively strong visual impact of eucalypts and conifers and the inclusion of a few species such as *Eucalyptus microcorys* (Tallow-wood) that are not found in the other parks. See *Attachment A and B*.

Most of the trees in Yarra Park are in fair to poor condition. Apart from recent planting since 2004 (*see Attachment C*), a large proportion of the stock is mature to ageing. The form of almost all of the Elms has been ruined by pollarding.<sup>8</sup> There are gaps in many of the tree avenues, and several others are declining.

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<sup>5</sup> Water Management Plan (2009 – 2013) Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces, City of Melbourne, October 2009

<sup>6</sup> Yarra Park Conservation Analysis, 2001

<sup>7</sup> Yarra Park Conservation Analysis, 2001

<sup>8</sup> This was an old horticultural practice that is no longer used or recommended.

A major constraint on tree planting and a problem for tree health is car parking during events at the MCG and other nearby venues. Intensive car parking over long periods causes irreparable damage to tree health as well as other open space areas. The damaging effects are mainly due to the direct physical impact on tree trunks (from collisions) and the indirect effect of soil compaction, which leads to increased soil density and increased soil restraining pressure that resists root penetration and growth.

Soil compaction also leads to a reduction of oxygen in the soil, which creates an environment that is toxic to tree growth. In combination, these effects are leading to a more rapid demise of trees in Yarra Park and have already led to the decline and stress of the majority of the park's trees.

#### *Tree planning objectives*

- A proactive planting and replacement program ensures the tree population is sustainable in the long term.
- Select tree species that minimise water requirements. Species that demand high levels of resources should be avoided.
- Ensure established Pest and Disease surveys are ongoing (e.g. Possum Browsing, possum counts, Elm Leaf Beetle, Dutch Elm Disease, Fruit Tree Borer, Elm Bark Beetle).
- Control tree pests and diseases (e.g. Elm Leaf Beetle , Possums)
- Ensure the highest standard of work is undertaken by open space and tree contractors.
- Mulch root zone area under selected trees as required for optimum tree health.
- Increase biodiversity in the park by expanding the number of tree species.
- Retain the long straight avenues of trees that frame the open space.
- Provide groups of trees to break up large expanses of grass and create more intimate settings.
- Communicate and interpret changes in tree stock to the public.

#### ***Proposals relating to the tree planning for Yarra Park are:***

- ***MCG Boundary*** - Retain and Reinforce large coniferous plantings (*Araucaria sp.*, *Agathis sp.* *Pinus sp.*) surrounding the boundary of MCG.
- ***Specimen Tree planting areas*** - Retain and reinforce the existing tree species in these areas such as areas that have large native woodland plantings with *Eucalyptus sp.*, *Corymbia sp.*, and *Ficus sp.*; and areas that have *Pinus sp.*, and *Araucaria sp.*
- ***Corner Planting*** - Plant trees in corners near avenues to reduce visual impact of the transition phase when tree replacement is required.
- ***Northern boundary*** - Develop the northern boundary to improve the aesthetics and screening with native species.  
(see Attachment D)

**Other proposals relating to the landscape character of Yarra Park are:**

- *To assist with maintenance of the park, it is recommended that the underground services be mapped.*
- *To prepare a detailed design for the area adjacent to lawn 16, incorporating the William Barak and tennis centre bridges. The area and landscape can be improved to provide an entrance to the park and the MCG, and facilitate improved pedestrian circulation.*
- *To improve the interface with the railway line on the northern boundary of the park, and liaise with Victrack regarding maintenance on the land they manage.*
- *To design a new entrance to the park on the site of the former police station.*
- *To prepare a landscape plan for all the entrances to the park, to improve their presentation, functionality and welcome.*
- *To protect the existing landscape character of the park by avoiding new structures or expansion of existing structures such as:*
  - *Memorials or monuments*
  - *Expansion of built structures beyond their current footprint,*
  - *Any new above ground utility structures associated with electricity, gas or telecommunications.*

## **2.2 Parking at Yarra Park and its impacts**

### ***History of parking at Yarra Park***

Parking within Yarra Park for sporting events at the MCG has occurred for many years, probably starting in an informal way in the 1930s. The *Yarra Park Conservation Analysis* notes there was debate at the time over which organisation was entitled to money received from allowing motor vehicles entering the park.

The *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* is the legislation primarily governing the use of the park. It states that unless otherwise approved by the responsible Minister, the park may only be used for parking associated with the function of the reserve as a public park. Parking for non-park related use is only allowed if approved by the Minister. A parking agreement is therefore required to allow parking for attendance at the MCG and other venues in the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Precinct, as none of these stadiums are in Yarra Park.

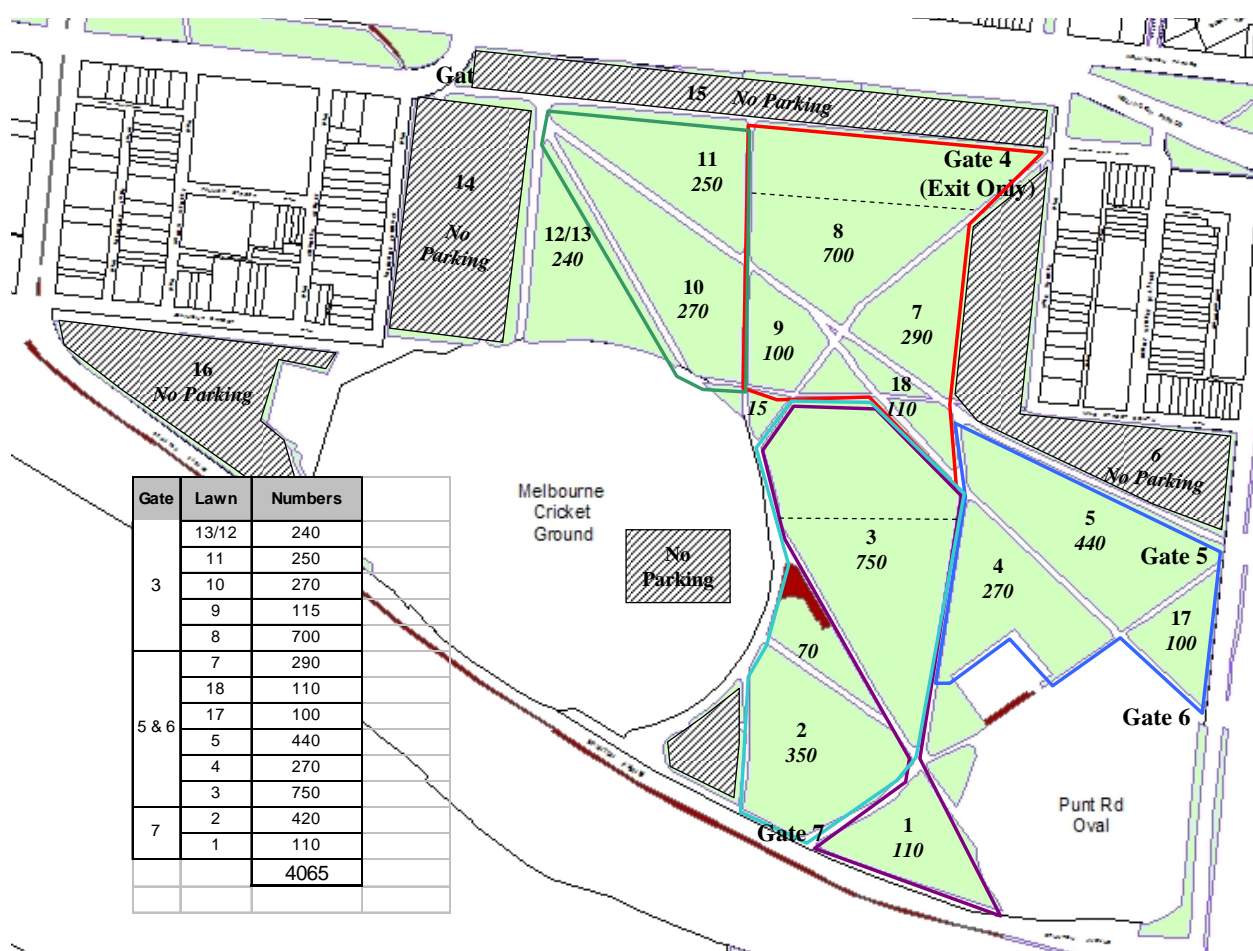
The first formal agreement between the City of Melbourne and the Minister for the use of the park for parking was established in 1990. At this time, up to 6,700 cars were allowed in the park on a match day, and 7,600 for a Grand Final.

In the late 1990s, a report was commissioned that identified parking was having an adverse impact on the health of the trees in Yarra Park. At the time Council sought, through subsequent agreements, to reduce car parking in the park. The 2000 agreement negotiated for a maximum of 6,200 cars, and when Federation Square car park was opened (with 500 car spaces), this number was further reduced to 5,700 cars.

The current Yarra Park Parking Agreement was approved by the Minister in 2005 and was due to expire this year. The agreement allows the parking of vehicles in Yarra Park for a “Major Event”, which is defined as an event or events in the precinct involving the MCG (using the arena and one or more stand) and / or the Melbourne and Olympic Park Precinct (when the expected attendance at these events exceeds 10,000 people).

At present a maximum number of 4,065 cars are allowed for major events at the MCG. The maximum number of vehicles allowed for attendance at a Melbourne Olympic Park Precinct event is 750, with the exception of the Australian Open.

In June 2007, Melbourne City Council sought approval from the Minister to amend the regulations to increase the parking fee from \$6 to \$8 per vehicle. The areas currently used for parking can be seen on the following plan.





***Who is parking at Yarra Park?***

Car parking at Yarra Park started with people driving to the MCG to watch a game of football or cricket, perhaps in the same way we would today for a game in our local neighbourhood.

However, recent data shows Yarra Park is now being used to support the car parking needs of the whole Melbourne and Olympic Parks Precinct, not just for access to the MCG. This practice has clearly evolved but perhaps it is time to take a step back and review the long-term viability of continuing this practice.

Yarra Park is now effectively used more as a car park than a public park. This is happening at a time when the inner city population is growing and there is an increasing demand for parkland.

Further, as the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Precinct has developed, it has not provided more car parking. The new rectangular stadium is being built over a former major public car park. The recently released Master Plan for the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Precinct area shows it to be more reliant on parking in Yarra Park.

However, it now also clear that only a small proportion of people attending major sporting events in the precinct are actually parking at Yarra Park. For example, the MCG has a capacity of 100,000 people while only 4,065 cars in total can be parked in Yarra Park. If each car has an average of 2.3 passengers (source 2006 study Maunsell<sup>9</sup>), only about 9% of MCG visitors are parking at Yarra Park. With a maximum of 750 cars allowed for attendance at other stadiums, the viability of any of the event venues is highly unlikely to be dependent on parking at Yarra Park.

In addition, as this form of parking is provided at a cheap rate, it may even be encouraging some people to drive who would otherwise use public transport.

***The extent of parking at Yarra Park***

The following table shows actual vehicle numbers and days open for parking at Yarra Park over the past 12 months:

<b>Month</b>	<b>Openings</b>	<b>Total vehicles parked</b>	<b>Total of vehicles with passes (corporate )</b>
Jan 09	30	61987	20248
Feb 09	17	8415	1459
Mar 09	18	21721	5095
April 09	11	28365	2008
May 09	21	32145	1845
June 09	17	26073	1616
July 09	23	37876	2356
Aug 09	29	49274	2955
Sept 09	11	24465	2114
Oct 09	10	4089	42
Nov 09	19	3918	38
Dec 09	22	19281	599

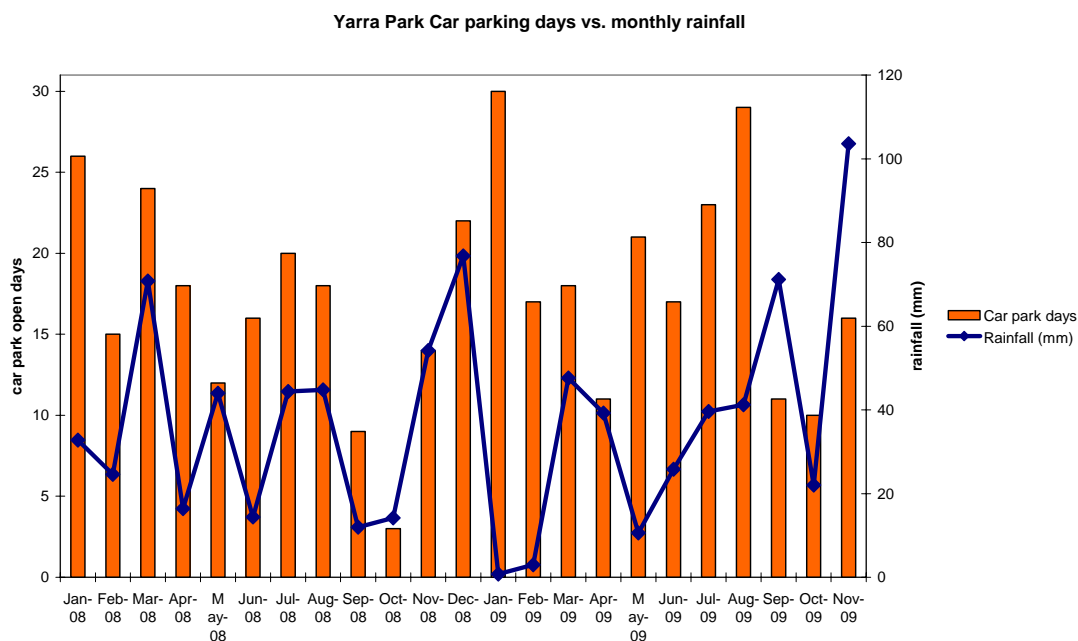
<sup>9</sup> Yarra Park – Investigation of Alternative Parking Options, Maunsell, 2006

In addition to information on the vehicle numbers and days open, this table shows the high number of vehicles with passes. Rather than demonstrating a need for parking, this information suggests there is an exclusive use of the park for privileged patrons, which does not benefit the park and could be questioned.

Depending on the time of year, Yarra Park is opened for parking an average of 3 to 4 times per week. The volume of cars varies according to the nature of the event. There is no information available on the anticipated parking needs of the new Melbourne Rectangular Stadium but it is likely to increase car parking use at Yarra Park.

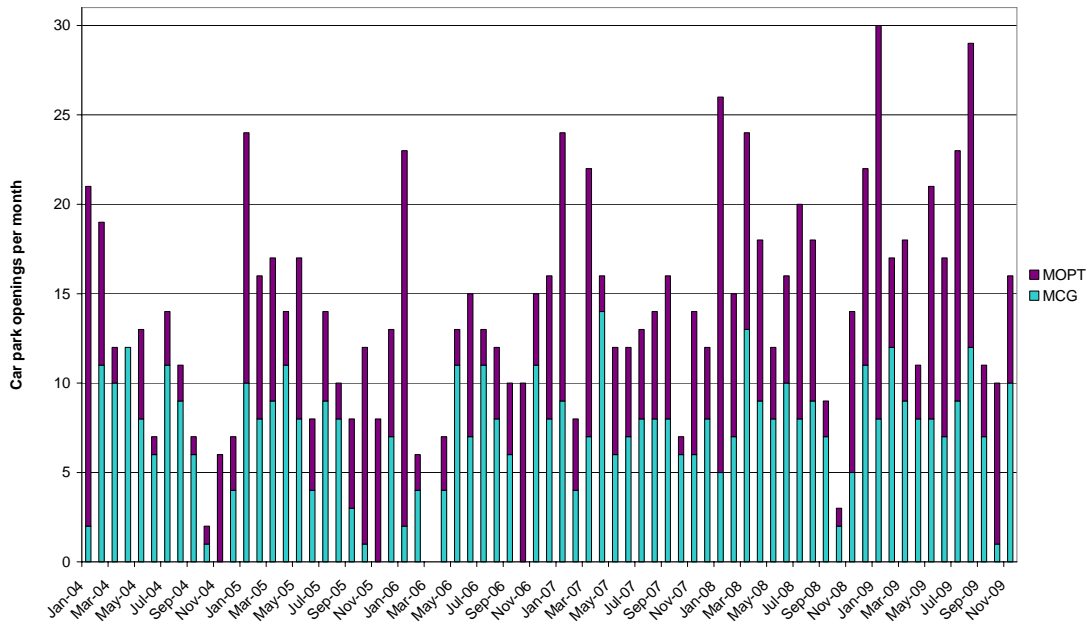
It is clear the heaviest sustained use of the park for car parking is for the Australian Open. In January 2009, 44,526 cars parked in Yarra Park over an 11-day period, which was more than double the number of cars parked in the park during the month of September 2009. Of the 44,526 vehicles, 16,508 or nearly 40% were corporate visitors (i.e. not the general public).

January 2009 was an extremely dry month for Melbourne with zero rainfall. This means the most intense car parking is usually taking place during the driest part of the year, when the park is most vulnerable to damage.



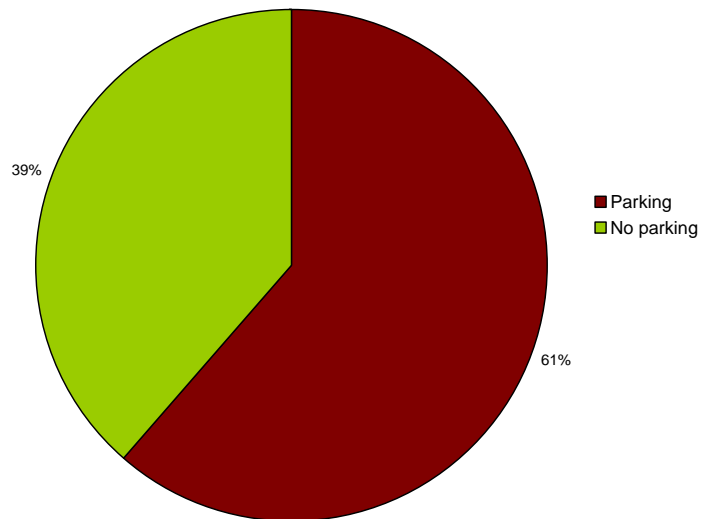
The graph below shows that the number of days opened for parking for events at the MCG remains relatively stable, while the number of days opened for parking for events at Melbourne and Olympic Park area is increasing.

Yarra park car park openings



There are now more parking days per year (61%) than non parking days (39%).

Parking days at Yarra Park: Nov 08 - Nov 09



Evidence suggests there is considerable use of Yarra Park as a car park for staff working at events, and may also be used as cheap day parking for people not attending events.

The MCG has up to 750 car parking spaces, which are used by staff and are available for corporate visitors.

Disabled parking is also provided at Yarra Park, with 250 spaces made available close to the venue. In the past some disabled parking was directly under trees to be close to pathways but this practice is being changed as it is not an ideal solution for access. Alternative options need to be explored such as disabled parking under the MCG, where paths are more suitable for these requirements.

Traffic circulation is also constrained by the layout of the park, the volume of cars and the simple fact it was not designed as a car park. It can take up to 1½ hours to exit the park during busy periods.

### ***The effects of parking on horticultural health***

This section describes the effect of parking on the horticultural health of Yarra Park. It is informed by extracts from *Yarra Park – soil conditions and the maintenance of grass cover and tree health, 2007* by Simon Leake, Principal Soil Scientist, Sydney Environmental and Soil Laboratory.

Leake says there are two main consequences of vehicle traffic in parks:

1. **Compression (compaction)** of the surface soil, usually to a depth of 100-150mm, which reduces pore space, increases soil density and strength, and reduces root penetration, water infiltration and oxygen exchange (aeration). The consequence is impaired root function, lower available soil water and restricted nutrient uptake.
2. **Wear** or mechanical abrasion of the grass coverage itself caused by pressure and shear. Wear seldom occurs without soil compaction. Wear can occur at a greater rate than the growth rate resulting in seasonal or long-term loss of grass cover. Wear is significantly greater in drought-stressed, dormant or nutrient deficient turf.<sup>10</sup>

According to Leake wear and compaction compound each other. If the soil is compacted, dry or nutrient poor, the recovery rate from wear is reduced.

“Recovery from wear is fundamentally a balance between the rate of destruction and the rate of growth and recovery of the grass surface....There will be a level of traffic above which growth rate cannot match wear rate. That level will be lower for turf stressed by compaction, cold, heat, drought or nutrition and higher where all of the competing factors are optimised.”

Leake points out that tree roots have the same needs and requirements as grasses: moisture, oxygen, nutrient uptake and a soil medium their roots can penetrate. However, since trees are much longer-lived organisms than grasses they can take longer to exhibit the symptoms of low-level stress such as reduced growth rate or canopy dieback.

Even worse than low-level chronic stress is acute stress resulting from soil compaction. “Constant parking of cars under trees growing in a compressible soil is always a recipe for decline and shortened life and often for susceptibility to acute stress events and wind blow. Parking within the critical root zone particularly

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<sup>10</sup> Carrow, R.N., and A.M. Petrovic (1992) *Effects of Traffic on Turfgrass*, in Waddington, D.V., Carrow, R.N., and R.C. Shearman Eds: (1992) *Turfgrass*, Number 32, Agronomy, American Society of Agronomy Inc. Madison Wisconsin USA

endangers the primary structural support roots that cannot effectively be regrown and endangers the stability of the tree. “

Leake concludes that parking cars in an important and historic inner city park is “not an option that properly includes consideration of the values of the park... The frequency of parking (in Yarra Park) is greater than the capacity to repair.”

### ***Towards a sustainable solution***

Providing ample, cheap car parking in Yarra Park is not only detrimental to the sustainability of the park environment, it also supports longer car journeys and vehicle dependence, which contradicts current planning policy.

For example, *Melbourne 2030* advocates for the promotion of sustainable personal transport options, and identifies car parking policies and management as a key means of encouraging the switch to public transport.

While the City of Melbourne had established a vision of removing car parking, and was slowly decreasing car parking numbers, in August 2005 a resolution was passed to phase out and eventually cease car parking in Yarra Park. The resolution sought a solution to achieve this outcome by the end of the current agreement in August 2010. To commence this process, a report was commissioned in 2006, investigating alternative parking options (Maunsell).

In 2008, the City of Melbourne prepared an interim improvement plan, and implemented its first phase. The focus was on tree protection and included increased mulching, and installing barrier fencing under two avenues to stop vehicles driving under trees while exiting the park. There was also some landscaping on the north west border of the MCG apron. This plan appears on the following page. Further investigation has also been initiated on management of vehicles exiting the park.

However, until such a time as parking in the park ceases, Yarra Park’s \$8 per car parking rate is much lower than all-day car parking charges for other Australian and international sporting venues (Docklands \$25; Sydney Cricket Ground’s Kippax Lake Car Park between \$15-\$20; London’s Wembley Stadium approximately \$50), which still makes it an attractive option.

Even though the standard of car parking facilities at Yarra Park is not equivalent to other purpose-built car parks, as long as it costs less than other parking alternatives or public transport, the economics of travelling to major events is likely to favour parking in Yarra Park.

For example, the current cost for a family of four (*i.e. 2 adults, 2 concession*) to travel to an event in Melbourne via public transport is \$21.00 (Zone 1 only) or \$32.40 (Zone 1 + 2), significantly more than \$8.

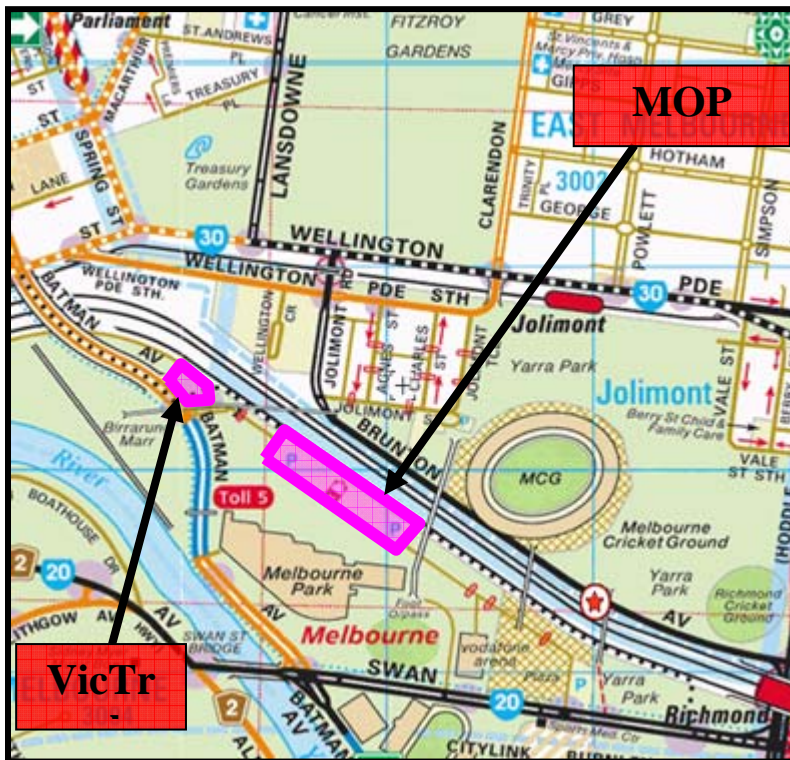


**Future alternatives**

To determine the parking requirements of the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Precinct a detailed analysis of patrons' transport needs must be completed as well as an assessment of possible alternatives.

One option that has been proposed is to upgrade the capacity of Richmond Railway Station to cater for large crowds however more formal car parking in the precinct may be required.

A 2006 preliminary investigation into car parking alternatives identified two possible sites suitable for construction of multi-level car parks. These locations are shown below:



The estimated capacity of each of these alternatives is:

- Melbourne Olympic Park Northern Car Park – 2,980 parking spaces (an increase of 1,988 parking spaces)
- VicTrack Land – 520 new parking spaces

These alternatives would increase parking stock in the precinct by 2,508 parking spaces.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the same study highlighted there was easy access to central city car parks via the new William Barak Bridge as well as numerous on-street parking options within walking distance of the precinct.

<sup>11</sup> Yarra Park – Investigation of Alternative Parking Options, Maunsell, 2006

**Proposals relating to car parking in Yarra Park are:**

- *Car parking should be phased out of Yarra Park. It is inconsistent with park uses, stops other legitimate park uses, and causes irreparable horticultural damage.*
- *In phasing out the car parking, the following plan suggests boundaries for the next car parking management area.*
- *Information should be compiled on the number of people attending sporting and other events in the precinct. This data should then be examined and analysed to make well-informed decisions about facilitating safer pedestrian and cyclist access to the precinct.*
- *Information should be collected and analysed about the characteristics of people using Yarra Park as a preferred parking option. Alternative parking options should be mapped and communicated to this group.*
- *Public transport nodes should be improved in the precinct, in particular upgrading of Richmond Railway Station.*
- *A business case should be developed for the provision of additional formalised car parks in the precinct (as identified in 2006 study).*
- *The State Government should provide more formalised car parking in MOPT area as part of their Master Plan process.*





## 2.3 Recreational uses and activities

### *Recreational use*

Yarra Park has a rich sporting, recreational and cultural history. It has been used for a wide range of passive recreation and structured sporting activities over many years. Current recreational uses includes walking, sitting and reading on park benches, visiting the children's play area, using the picnic and BBQ area, cycling, keeping fit and dog walking.

The park attracts people from a wide area – international, national, regional, metropolitan and local visitors. However, the purpose of each visit varies. It is predominately metropolitan and local visitors who are using the park, while most others visit the park to access the MCG or an event in the Melbourne Olympic Parks Precinct. There are also a high number of visitors who pass through the park, either as pedestrians or cyclists, on their way to another destination.

The park plays an important role as a neighbourhood park for nearby residential areas. Residents from Richmond have a particular reliance on the park as there is limited open space in that area.

However, the intensity of car parking in the park – combined with the effect of drought and water restrictions – is now compromising its landscape character and making it less appealing for recreational activities.

In addition, due to the lack of a clear timetable about when the park is going to be used for car parking, it cannot be relied on as a destination for passive recreation. Other activities cannot take place while cars are parked on the lawns.

Car parking causes lawns to deteriorate to the point where they are unattractive for passive recreational use and must be closed off for grass reinstatement, thereby increasing the time they are unavailable to the public.

It has also affected the City of Melbourne's ability to provide amenities for recreational use in Yarra Park. The location of park benches, BBQs, and picnic tables has been restricted by car parking as has tree planting because it reduces areas available for car parking. Even the children's playground was built in a 'left over' section of the park, rather than in a central destination, due to car parking.

Over the past 10 years, the City of Melbourne has undertaken annual research into customer satisfaction with the major parks and gardens it manages. Overall, park users rated Yarra Park significantly lower than other Melbourne parks they had visited.

### *Children's play*

A local play area is provided in the northern part of the park. Upgraded in 2006, it provides play equipment broadly catering for 0-12 year olds and is well used by local residents and other visitors.

Providing areas for children to play is an important function of parks and gardens. The opportunity for inner city children to have access to large parks to run and play in is critical to their healthy growth and development. At present unstructured play opportunities in Yarra Park are compromised by its use for car parking.

## **Cycling**

Yarra Park is a popular and well used route for cycling. Many of the pathways are used by commuter cyclists, predominately at peak times.

A recent bike survey (July 2008) of a single section of pathway recorded 1,204 bicycles in one week.<sup>12</sup> One of the paths through Yarra Park is identified as a bike route in the City of Melbourne Bicycle Plan 2007–11 but clearly other paths are also desired bicycle routes. The plan describes the need for further links through Yarra Park to connect East Melbourne to the Main Yarra Trail, allowing cyclists to avoid the congested arterial road network on the park boundaries.<sup>13</sup>

In other parks, concern is expressed about the conflict between commuter cyclists, pedestrians and off leash dogs. This is could be an issue in Yarra Park as well and consideration should be given to introducing an awareness program for park users.

Consideration should also be given to mapping the main cycling routes through the park to determine if any design or management initiatives are required.

## **Dogs**

Dog walking is a popular activity in Yarra Park. The park includes a large dog off leash area (8.8 hectares or 31% of the park) while the rest of the park is designated for dogs on leash. Dogs must be brought under control within 20 metres of playgrounds and BBQs.

Some dog owners have expressed concern about the poor condition of the turf in the current off leash area. The City of Melbourne has made a commitment to the community to review dog off leash areas in the context of other park activities and uses. Part of the area is in very poor condition, and has a high frequency of car parking. Car parking and off leash dogs obviously cannot occur safely at the same time.

Dog owners have also expressed frustration at not knowing in advance when car parking will occur. They often avoid the park just in case there is car parking, which is an unfortunate outcome.

### **Proposals relating to uses and activities in Yarra Park are:**

- *While car parking in the park continues, a centrally located area for passive recreation within Yarra Park should be established. Picnic tables, seating and BBQs could be provided, and the children's play area could be relocated or redeveloped in this site. However, the main focus would be open parkland. The area set aside should have no structured activities, no car parking and remain a dog on leash area to avoid interference with passive recreation users.*
- *There is a need for more amenities to support passive recreational use of the park. This includes seats, drinking fountains, public toilets, signage, lighting and picnic facilities. Bins have recently been upgraded.*
- *Major cycling routes in the park should be mapped and analysed to facilitate safety for cyclists and pedestrians.*

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<sup>12</sup> Austraffic July 2008

<sup>13</sup> The City of Melbourne Bicycle Plan 2007 – 2011 p14

- *The condition of the existing dog off leash area should be upgraded. If the area is to be reviewed, it should be reviewed in the context of all the other uses and activities in the park.*

## **2.4 Access, amenity and safety**

Access to and within Yarra Park is important for its role as a welcoming, safe and enjoyable place. Entrances are vital for establishing the nature of a park and giving people a sense of the kind of open space they are entering. There are 16 separate entry points to Yarra Park, which should be reviewed and upgraded where required.

In terms of future access works, the historic path network should be maintained at a high standard to cater for the large number of park visitors. A few additional pedestrian routes have emerged in recent years, which should be monitored to determine if these paths can be formalised.

Lighting within the park is due to be upgraded and public toilet facilities have been proposed for the northern section of the park. The City of Melbourne's public toilet plan (2008–13) recommends public toilets be placed at the boundaries of parks to improve their safety.

There is also a need for more amenities to support passive recreational use in the park. This includes seats, drink fountains, picnic facilities and signage. Bins have recently been upgraded.

At present Yarra Park has an identity crisis. Most people who visit the MCG are probably unaware of Yarra Park as a park in its own right. It is likely they realise they are entering 'a park' but their focus is on their destination. When the area is operating as a car park, it does not even look like a park.

If car parking can be removed, there is an opportunity to reintroduce people to Yarra Park and give them more knowledge about its history, tree species and recreational opportunities. The park would benefit greatly from the development of an interpretative plan.

### ***Proposals relating to access, amenity and safety in Yarra Park are:***

- *Prepare a Disability Access Audit for the park.*
- *Prepare a design for and upgrade all park entrances.*
- *Upgrade and maintain lighting and paths. Provide new public toilets, seats and drink fountains.*
- *Prepare an interpretative plan for the park and install signage in the park. Use good design principles to drive the development and implementation of improved signage within the park to ensure consistency and legibility of signs.*

## 2.5 Environmental sustainability

Critical to the sustainability of Melbourne's parks and gardens is the development of long term policies to guide future development, management and protection of park values.

Healthy parks are vital for healthy communities. Urban landscapes and vegetation contribute to temperature modification, air quality, hydrology, maintaining local water tables, reducing waterway pollution, soil stabilisation, slowing the movement of water from catchments and facilitating the infiltration of water into the soil. They contribute to the cooling of buildings and reducing airborne pollutants. Parks also play an essential role in biodiversity, and many of these environmental benefits are dependant on vegetation, particularly trees, being maintained during drought.

Parks play a critical role in total water management. They are an essential part of the urban ecosystem, and should not be considered in isolation.

### ***Securing a water source***

The Melbourne Cricket Ground Trust have announced that they will construct an underground water recycling plant to secure a water source for the park, as well as for use at the MCG and Punt Road oval.

The City of Melbourne's strategic direction to secure water for the horticultural health of its parks is guided by the *Water Management Plan for Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces* 2009–13. This plan directs the need to have a multi-functional approach to water which includes:

- investigating alternative water sources
- increasing water efficiency
- managing how parks are used, and
- adapting the landscape

While securing an alternative water source is important, other measures are equally important such as increasing water efficiency which involves determining a park's optimum water needs for landscape health.

Managing how a park is used is also important to provide quality parkland for a range of leisure opportunities while managing these activities in line with water availability. Adapting the landscape of parks aims to make them less water dependent and more dry climate tolerant, while minimising changes to landscape character, heritage and community use.

In the context of these objectives, car parking is simply not sustainable in Melbourne's parks. Finding another water source to allow for turf reinstatement at Yarra Park cannot completely resolve the problems caused by car parking. And as the park is used for car parking more than half of the year, irrigation times would be severely limited, and may well coincide with the restricted times people have to access the park for passive recreation, further compromising their access.

### ***Proposals relating to environmental sustainability in Yarra Park are:***

- *Address and plan for the impacts of climate change on the park, and recognise the critical importance of the role of a healthy park for the environmental health of the City of Melbourne.*

- *Seek to restore and improve the horticultural health of Yarra Park through provision of water, removal of damage to soil, and following treatment programs identified by qualified specialists. Refer also to proposals for tree health outlined in section 2.1.*

## **2.6 Cultural Heritage**

*The Melbourne Dreaming*, a guide to Aboriginal places in Melbourne, describes Yarra Park as a former Aboriginal camping area. Three scarred trees remain in the park. The book also notes that native police used the former police barracks, which was situated in the former extent of Yarra Park and refers to the link between the MCG as the home of football and how a form of the game was played by Aboriginal people.<sup>14</sup>

Under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, a cultural heritage management plan may be required for anything within 50m of one of the registered Aboriginal sites. There may be other obligations under the Act and the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2007.

It is also important to recognise the significant heritage value of Yarra Park within the network of parks and gardens in Melbourne. The cultural and heritage values of the park should inform all decisions about its future use and management.

### ***Proposals relating to cultural heritage of Yarra Park include;***

- *To prepare a Cultural Heritage Management Plan.*

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<sup>14</sup> The Melbourne Dreaming: A guide to the Aboriginal Places of Melbourne, Eidelson M, 1997

### 3. Community input

In the course of preparing this submission, officers from the City of Melbourne have met with representatives of the following local groups.

- East Melbourne Group
- Yarra Park Association
- Friends of the Elms

It is acknowledged this is a preliminary consultative process and there is a need for a full community engagement program. The following is a summary of their comments received to date:

**1. Identification, protection and public communication of heritage values both natural and cultural (including Indigenous).** The communication should not be reliant on signage, and would benefit from preparation of an interpretation strategy.

**2. Minimisation of impact of car parking while it continues**

Car parking is the major concern of all groups, largely because the park is used more as a car park than a park. Local residents have no idea when car parking is going to take place, which means they are reluctant to visit the park because they may arrive and have nowhere to go. Car parking restricts and excludes the passive recreation participation in the park.

The second major concern is the damage caused by car parking. Damage to tree roots, soil compaction and lack of grass cover are all problematic. Local communities are concerned about this from both a horticultural and a recreational amenity perspective. Again, it compromises the passive recreation participation experience available for the general public.

Excellent options for access to the MCG exist with two rail stations, trams, buses and pedestrian access including via the William Barak Bridge. With increased public transport service during the Commonwealth Games, this experience demonstrated how successful access can be with no parking, and there was no adverse comment.

While a long term commitment to removal of car parking is the unanimous direction desired by all local community, they are keen to see strategies to minimise the damage by vehicles in the short term. This could include managing the exit of cars from the park, and permanently excluding some areas from car parking. Night-time was noted as being extremely dangerous for pedestrians when cars are exiting from the park.

**3. Securing a water source.**

For tree health and turf management.

**4. Protection of trees.**

Elm avenues in Melbourne are among the only remaining examples in the world. These trees, and other avenues of significant trees in Yarra Park, are being severely damaged by car parking. The copse of oaks immediately north of the MCG was noted as always being parked under. The Queens Walk was noted as being the best avenue in the park. Consideration should be given to protecting it from any vehicle movement or parking (e.g. with fencing).

Respondents felt all trees should be mulched and pest management programs should continue (possums, elm leaf beetle and so on).

Those consulted said the variety of bird life varies from season to season and is excellent. Tree planting plans were well supported and these should build on established themes, retain Elm avenues, and provide specimen planting in some areas.

**5. Upgrading avenues and minor walkways.**

**6. Soil management**

**7. Explore options for ground cover** – grasses, mulching and other options. It was noted that unlike other parks, there is no grass to sit on.

**8. Management of multiple uses** – including pedestrian transit, cycling, parking, passive recreation, dog walking, events in sporting precincts, and events in the park. As cycling is increasing, some intersections have been identified for potential treatment.

**9. Location and management of dog off-leash area.**

Much of the current off leash area is in extremely poor condition, and the frequency of use for car parking is high.

**10. Management of adjacent VicTrack land.**

The land adjacent to the rail line is not well maintained. There is support for removal of the former police station building and creating a new entrance to the park through this site.

**11. Management of boundaries of the MCG 'apron'**

There is a need to protect the park from further encroachment.

**12. Impact of the park use on adjacent residential areas** (Jolimont and Vale Streets) – Buffer areas are clearly important.

**13. Clearer identification of Yarra Park as a park** was needed through clearly designed and marked entrances. Some respondents noted the park could function as a beautiful setting for the MCG and suggested a café could be provided.

**14. Adequate budget for ongoing maintenance.**

15. There was some concern about the use of the park for the **turf wicket nursery**.

**16. Park amenities**

Many of those consulted said there was a need for seats, drink fountains (with dog bowls), public toilets and bicycle parking racks.

**17. Bridges**

Some people commented that existing pedestrian bridges over the rail lines were narrow and inefficient. In addition, Brunton Avenue overflows with people at peak times.

**18. Rubbish**

It was noted by respondents there is a lot of rubbish in the park after it is used for car parking.



In addition to the above comments, one respondent said, “people who use the park have enormous love and respect for (it) and hate to see the decline”.

It was also noted that at a time when it is very difficult around the world to create new parks in established cities, here we were in Melbourne with a great park we didn't value.

## References

*Yarra Park Conservation Analysis*, Patrick J and Raworth B, 2001.

Parks Policy, City of Melbourne 1997

<sup>1</sup>Maller, C, Townsend, M, Brown, P & St Leger, L (2002), *Healthy Parks Healthy People: The health benefits of contact with nature in a park context*, Report to Parks Victoria and the International Park Strategic Partners Group, Deakin University and Parks Victoria.

Water Management Plan (2009 – 2013) Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces, City of Melbourne, October 2009

City of Melbourne Parks Satisfaction Research Study 2009, Market Solutions Pty Ltd

The City of Melbourne Bicycle Plan 2007 – 2011

Yarra Park Parking Agreement 2005

*Yarra Park – soil conditions and the maintenance of grass cover and tree health, 2007*, Leake S, Principal Soil Scientist, Sydney Environmental and Soil Laboratory (Expert Opinion)

The Melbourne Dreaming: A guide to the Aboriginal Places of Melbourne, Eidelson M, 1997

Yarra Park – Investigation of Alternative Parking Options, Maunsell Australia Pty Ltd, 2006

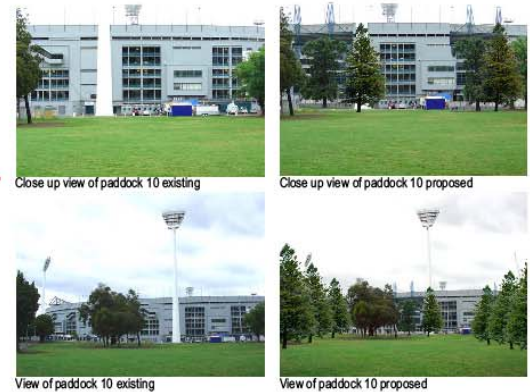
## Data Analysis

Austraffic Bicycle Survey 2008

Car parking statistics  
CLUE data, City of Melbourne

**Yarra Park Tree Species List**

- |                               |                            |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Arucaria bidwilli</i>      | Bunya Bunya Pine           |
| <i>Arucaria cunninghamii</i>  | Hoop Pine                  |
| <i>Callitris species</i>      |                            |
| <i>Casuarina torulosa</i>     | Forest Oak                 |
| <i>Corymbia citriodora</i>    | Lemon Scented Gum          |
| <i>Corymbia maculatta</i>     | Spotted Gum                |
| <i>Eucalyptus botryoides</i>  | Mahogany Gum               |
| <i>Eucalyptus crebra</i>      | Narrow-leaved Red Ironbark |
| <i>Eucalyptus grandis</i>     | Flooded Gum                |
| <i>Eucalyptus microcorys</i>  | Tallow-Wood                |
| <i>Eucalyptus rubida</i>      | Candebark Gum              |
| <i>Eucalyptus sideroxylon</i> | Red Ironbark               |
| <i>Eucalyptus viminalis</i>   | Manna Gum                  |
| <i>Ficus macrophylla</i>      | Moreton Bay Fig            |
| <i>Ficus platypoda</i>        | Rock Fig                   |
| <i>Ficus rubiginosa</i>       | Rusty Fig                  |
| <i>Podocarpus elatus</i>      | Plum Pine                  |
| <i>Scinus molle</i>           | Peppercorn Tree            |
| <i>Ulmus procera</i>          | English Elm                |



Close up view of paddock 10 existing

Close up view of paddock 10 proposed



View of paddock 10 existing

View of paddock 10 proposed



View North of Richmond Oval existing



View North of Richmond Oval proposed



View of Paddock 16 East existing



View of Paddock 16 East proposed



View of Paddock 16 West existing



View of Paddock 16 West proposed

**LEGEND**

- TREE PREVIOUSLY REMOVED
- TREE TO BE REMOVED
- EVERGREEN TREES RETAINED - 394
- DECIDUOUS TREES RETAINED - 209
- AVENUE TREES RETAINED - 551
- PROPOSED EVERGREEN TREE - 297
- PROPOSED DECIDUOUS TREE - 42
- Paddock 16
- PEDESTRIAN ZONE
- EAST MELBOURNE INTERFACE
- NEW MCG FORECOURT
- JOLIMONT STATION FRONTAGE
- VALE ST AND VALE ST SOUTH
- RICHMOND OVAL

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**PROJECT**  
PARKS AND RECREATION  
YARRA PARK TREE PLANNING PLAN

**DESIGNER**  
ILLUSTRATION DESIGN

**DATE**

DATE	REV	BY	CHKD
1/12/20	1	...	...

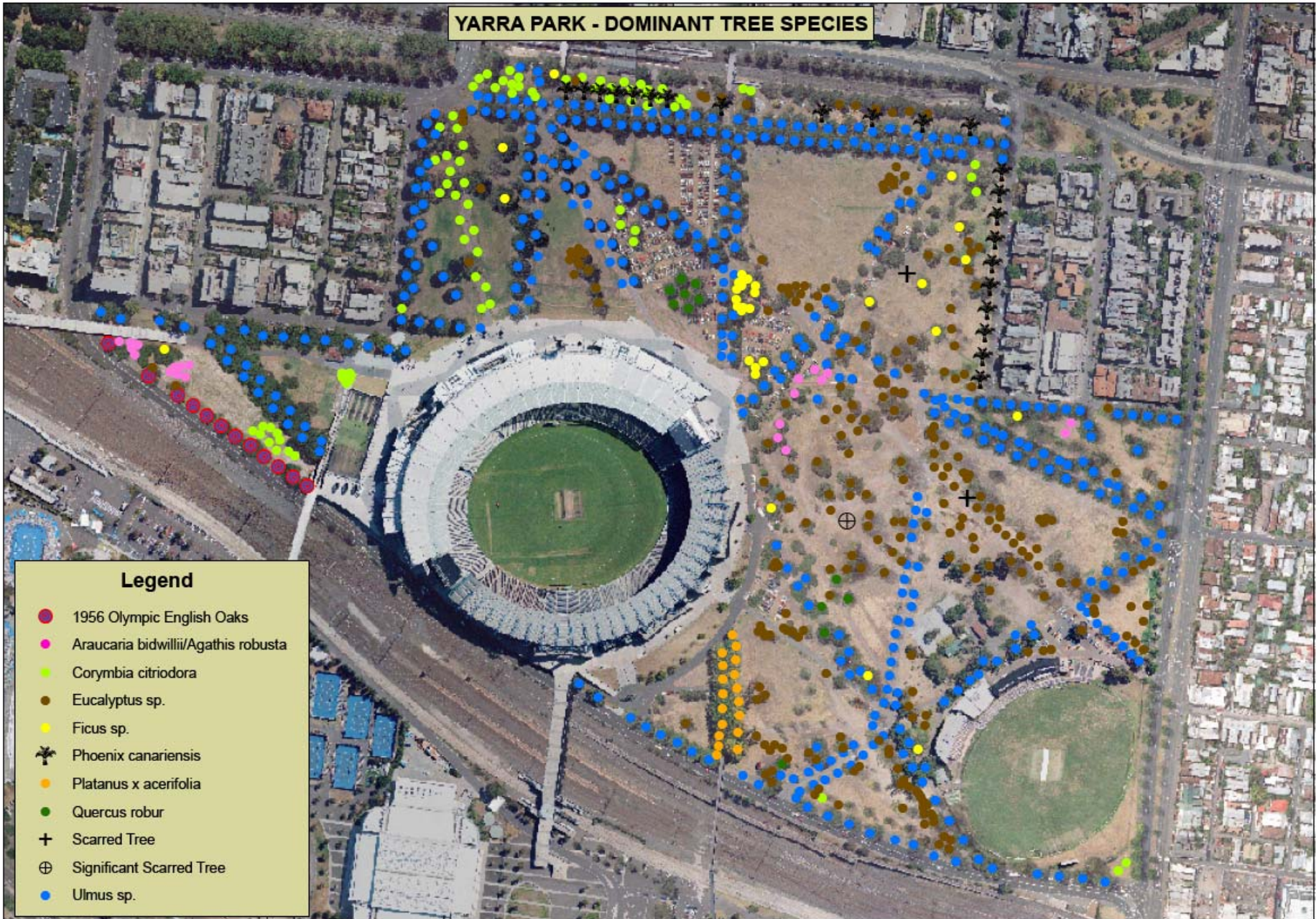
ISSUED: 23 JANUARY 2020

PROJ NO: 901929  
SHEET NO: 901929

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YARRA PARK - DOMINANT TREE SPECIES

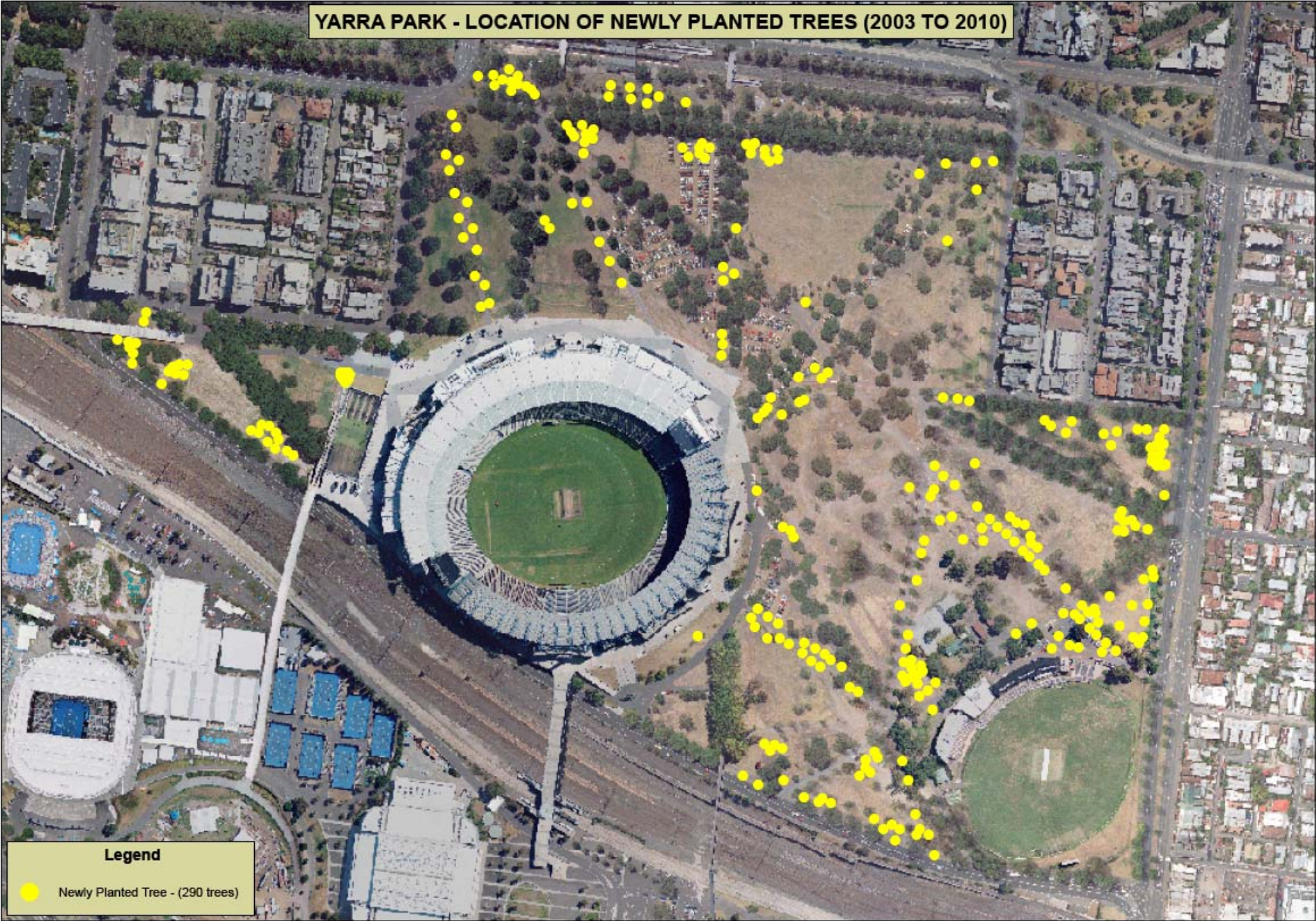


**Legend**

- 1956 Olympic English Oaks
- Araucaria bidwillii/Agathis robusta
- Corymbia citriodora
- Eucalyptus sp.
- Ficus sp.
- ☙ Phoenix canariensis
- Platanus x acerifolia
- Quercus robur
- + Scarred Tree
- ⊕ Significant Scarred Tree
- Ulmus sp.

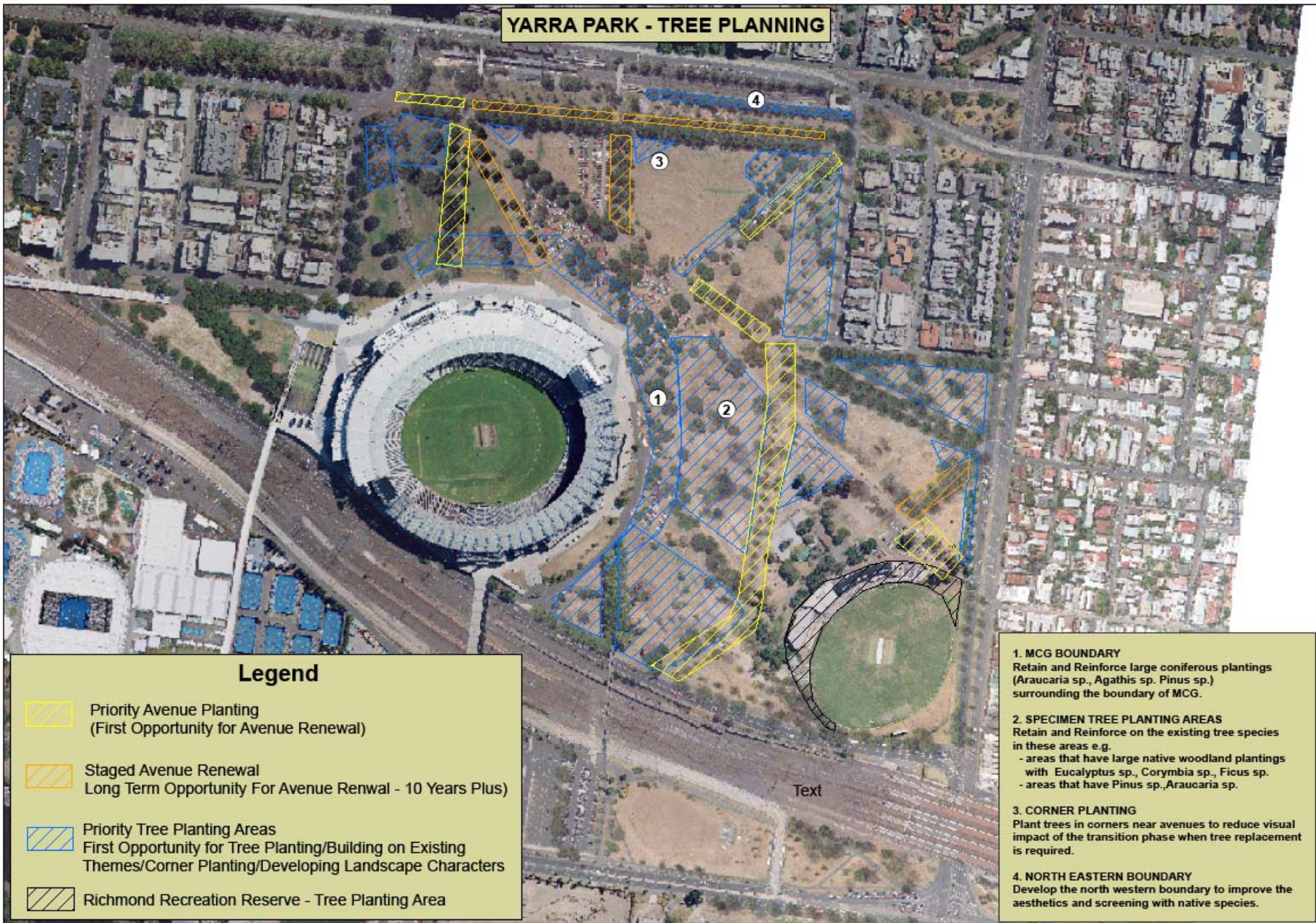


**YARRA PARK - LOCATION OF NEWLY PLANTED TREES (2003 TO 2010)**





**YARRA PARK - TREE PLANNING**



**Legend**

-  Priority Avenue Planting  
(First Opportunity for Avenue Renewal)
-  Staged Avenue Renewal  
Long Term Opportunity For Avenue Renewal - 10 Years Plus)
-  Priority Tree Planting Areas  
First Opportunity for Tree Planting/Building on Existing Themes/Corner Planting/Developing Landscape Characters
-  Richmond Recreation Reserve - Tree Planting Area

- 1. MCG BOUNDARY**  
Retain and Reinforce large coniferous plantings (Araucaria sp., Agathis sp. Pinus sp.) surrounding the boundary of MCG.
- 2. SPECIMEN TREE PLANTING AREAS**  
Retain and Reinforce on the existing tree species in these areas e.g.
  - areas that have large native woodland plantings with Eucalyptus sp., Corymbia sp., Ficus sp.
  - areas that have Pinus sp., Araucaria sp.
- 3. CORNER PLANTING**  
Plant trees in corners near avenues to reduce visual impact of the transition phase when tree replacement is required.
- 4. NORTH EASTERN BOUNDARY**  
Develop the north western boundary to improve the aesthetics and screening with native species.

**FINANCE ATTACHMENT**

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**PREPARATION OF A MASTER PLAN FOR YARRA PARK – SUBMISSION**

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There are no major financial implications for Council arising from the recommendations contained in the report, given that the legislation has been passed transferring the Committee of Management responsibilities for Yarra Park from the City of Melbourne to the Melbourne Cricket Ground Trust. This is scheduled to occur on 15 March 2010.

**Phu Nguyen**  
Acting Manager Financial Services

**LEGAL ATTACHMENT**

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**PREPARATION OF A MASTER PLAN FOR YARRA PARK – SUBMISSION**

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No direct legal issues arise from the recommendation from Management.

**Kim Wood**  
Manager Legal Services