

Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project Update July 2024



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Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project Update July 2024

Purpose

The project aims to:

- **re-establish an example of pre-settlement landscape in an urban setting, in balance with recreational and other community needs;**
- **provide a natural setting for both healthy activities and quiet contemplation in the heart of the Kensington;**
- **provide opportunities for community engagement through volunteering and interaction with a range of natural processes;**
- **educate the community about the many benefits of native Australian plants;**
- **act locally, combatting climate change and maintaining a thriving habitat of flora and fauna in a sustainable open space.**

Local Engagement

Local engagement in this mature project remains strong, with the Kensington community highly engaged with Borthwick Park through working bees, meetings, planting days and community events. At least 6,500 volunteer hours (probably more) have been spent on the project since its inception. This equates to an average of 450 hours a year; equivalent to three months full-time work per year.

The project is regularly promoted through Kensington Residents' Association newsletters delivered by volunteers to every household in Kensington, website www.kra.org.au and weekly emails to Association members, as well as during discussions with volunteers and other stakeholders.

Initiated by the Kensington Residents' Association in 2009 and supported by the City of Norwood, Payneham & St Peters, this project remains one of the Kensington Residents' Association's most effective forms of community engagement and is a vibrant example of Council and community working together. It is a local 'feel-good' project that helps to address climate change by augmenting the City's tree canopy at a time when much of Adelaide's tree canopy is in decline.

History 2009- present

Context

Borthwick Park is the largest recreational reserve in Kensington (0.71 hectares). The Kensington Residents' Association was instrumental in the creation of the reserve, which is highly valued by the local community as a rare example of a natural public space. Second Creek (formerly known as Hallett's Rivulet) runs through the park. Built infrastructure includes two installations of play equipment, a shelter shed, barbeques, picnic tables and benches.

In 2009, as pointed out in the *City of Norwood, Payneham and St Peters Biodiversity Strategy 2006-2016*, the park was “dominated by an open mown grass area with scattered trees”. The ‘scattered trees’ are magnificent remnant Redgums, some of which are up to 450 years old according to Dr Dean Nicolle, consultant arborist, botanist and ecologist.

In 2009 Second Creek was degraded with considerable bank erosion obvious within the park. The soil at the bases of the ancient Redgums was compacted. Feral weeds lined the edges of the creek and the perimeter of the reserve.

The 2009 reality of Borthwick Park was a stark contrast to the colonial landscape described in the *City of Norwood Payneham & St Peters State of the Environment Report (2005)* As described, the original eastern plains between Adelaide and Burnside supported: “...a magnificent gum forest with an undergrowth of Kangaroo Grass so high that people travelling between Adelaide and Kensington lost their way” (Kraehenbuehl, 1996).

Proposal to Council

Insofar as it is possible to recreate a pre-settlement landscape in a contemporary urban setting in balance with recreational and other needs, the Association consulted widely with biodiversity experts and with Council during the latter half of 2009.

Submission of a detailed proposal to Council in December 2009 resulted in approval to commence the first planting of native species of local provenance.

Plantings 2010 to the present

Council prepared the first section at the eastern end of Second Creek by poisoning the kikuyu grass, disconnecting irrigation, digging swales and providing mulch which was spread by community volunteers led by the Kensington Residents’ Association.



First year plantings. Looking West. 2010.

The first community planting was conducted in the winter of 2010, with plants funded by the Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board, now Green Adelaide. With subsequent Council approvals, planting of more areas followed over successive years.

Areas chosen for planting prioritised protection of the remnant Redgums (halo plantings) and creek banks, using pre-existing beds and sloping ground while retaining level lawn areas for play. A Sheoak Grove featuring a meadow of wallaby grass below native Casuarinas has been established alongside the adventure playground. Native ground orchids and lilies appear periodically demonstrating a degree of self-sufficiency in the established plantings.

Annual plantings are currently focussed on replacement planting / increasing biodiversity with additional low plants, grasses and groundcovers helping to keep weeds at bay while enhancing soil biota.

At the 2024 winter planting days some 750 grasses, ground covers and low shrubs, purchased with Green Adelaide funding, were planted to further develop the understorey.

At the time of this update, some 7,000 small plants; grasses, groundcovers, small trees and shrubs have been planted and are flourishing in the park. Plant lists include species that thrived in the area before settlement; dodonias, sheoaks, bursarias, acacias, olearias, sennas, native apricot, kangaroo grass, wallaby grass, native clematis, sweet apple berry (*Billardiera* sp.), creeping boobialla and many others.



One year old plantings, looking East. 2011

City of Norwood, Payneham & St Peters; Outcomes of NPSP City Plan 2030

The Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project contributes towards several outcomes of the City of Norwood, Payneham and St Peters City Plan 2030:

Objective 1.3	An engaged and participating community.
Objective 1.4	A strong, healthy, resilient and inclusive community.
Objective 2.5	Dynamic community life in public spaces and precincts.
Objective 4.2	Sustainable streets and open spaces.
Objective 4.3	Thriving and healthy habitats for native fauna and flora.
Objective 4.4	Mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change.

Working bees & Council support

Community volunteers led by the Kensington Residents' Association maintain the Biodiversity Project plantings. Mulching, weeding and trimming shrubs occurs during regular working bees (second Sunday each month). Two winter planting days are undertaken annually. Occasional smaller, targeted work sessions, mainly for intensive mulching and weed control, occur on an ad hoc basis. Summer watering volunteers form a roster to hose-water the newest plantings from December to March; this extra support for the young plants during their first summer in the ground greatly improves survival rates.

Council Parks Maintenance staff provide invaluable support for the working bees and planting days, delivering loads of mulch and removing garden waste on request. Council staff also maintain lawn areas, service bins and barbeques, maintain infrastructure including the shelter shed, benches, retaining walls and fencing, irrigation and lighting within Borthwick Park, and provide arboreal services as required.

The social engagement of volunteers at working bees is an integral part of the Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project. Monthly working bees and annual planting days always include morning tea and/or lunch to show appreciation to those who help look after the park and to extend the opportunity for neighbourhood connection.

Green Adelaide

Green Adelaide continues to support the Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project with Core Needs budget, advice and training. This enables provision of the project's annual plant order with plants supplied most recently by Trees for Life.

Volunteers

Approximately thirty registered volunteers are connected to the Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project. Typically, 12-20 volunteers participate in monthly working bees with double this number at annual planting days. Volunteers are supplied with hi-vis vests and equipment and are required to sign-in and out when working on site. Task-specific training is provided. A wide range of skills training is also available for volunteers through Green Adelaide e.g. first aid.

Since the adoption of the project under the City of Norwood, Payneham & St Peters auspices in late 2020, all Borthwick Park volunteers are considered council volunteers. Council ensures that every volunteer has the appropriate safety checks and inductions. New

volunteers are always welcome and should contact the Volunteer Co-ordinator at Council in the first instance. The process of transitioning from being a Kensington Residents' Association volunteer to becoming a Council volunteer has been at times onerous and steps are being considered to make the process smoother.

Central halo plantings

In 2018, following a large limb failure, Council decided to create a large halo around the central gum for safety reasons.

In consultation with Council arborist Matthew Cole, the initial halo plantings were undertaken in 2019 as part of the Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project. This initiative is improving soil health around the sentinel tree which is some 450 years old.

Second Creek on-ground works

The creek is now a highly modified drainage channel, concreted between the First and Second World Wars by returned soldiers. In 2022 the concrete was showing signs of damage and the weir was full of silt from upstream.

On-ground creek works were completed by mid-2022 by Council contractors. The weir was removed and creek banks reformed, creating a safer approach to high water flows and preventing stagnant standing water. At the same time a new nature play area was constructed using quartzite, logs and rocks.

An extra planting day was held in the winter of 2022 and volunteers planted low grasses, sedges, ground covers and some shrubs throughout the nature play area.

The nature play area continues to be popular with young children visiting the park and the plantings have established well, despite being in an active play area.

Southern bank

The southern bank of the creek is steep and difficult to access. It has historically been a troublesome area, often overgrown, with a considerable weed load spreading seed into the main areas of the park.

Using the allocated Council budget for Borthwick Park, *Back2Bush* was contracted in 2022 to perform annual weed management and planting. The ongoing work by the *Back2Bush* team is beginning to yield positive results and efforts to manage plant growth on the southern bank will continue. Council assistance to maintain and plant out the southern bank, using Borthwick Park's budget allocation, is greatly appreciated.

Top dressing of lawn areas

In December 2022, the lawn areas of the park were aerated, top dressed and re-seeded following disruption by creek works in 2021/2022. Further repair was undertaken in 2023. The lawn continues to need ongoing attention as it gets waterlogged in winter and is subject to damage by dogs.

Volunteer shed

The shed plays a vital role as a focus for volunteer activities in Borthwick Park. Council installed power, security lighting and internal lights in 2022 and provide insurance cover of the contents under Council arrangements. The shed has been fully fitted out internally by volunteers with racks installed for hand tools and watering equipment. A defibrillator has also been installed on the exterior of the shed for public use.

In 2024 Council replaced the uneven slate entry to the shed with a concrete ramp for easy and safe access.

Digital Information Board (DIB)

Funded by a federal grant, through the office of James Stevens MP in 2023, the DIB was officially launched in June 2024. Mounted securely behind the shed window and operated by external buttons, residents and visitors can now find out about the Kensington Residents' Association and community activities, as well as details of the Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project and the native plants found in the park.

Dolomite paths

In 2024 the unpaved paths were refreshed using quartzite, rendering them more attractive and safer for park users.

Forward planning

Much of the fixed plant ID signage in Borthwick Park has deteriorated. A sub-project to design and instal signage featuring QR codes to display information about the native plants and trees in Borthwick Park is in its inception stages.

Other park infrastructure such as the play equipment is aging, and the Kensington Residents' Association is looking to the community for guidance as to how to re-imagine the playgrounds into the future.

The community is a key driver for further change and improvements in the reserve. The Kensington Residents' Association committee is constantly looking for opportunities to extend the remit of the Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project, consulting with residents on an ongoing basis. Residents are encouraged to get involved with adjacent aspects of Borthwick Park, e.g. researching Aboriginal history or European settler use of the park area, education, nature play and making homes for birds, bats, butterflies, native bees, lizards or frogs.

Biodiversity Officer

With the increasing impacts of climate change, the need for a cooler, greener city is imperative. The Kensington Residents' Association would like to see stronger environmental outcomes implemented across the City in terms of conservation and land management as well as tree protection, tree planting programs, verge plantings and sustainability across all levels of Council activity.

The Kensington Residents' Association committee strongly supports the need for a full-time Biodiversity Officer to be employed by the City to work at a senior level to help achieve City Plan 2030 Outcome 4.3. This role would include input into Council planning and strategic decision-making as well as guiding practices in council parks and gardens.

Community events

In 2019 the Association won the Australia Day Community Event of the Year for its 'Cultures of Kensington Long Lunch' held in Borthwick Park at the end of 2017.

In 2022 and again in 2024, Kensington Residents' Association committee members hosted the Council's Works team at a barbeque lunch to show residents' appreciation for the Council's efforts maintaining local parks and supporting the Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project.

On Clean Up Australia Day in March, residents meet in Borthwick Park, disperse across Kensington to pick up rubbish, then return to the park for a barbeque. The Kensington Residents' Association has been organising annual Clean Up Australia Day events for more than 20 years.

In June 2023, a well-attended and moving Kurna smoking ceremony was held in the park thanks to a grant from Foundation SA. This cleansing ceremony was led by Jack Kanya Buckskin (pictured below) and Steven Warrior.



Other regular community events held in Borthwick Park include *Dog's Breakfast* gatherings of dogs and owners, annual *Blessing of the Animals* led by St Ignatius Parish, plant swaps, musical celebrations by *VoiceStyle* students and the Kensington Residents' Association *Pizza in the Park* held every October since 2020.

Grants and awards

The Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project has been awarded several grants and awards:

- 2011 award from the Australian Civic Trust;
- Two grants from the Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges Natural Resource Management Board including one received in 2012 for signage and another received in 2018 for KRA's Bird and Bat Citizen Science Project;
- Council grants for purchase of park signage in 2016 and for the volunteer shed in 2021;
- Commendation in the City of Norwood, Payneham and St Peters Sustainable Garden Awards 2016;
- Federal government funding for gardening tools and a defibrillator (2022);
- Grant funding from Foundation SA (2022) for the 2023 Kurna smoking ceremony (see *Community Events* above) which later received recognition as Council's Community Event of the Year 2023;
- 2023 federal government funding awarded to KRA to develop the Digital Community Info-board in Borthwick Park;
- 2023 Council community funding to purchase the street library now installed in the park;
- The community value of the Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project was also acknowledged in 2023 by the awarding of Norwood, Payneham & St Peters Citizen of the Year for John Legg, who has led the project since 2009.

The ongoing support of the Kensington community, the City of Norwood, Payneham & St Peters and Green Adelaide is greatly appreciated by the Kensington Residents' Association.



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President
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Bank of Second Creek, 2010.

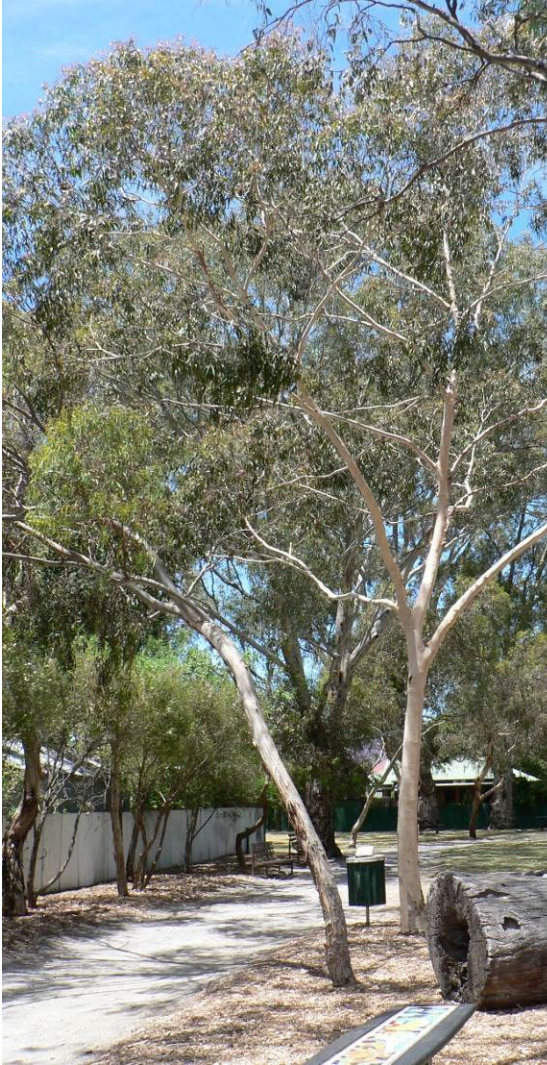
Top: site of existing Sheoak Grove 2014
Below: Sheoak Grove 2022



Richmond Street entrance 2014 (left)



Richmond Street entrance 2022(right)

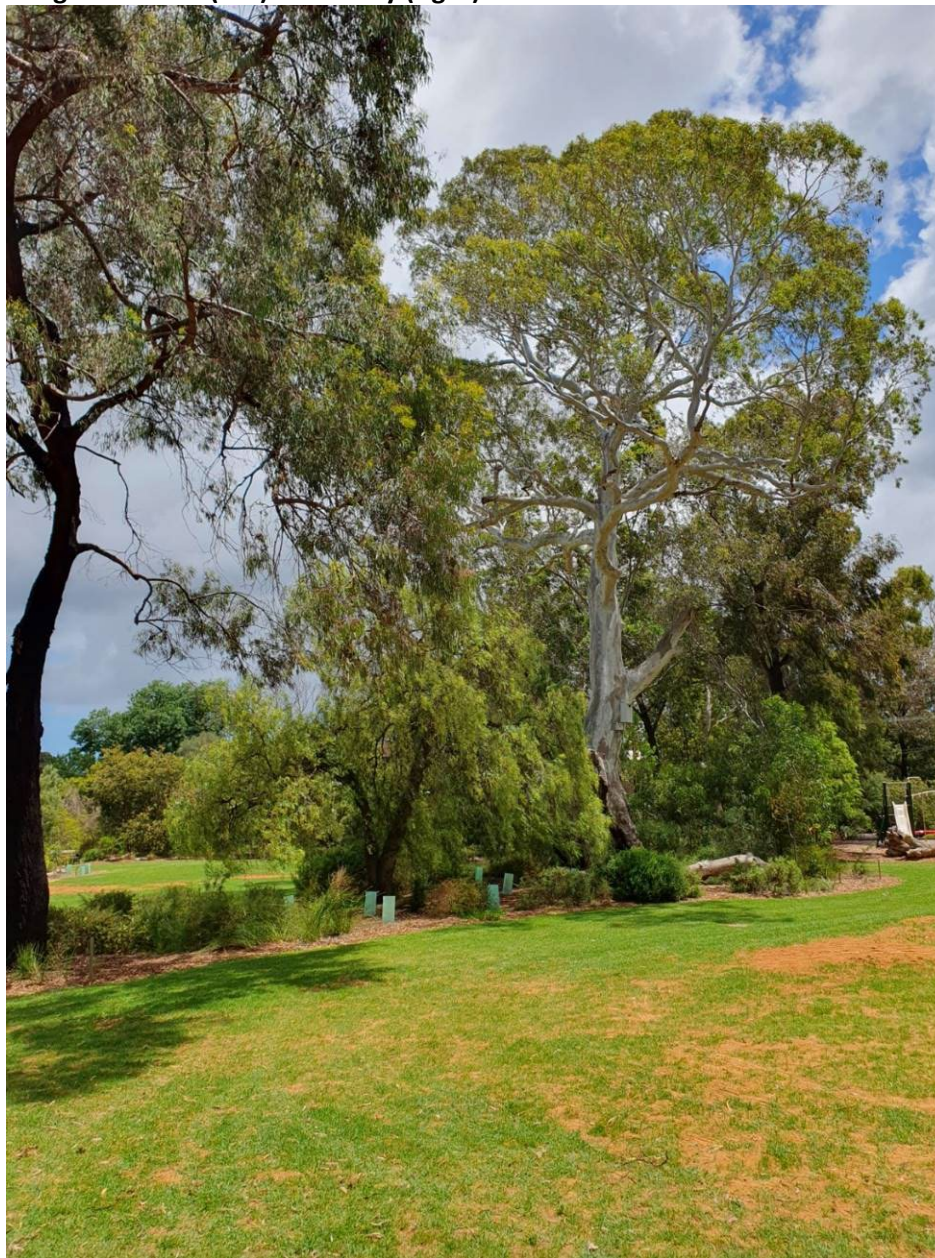


Entrance from Thornton St, 2014

Entrance from Thornton St 2022



Central Redgum in 2014 (left) and today (right)



Right: Nature play and creek works in 2024

Below: Same spot, Second Creek, 2010



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