

ADDENDUM

4.1 RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS PUBLIC QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE

This addendum provides responses to public questions taken on notice at the 10 October 2018 Ordinary Meeting of Council.

Mr Rick Ensley of 32 Merchant Street, Margaret River, asked the following questions at the 10 October 2018 Ordinary Meeting of Council, in relation to the mass planting to the north of Wallcliffe Road and Merchant Reserve:

‘Each question can be answered in two parts:

- **The mass planting to the north of Wallcliffe Road dual use path west of east Kevill and east of Trinder drive; and**
- **The planting in Merchant Reserve, north of Wallcliffe between Railway Terrace and Merchant Street.**

Q1: Can Council provide me with written advice on:

- a) How plant types and species were selected and their numbers?**
- b) How the timing of planting was determined?**
- c) The intended purpose and outcome of these plantings?**
- d) The cost breakdown of plants, bags, stakes and labour?**
- e) The percentage survival planned for?**

A1:

- a) A variety of plant types were selected based on the limited availability of seedlings and the health of available tube stock at the time. The Shire opportunistically purchased a large number of seedlings for a range of sites and the exact number and types planted at these sites has not been recorded in an itemised list. A number of species were chosen on anticipated access to portions of John Archibald Drive; however, access to this site did not eventuate, resulting in a need to install some plants in areas not initially planned to receive those species.
- b) The timing of planting was guided by seasonal weather patterns, availability of resources and under consideration of competing projects. This year has been one of the wettest winters for some time and it was considered that the plants had received sufficient water for establishment given that there will be some expected losses.
- c) The intended purpose is to provide understorey and infill planting in order to improve local amenity and provide a small biodiversity corridor and vegetation buffer along Wallcliffe Road. Planting of this area is also anticipated to reduce weed management efforts. The outcome is dependent on plant survival, which in turn is influenced by climatic and soil conditions, trampling and animal attack, plant disease, as well as initial condition at the time of planting.
- d) This is considered to be commercial in confidence information which may prejudice future purchasing activity for similar projects and provide inequality in the quotation process, if it were to be released to the public and competing contractors.
- e) This has not been specified and relies on a number of factors. The anticipated survival rates will also vary in relation to the location of planting. A higher planting density has been chosen to account for some sacrificial planting as well as some loss of tube stock in order to ultimately achieve a reasonable understorey.

Q2: Having known and worked with and under your Environmental Officer for many years, I'm absolutely certain these plantings were not of their decision. Who was responsible for the design and planning and what other groups or experts were consulted? Especially, what was the logic used to only plant on the north side of the Wallcliffe Track?

A2: Planting was undertaken by the Shire utilising in-house staff as well as a contractor. The project planning and design was the result of discussion with in-house staff, including trained

horticultural staff, environment staff and an external contractor. The northern side of the Wallcliffe Road dual use path was chosen to maintain passive surveillance of the path from the road and vice versa, as well as low fuel separation zones close to Wallcliffe Road, as this road performs an important function for access in emergencies.

Q3: Are Council aware that the bags and stakes have generally been installed in such a way as to be ineffective for purpose?

A3: There may be an issue with the installation of some of the tree protection sleeves, insofar that some of the stakes could have been spaced further apart and hammered in more deeply into the ground as to stretch and thereby secure protection sleeves more tightly. Notwithstanding this observation, these protection sleeves have satisfactorily withstood a number of severe weather events, with damaging winds and dangerous gusts in excess of 100 kilometres per hour, with little to no loss, and they continue to provide a level of protection to seedlings from humans and animals, e.g. kangaroos, dogs or rabbits, and create a microclimate inside the sleeve which may aid plant growth. This is especially the case when rain collects and moisture runs down the side of the plastic. This may assist the survival rate of seedlings. Hence, protection sleeves will still be effective for purpose.

Q4: Having inspected the site on three evenings following plantings I noticed a lack of rootball teasing where appropriate, proper firming in, pruning, or even watering in. Is Council satisfied with the qualifications, experience and expertise of those responsible for the physical planting?

A4: Inspection of root ball teasing post planting requires removal of the plant from the planting hole. With the high number of plants used as part of this project, it would be difficult to arrive at such a conclusion or to generalise on a perceived lack of plant preparation during three cursory inspections. Notwithstanding, it is unfortunate that observations of a perceived lack of root ball teasing as well as suggestions of improper firming in, pruning, or even watering in were not raised directly and immediately with the Shire at the time and on the day following these three inspections, as this would have allowed the Shire to take appropriate improvement actions where necessary and at a time when planting was still new. In this way, any confirmed issues could have possibly been remediated and improved the chance of plant survival. It should be noted that parts of the Wallcliffe Road site were the subject of a post planting inspection following heavy rainfall, where large numbers of plants were inspected and replanted. The majority of the plants were installed during heavy rainfall and into damp soil and watering in was not considered necessary. Qualifications, experience and expertise of staff or contractors working for the Shire and their performance are all sensitive employee records and the information relating to employee and/or management issues are therefore confidential in nature and cannot be disclosed in public.

Q5: Can Council explain the logic of species selection particularly with respect to the very small numbers of marri, pebbie and their associated understorey species that support local fauna?

A5: Answer to question Q1 refers. In addition, the species selection for these sites was based on site constraints, including existing tree canopy cover and plant availability. The Shire acknowledges the fact that a great diversity of native plants has been utilised in this project and plant selection has not been ideal. The planting could have been more coordinated and better executed; however, this is in part due to external factors preventing access to planned planting sites. There are shortcomings and opportunities for improvement. The Shire is a learning organisation and has embarked on the development of a procedure and more holistic approach to the implementation and quality control of similar projects to be followed in the future.

Q6: Can Council assure me and the community that no funds earmarked for environmental purposes were used in these plantings?

A6: Yes. Funds utilised were solely sourced from the operational maintenance budget.

Q7: What were the anticipated costs to support these plantings and will Council provide myself and the community with an assessment of the costs, survival rates and outcomes for these plantings on the 1 May 2019?'

A7: No specific budget has been established for the support of these plantings into the future and this will be managed under the operational provisions for maintenance. The Shire's does not currently track this expenditure in relation to individual verges. The site is publicly accessible allowing assessment of survival rates and the outcome of plantings.

Q8: Can Council guarantee me and the community that any such further mass plantings will be undertaken after consultation with appropriate local environmental groups? If not, why not?

A8: Where possible the Shire will endeavour to consult with relevant stakeholders in the planning of future projects of this nature. Consultation on projects is guided by the Shire's Community Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement Policy. This requires community engagement in policy-making and key projects, with key projects for the Shire being defined as any organisational project that falls within the following criteria:

- Projects classified as a major project – projects with a budget of \$150,000 plus
- Projects flagged as a CEO Priority
- Projects involving multiple funding providers or are politically sensitive, or
- Projects involving issues which may be high risk.

Hence, the Shire will not always consult local environmental groups on projects of this nature, as this would require significant additional resources to enable consultation processes for minor projects or operational works of a lower value. The Shire needs to be mindful of potential conflicts of interest in the process of consultation as local environmental groups also carry out rehabilitation work and employ local contractors, and may be in competition for these projects.