



BRANCHING OUT

Implementation Plan
2026 - 2036

DRAFT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Surf Coast Shire Council acknowledges the Wadawurrung People, and Gulidjan and Gadubanud Peoples of the Eastern Maar, their Elders and leaders past, present and emerging as the Traditional Owners of the skies, land, waters and sea country across our municipality. We acknowledge their care and custodianship for more than 60,000 years, which continues today. We walk with them as we respectfully care for and tread lightly on these lands. We also extend that respect to all First Nations people who are part of the community.



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- Surf Coast Shire Council stakeholders
- Community contributors

Disclaimer

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VISION

Surf Coast Shire has a resilient tree network that enhances township character, cools communities, and supports biodiversity for the future.

OUR TARGETS

Increase canopy cover across Surf Coast Shire's township study area from 28.9% to 32% by 2036.

Achieve a minimum two-year establishment survival rate of 85%
No single species to make up more than 10% of new planting.

OUR OBJECTIVES

1. Expand canopy through a place-based approach
 2. Strengthen integration, planning and delivery
 3. Support tree performance, diversity and community
 4. Build the systems for long-term delivery
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OUR DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Different township conditions and planting opportunities warrant a place-based response and species selection.



01 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Implementation Plan

The Branching Out Implementation Plan sets the long-term direction for how Surf Coast Shire Council will plan, plant, establish, manage and renew its public tree population across the Shire's townships and public places. It provides a practical framework for translating Council's township-based tree planting goals into coordinated on-ground action, with a clear focus on deliverability, place-based responses and long-term management.

It brings together the evidence, priorities and practical steps needed to move from broad ambition to implementation, ensuring that public trees are planned and managed as essential infrastructure that supports township character, climate resilience, community wellbeing and liveability.

For the purposes of this Implementation Plan, the primary focus is on public trees located within streets, roadsides, parks, reserves, open space and other Council-managed public land within the defined urban study area.



02 STRATEGIC VISION

2.1 Strategic Vision

Surf Coast Shire has a resilient tree network that enhances township character, cools communities, and supports biodiversity for the future.

Through careful and coordinated planning, planting and management, public trees will be recognised as essential community infrastructure, shaping streets, parks and public spaces that are greener, more connected and better adapted to local conditions over time.

2.2 Strategic Objectives

To achieve this vision, four strategic objectives have been identified. These respond to Surf Coast Shire's township variation, public tree focus, environmental conditions and implementation priorities, and provide the framework for strengthening the public trees over time.

This Implementation Plan is structured around a hierarchy that links strategic direction to implementation. The Strategic Objectives set the long-term direction. Goals provide the key focus areas under each objective, and the Action Plan translates these into specific actions.



Objective One

Expand Canopy Through a Place-Based Approach



Objective Two

Strengthen Integration, Planning and Delivery



Objective Three

Support Tree Performance, Diversity and Community



Objective Four

Build the Systems for Long-Term Delivery



Objective One

Expand Canopy Through a Place-Based Approach

Surf Coast Shire's urban canopy has increased overall, but this change has not occurred evenly across townships or land tenures. Public land makes up a relatively small share of the urban area, which means future canopy growth on Council-managed land needs to be carefully targeted to where it can deliver the greatest benefit and be sustained over time. In Surf Coast Shire, this requires a place-based approach that responds to township character, planting opportunity, existing canopy, heat exposure, public land availability and local constraints, including bushfire risk. Expanding canopy across streets, parks and public places is central to this Implementation Plan, particularly where additional shade can improve thermal comfort, and support more liveable and resilient townships.

Focus Areas

- Increase public tree canopy across streets, parks, reserves and other public places through targeted planting, renewal and improved establishment.
- Prioritise canopy expansion in a way that is responsive to bushfire risk, and management requirements.
- Direct planting to locations where additional shade, cooling, amenity and liveability benefits can be most effectively delivered.
- Apply a place-based approach that responds to township variation, local character, planting opportunity and environmental conditions across the Shire.



Objective Two

Strengthen Integration, Planning and Delivery

To strengthen the public trees over time, trees need to be considered as part of the way Council plans, designs and delivers public spaces. In Surf Coast Shire, this means embedding public tree outcomes more consistently into asset management, capital works, streetscape improvement, public space upgrades and development processes, so that trees are planned for early, supported through delivery and recognised as long-term public assets. A stronger focus on integration will help ensure that development and infrastructure projects contribute positively to canopy outcomes, that tree asset value is better understood, and that planting and renewal are supported by clear standards, data and delivery pathways.

Focus Areas

- Integrate public tree outcomes into asset management, capital works, streetscape design and public realm projects from the earliest stages of planning and design.
- Ensure development, subdivision and project delivery processes contribute positively to canopy outcomes and support high-quality, tree planting in the public realm.
- Strengthen the use of tree data and asset valuation to support better planning, prioritisation and long-term decision-making.
- Improve coordination between planning, design and delivery so that public trees are consistently recognised and managed as essential community infrastructure.



Objective Three

Support Tree Performance, Diversity and Community

A successful public tree network is not defined by planting alone, but by how well trees perform over time and how well their value is understood and supported by the community. In Surf Coast Shire, the public tree population needs to respond to a wide range of local conditions, including coastal exposure, varied site conditions, increasing heat and significant bushfire considerations. It also needs to remain diverse and adaptable so that canopy benefits can be sustained over the long term. Supporting tree performance, diversity and community awareness will require a continued focus on climate-responsive species selection, appropriate planting design and clear communication about the role of public trees in shaping safer, cooler and more liveable public places.

Focus Areas

- Strengthen the diversity of the public tree population over time to improve resilience.
- Select and establish trees that are suited to Surf Coast Shire's township conditions, including coastal environments, urban settings and bushfire-affected areas.
- Improve long-term tree performance through appropriate planting design, site preparation and establishment.
- Build community awareness of the value of public trees and support shared understanding of their role in the public realm.



Objective Four

Build Systems for Long-Term Delivery

Growing Surf Coast Shire's public tree network will require more than new planting alone. Long-term success will depend on the systems, information and service standards that support 'whole of life tree' management, from planning and establishment through to maintenance, renewal and monitoring. This includes clear delivery pathways, reliable data, ongoing performance tracking and an integrated approach to implementation that aligns with available resources and operational capacity. It also includes building shared understanding of the value of public trees across Council, so that an organisational culture of greening can support long-term outcomes.

Focus Areas

- Align planting programs with establishment maintenance, proactive maintenance, renewal and replacement to support long-term tree performance.
- Improve tree asset inventory, planting records, monitoring and reporting to support better decision-making and long-term management.
- Deliver the Implementation Plan through a staged and prioritised program that reflects available resources, service and delivery requirements.
- Build awareness of the value of public trees and support shared stewardship by embedding greening as business as usual across Council.

2.3 Targets

The targets for this Implementation Plan focus on Council-managed land and provide a practical framework for guiding delivery and monitoring progress over time. Together, they support canopy growth, stronger tree performance and improved long-term management of Surf Coast Shire's public trees over the next 10 years.

2.3.1 Canopy Target



Increase canopy cover across Surf Coast Shire's township study area from 28.9% to 32% by 2036.

This target provides a clear and measurable direction for canopy growth over the life of the Implementation Plan. It builds on the overall increase in canopy already recorded across the township study area and establishes a practical long-term ambition for urban greening, shade and resilience.

Public Land Contribution

Council will make a significant contribution to the 2036 canopy target through a staged public land planting, renewal and canopy protection program focused on streets, parks, reserves, civic land and other Council-managed public places.

For the purposes of this Implementation Plan, it is assumed that 30% of the additional canopy required to achieve the 2036 target will be delivered through public land programs led by Council, recognising that while public land makes up a relatively small share of the township study area, it is the part Council can most directly influence. This also reflects the Implementation Plan's public tree focus and Council's direct role in planning, planting, managing and renewing the public tree network over time.

What Will It Take to Meet the Target?

Reaching 32% canopy cover by 2036 requires an increase of approximately 3.1%, equivalent to around 1.39 million m² of additional canopy across the township study area.

Under the assumed 30% public land contribution, Council would need to support the delivery of

approximately 416 779m² of additional canopy through streets, parks, reserves and other public places over the life of the Implementation Plan. Based on an indicative mature canopy area of 50 m² per tree, this is equivalent to around **8,340 additional trees at maturity.**

This figure is intended to illustrate the scale of the planting and renewal task.

2.3.2 Planting and Establishment Targets

Support canopy growth through a staged planting and renewal program focused on identified priority locations across the Shire.

- Deliver new planting across priority streets, parks and public places identified through the planting opportunity and prioritisation analysis.
- Achieve a minimum two-year establishment survival rate of 85% for new planting.
- Ensure all new planting is supported by establishment maintenance and monitoring.

2.3.3 Diversity and Resilience Targets

Strengthen the resilience and long-term performance of the public tree population through more diverse future planting.

- No single species is to make up more than **10%** of new planting.
- No single genus is to make up more than **40%** of new planting.
- All new planting is to be assessed for climate readiness and suitability to local conditions, including coastal exposure, bushfire risk, available growing space and surrounding infrastructure.

2.3.4 Monitoring and System Targets

Support long-term delivery through improved data, reporting and asset integration, by:

- Progressively incorporating tree asset valuation into Council's asset and decision-making systems over the life of the Implementation Plan.

2.4 Place-Based Strategic Response

A place-based approach is central to this Implementation Plan. While the Strategic Objectives provide a consistent direction across Surf Coast Shire, the way they are applied will need to respond to the different township conditions, landscape settings, planting opportunities and constraints across the Shire. This means canopy expansion, species selection, design responses and implementation priorities will not be the same in every location.

In coastal townships, the public trees will need to respond to highly visible public realm settings, coastal exposure, sandy soils and strong landscape character. In these areas, planting and renewal should focus on species and design approaches that can perform in exposed conditions while strengthening shade, amenity and township identity.

In inland townships and more sheltered urban areas, there may be greater opportunity to strengthen canopy across streets, parks and civic spaces, including through larger-canopy species where site conditions allow. These areas may also offer stronger opportunities to build long-term shade and reinforce local character.

In growth and change areas, the focus should be on embedding trees early through streetscape planning, subdivision design, open space delivery and public realm projects. In these locations, a place-based response means ensuring public trees are planned from the outset so that there is space provided for trees and canopy can establish as townships evolve, rather than being retrofitted later.

In constrained or bushfire-affected areas, the response will need to be more tailored. Planting and renewal should reflect local safety requirements, defensible space, infrastructure constraints, available growing space and long-term maintenance considerations. In these areas, the aim is not simply to maximise planting, but to achieve canopy outcomes that are appropriate, safe and sustainable in context.

Taken together, this place-based approach ensures the Implementation Plan can be applied consistently across the Shire while still responding to the different conditions that shape public tree outcomes in each township.

2.5 Species Design Principles

Appropriate species selection is critical to delivering a resilient, climate-ready and well-performing public trees across Surf Coast Shire's coastal and hinterland townships. Species selection influences tree survival, canopy performance, public safety, maintenance requirements, biodiversity outcomes and township character. For this reason, future planting, renewal and replacement should be guided by clear and consistent principles that support the right tree in the right location.

Principle One – Climate ready and suited to local conditions

Species should be selected for their ability to perform under current and future climatic conditions, including higher temperatures, longer dry periods, irregular rainfall and, where relevant, coastal wind and salt exposure. Indigenous and native species will continue to play an important role, but other species may also be appropriate where they demonstrate strong performance and suitability to township conditions.

In practice, this means selecting trees that are proven or likely to establish successfully in Surf Coast Shire's urban environments and provide reliable canopy over time.

Principle Two – Responsive to bushfire risk and township safety

Species selection and planting design must respond to the significant bushfire considerations that apply across parts of the Shire. In bushfire-affected areas, species choice, planting density and placement should support defensible space, emergency access, sightlines and broader settlement safety requirements.

In practice, this means designing planting outcomes that balance shade, amenity and character with local bushfire planning and long-term risk management.

Principle Three – Supportive of biodiversity

Species selection should contribute positively to biodiversity outcomes where appropriate, including habitat value, pollinator support and ecological connectivity. At the same time, it should avoid creating new ecological or management risks, including weed potential, hybridisation with local flora, or species that may contribute to pest problems in township areas.

In practice, this means selecting species and planting combinations that support biodiversity in a practical and locally appropriate way.

Principle Four – Matched to soils, space and infrastructure

Species must be suited to the physical conditions of each site, including soil type, drainage, available soil volume and surrounding built form. Selection should also respond to powerlines, underground services, footpaths, sightlines and other infrastructure constraints so trees can establish successfully and perform well over time.

In practice, this means matching tree size, form and rooting requirements to the available growing space and surrounding infrastructure from the outset.

Principle Five – Reflective of township character and place

Species selection should strengthen the distinct landscape character of Surf Coast Shire's townships and public places. Planting should respond to the different identities of coastal, hinterland and rural townships, and where appropriate reflect cultural values and opportunities for locally significant species.

In practice, this means avoiding a one-size-fits-all planting approach and using species that reinforce local place character.

Principle Six – Diverse, safe and managed as a long-term asset

A resilient public tree population requires diversity across species, genus, form and age class.

Species selection should also consider public safety and long-term suitability in high-use public spaces, including structural reliability, limb drop risk and maintenance requirements.

In practice, this means avoiding over-reliance on a narrow range of trees and selecting species that are appropriate to both the site and the way the space is used.

Principle Seven – Applied consistently across planning, delivery and renewal

These principles should be applied consistently through future planting lists, capital works, streetscape projects, development requirements, renewal planning and community planting initiatives.

In practice, this means using a shared decision-making framework so species selection is guided by long-term strategy rather than short-term preference.