

MAXIMISING THE VALUE OF THE PUBLIC SPACE KNOWN AS 'THE VERGE'

Video link: <https://youtu.be/-2dKsltds7I>

Permission Statement: A summary report of the Pre-Challenge Task submission will be prepared and distributed to the sector as a resource after the Management Challenge. Any material which is copied or quoted from the task will be attributed as ideas or opinions of team members, but may not represent those of their councils. Pre-Challenge Task videos may also be used at sector event and as an online resource material.



CITY OF
ADELAIDE



INTRODUCTION

The verge, also known as the nature strip, is an integral part of the streetscape as it represents the space where the public and private realm meets. Verges can significantly influence the appearance of an area; they are a place of gathering and can foster social interaction between community members.

The topic is focused on maximising the value of verges across the City and how the City of Adelaide (CoA) can better work with the community to improve this space. For the purposes of engagement, 'the verge' is defined as...

"The space between the footpath and the road or alternatively, the space between private and public property"

This report has been prepared by 'sixinthecity' on behalf of CoA. It demonstrates how the team chose the topic of verges as one that would benefit from real community engagement and investigation. The report also outlines the engagement process undertaken with management and the community before presenting the findings and recommended actions for Council.

PHASE ONE: ENGAGEMENT WITH MANAGEMENT

'Sixinthecity' engaged with senior management¹ from a range of program areas to understand potential issues currently faced by CoA. To obtain a good cross-section of the organisation, the team met with managers in Commercial Operations, Customer Relations, and Community & Culture to discuss issues of key concern for their area. Potential issues raised that could benefit from community feedback included an action plan for diving boards at the Aquatic Centre, litter control reform, smoking in Rundle Mall, and the use of verges around the City.

After engaging with management, it was clear that the issue of verges impacted on many different program areas such as Community & Culture, Public Realm and Customer Relations. Therefore to deliver a successful outcome, a collaborative effort across the organisation and with the community is required. In addition, the issue aligns with CoA's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan (Box A) and is relevant to all councils as demonstrated by the recent media coverage on the maintenance of verges in Tea Tree Gully Council and Bayswater Council in Western Australia.^{2 3}

Box A - Alignment with City of Adelaide's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan

The City of Adelaide 2016-2020 Strategic Plan consists of four key themes – Smart, Green, Liveable and Creative. The topic of verges aligns directly with the following Green actions:

- Work with all City stakeholders to increase public and private greening with trees, gardens, community gardens, green walls and roofs, providing incentives where appropriate
- Work with local communities on public greening activities that will beautify streets and parks

To better understand the topic from an organisational perspective, 'sixinthecity' met with Associate Director of Public Realm to identify some of the practical limitations around the utilisation of verges. Further engagement with Acting Associate Director Community & Culture provided a better understanding of the issue and how it was being addressed from a community and broader local government perspective. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of CoA was consulted and provided a higher level overview of what he would like to see happen within these spaces. The CEO emphasised the importance of these spaces on providing amenity and value to the community.

Engagement with CoA management demonstrated that verges were a current and relevant topic to local government, which has a strong impact on the community. It is therefore important that CoA and the community work together to maximise the value of this space for all.

¹ [Click here](#) for a list of senior management we engaged with.

² 'Long grass long northeast roads have upset Tea Tree Gully residents and ward councillor Lucas Jones', Online Adelaide Messenger, 23/1/2017,

³ 'Get out there and do it': Perth council ditches street verge rulebook', WA Today, 27/2/2017,

PHASE TWO: ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY

Prior to engaging with the community, the team worked with Council's Community Engagement team to ensure that the processes used to obtain feedback were consistent with corporate guidelines and policies. A series of brainstorming sessions and meetings were held to identify and develop the methodologies for engagement. Face-to-face interviews and an online survey were selected as the final engagement tools. The use of multiple engagement techniques meant that the team could easily target different stakeholders such as residents, business owners, property owners, and general city users.

The next step was to identify interviewees and develop questions to ensure that the information collected from the engagement was consistent and could be analysed to inform the final recommendations. Using open-ended questions for the interview, the team gathered community feedback on the perceptions of verges, what the community liked and disliked, and ideas for improvement. These questions (Box B), along with background information on verges, were provided to the eight community members prior to interview.

Box B – Interview questions for community members

1. What is currently on your verge if anything? Is this consistent for your area?
2. Do you use the verge in your area for anything? If so, what for?
3. Is there anything you'd like to change about the verges in your area? If yes, what kind of changes would you like to see?
4. If there are no limitations, what would you like to see or do on your local verges?
5. How important do you think verges are in terms of contributing to the overall aesthetics of an area?

The online survey questions were developed to be consistent with the open-ended interview questions though in a shorter format. The purpose of the online survey was to explore the extent to which the community valued verges, the perceived challenges that existed in the management of verges, and what community members wanted to see on verges. A link to the survey was distributed to a number of city users and wider community networks to ensure a good coverage of respondents.

PHASE THREE: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In total, face-to-face interviews were conducted with a sample of six residents and two business owners and 140 online surveys were completed by residents, city workers and tourists. While there were varied perceptions of verges, the themes of 'green', 'responsibility', 'maintenance' and 'edible plants' were common throughout. Another key underlying theme was the ability for verges to facilitate a sense of community within the local neighbourhood. The key themes from the interviews and survey are summarised below (Box C).

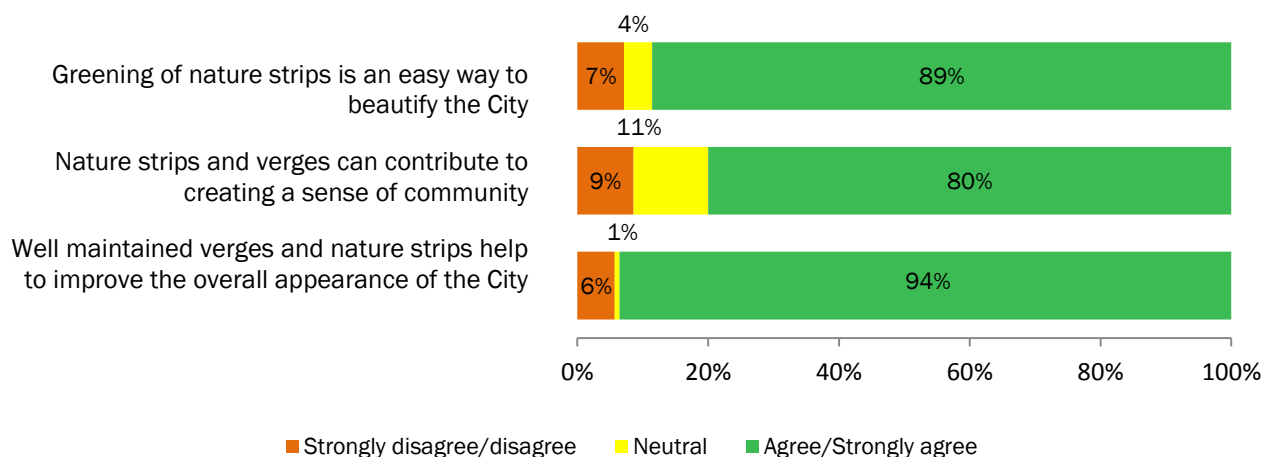
Box C – Key themes from interviews

- Verges are recognised as a way to green and beautify the City.
- Well maintained and green verges are valued in the streetscape.
- Verges contribute to social connections in the neighbourhood and create a 'sense of community' and shared responsibility
- Community members like having uniform appearance and consistency in verges, but also like having flexibility around plantings
- Community gardens with different edible plants would be popular

Feedback from the interviews indicated there was a strong preference for greenery in verges whether it was trees, grass or planter boxes as it helped with the aesthetics of the urban environment. This was consistent with the online survey results where 89% of respondents thought greening was an easy way to beautify the City.

Four out of five survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed that verges contributed to creating a sense of community. This was achieved by bringing members together on the shared space or having a sense

of shared responsibility for maintenance. This was also reflected in the feedback gathered from the interviews.



While most community members agreed that well-maintained verges helped to improve the overall appearance of the City, there were differing opinions as to whether the responsibility of maintaining verges should sit with CoA or the community. Some community members felt that CoA should have more of a facilitator role in uniting the community to look after verges. Alternatively some thought that it should be a joint responsibility while others were happy to be solely responsible for maintaining their verges.

Community feedback also indicated that a number of respondents were happy with their current verge arrangements while others felt let down by areas where they were poorly maintained or lacked greenery.

As a result of this engagement process, an additional \$100,000 is being considered for the 2017-18 budget process to further develop verges. All or part of this funding could contribute towards the recommended actions outlined in the following section.

PHASE FOUR: RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

While verges are owned by CoA, having a joint responsibility for maintenance and providing the community with more of a say appears to be the most effective way of maximising the use of these public spaces. In light of these findings, 'sixinthecity' recommends the following (Box D):

Box D – Recommended actions

- Refresh CoA's existing Nature Strip Program to raise the profile of the program with the wider community
- Conduct further community engagement to gain a more in-depth understanding of how CoA and the community can work together to maximise the value and appeal of verges across the City
- Develop a communication piece with clear and consistent messaging to raise awareness within the community on the use of verges
- Set up a working group across the organisation including staff from the Public Realm and Community & Culture programs to identify pilot sites for verge improvements and actively engage with those communities around use of the space

Verges are an important part of the local streetscape and have the ability to improve the aesthetics of a local area. Feedback showed that the community definitely thought that there were more ways to maximise their current value, which could be achieved by adding greenery, giving the community more of a say on what goes in, or on verges, and identifying further opportunities for collaboration between Council and the community.