

Draft Urban Forest Policy

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1. Purpose

Randwick City Council covers an area of 37.42 square kilometres. The local government area (LGA) is an urbanised environment with diverse land uses including residential, town centres, special uses, and community land.

Randwick City is known for its extensive parkland and open space areas including Centennial Park, Heffron Park and two National Parks, Malabar Headland and Kamay Botany. These areas provide the backbone to our local urban forest.

A healthy urban forest provides significant aesthetic and ecological benefits to both people and the environment. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Enhancing biodiversity and habitat
- Providing shade to mitigate the urban heat island effect
- Enhancing the streetscape and creating a sense of place
- Increasing social and health and wellbeing
- Carbon sequestration and reducing energy consumption
- Facilitating land stabilisation and erosion reduction
- Reducing stormwater run-off and supporting water sensitive urban design
- Improving air quality
- Traffic calming

Randwick Council recognises that the tree canopy is a primary feature and critical component of the urban forest which requires effective management now and for the future. This policy focuses on how we will protect, enhance and manage public and private trees within the Randwick LGA as part of a functioning urban forest. To proactively manage the broader urban forest this policy will be supported by a suite of documents including an Urban Forest Strategy that incorporates a masterplan, register of significant trees, technical manual and procedures. The framework is illustrated in Appendix A.

The Randwick City urban forest has been established over time within a highly developed urban area. It contains a variety of tree species of different size, age, and level of significance in the landscape, including trees identified in our Register of Significant Trees.

We will continue our program of increasing the tree canopy cover in the City, delivering a range of positive outcomes for the environment and the community. We will focus on growing and enhancing the City's tree canopy to support the delivery of an established urban forest, aiming to reach a target of 22% canopy cover by 2040.

Our urban forest programs will support local resilience, aiming to increase biodiversity, reduce urban heat and support emissions reduction. Planting a variety of species will diversify the composition of our urban forest to assist it to respond to climatic changes. As urban heat becomes an increasing problem in densely populated areas, we will work closely with our community to establish trees in areas vulnerable to high urban temperatures. Cooler active travel routes and shading of buildings will support the community to reduce emissions.

1.1. Policy Objectives

The objectives of the Urban Forest Policy are to:

- prioritise the protection and management of trees as a critical part of the urban forest across the LGA

- develop planting programs to improve the quality and quantity of the Randwick City tree canopy cover
- broaden the approach of tree management to include urban forestry principles.
- balance the urban forest against the management of built infrastructure including the interface with private property
- develop management principles for tree selection, maintenance, removal and replacement in accordance with the Street Tree Masterplan
- manage trees as a collective, to maximise the benefits that canopy cover provides the community
- increase species diversity and improve the age spread of the urban forest to mitigate the effects of climate change
- manage and maintain trees for public safety including safe work practices
- increase awareness and educate our community, utilities, developers, and staff on the value of trees and the benefits they provide in the urban landscape
- reduce the incidence of tree vandalism
- enhance wildlife corridors
- manage our trees as important assets by identifying our trees and maintaining relevant data in our tree asset management system including tree information, tree assessments and maintenance

2. Scope

This Policy has been developed for and applies to the urban forest within the Randwick LGA. Trees are a significant component of the urban forest, together forming the tree canopy, and have complex management requirements.

This Policy details management principles and practices in relation to all trees that contribute towards the tree canopy cover, and thus urban forest, located within the Randwick City Council local government area (LGA). This includes trees on public streets, private land, and in parks and bushland settings.

3. Value of Our Trees

Protecting areas of bushland and biodiversity and increasing tree canopy cover across the LGA are key priorities for the Randwick community, as reflected in the City of Randwick Environmental Strategy 2022 and our Local Strategic Planning Statement 2036.

Through these plans Council is improving the connectivity of key bushland areas by planting and maintaining 14,000m² of native and indigenous ground covers, shrubs and trees. Planting is undertaken in areas between Kamay National Park, Bunnerong Road Chifley Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub, Yarra Bay bushland areas, Malabar Headland National Park and spreads throughout the City.

We are also preserving native habitat by mapping and conducting flora or fauna surveys covering 10% of Council's managed bushland each year. A key objective is to measure the density and extent of threatened native flora and fauna species against that of introduced or competing pest plant or animal species (e.g. foxes).

Climate change response requires two key aspects - reducing our emissions and increasing the resilience of our environment and community to handle extreme events and long-term changes. Council is taking action through our street tree planting programs, development controls on private land and community engagement programs. Every tree, plant and bush established, helps to reduce emissions, sequester carbon, provide shade and generally future proof our local area.

3.1. Tree Species Selection and Planting

Randwick City Council will proactively identify opportunities to increase tree canopy cover across the local government area. Improving the quality of the canopy cover will be achieved through planting tree species that are suitable for the location and site conditions. Quality planting processes will be followed, including species selection, nursery stock quality, planting specifications and tree establishment.

Our urban forest is a mix of indigenous, native, exotic, evergreen, and deciduous trees. Each has an important role to play. We recognise that species diversity is essential for managing pests and diseases, attracting a diverse range of fauna and providing shade and cooling to the urban environment during summer. Our planting programs include a diverse range of trees and this will ensure future resilience and vibrancy of the urban forest.

3.1.1. Increasing Canopy Cover

According to baseline data from the NSW Government Randwick City Council has a relatively low tree canopy cover compared to other metropolitan Sydney councils. Lower canopy coverage is seen in the suburbs in the south of the LGA such as Malabar, Little Bay, La Perouse and Port Botany. There is higher canopy coverage in the north of the City.

We will continue to identify new tree planting opportunities for streets, parks and properties to achieve the canopy cover target and to deliver ongoing environmental, economic, and social benefits. To do this we will:

- develop tree planting programs as part of our capital works program
- incorporate development controls to protect and enhance trees on private property
- continue community programs, such as the 'Request a Tree' program whereby homeowners can request a tree to be planted in the nature strip outside the property.
- continue to use the NSW Governments tree canopy cover measurement to assess progress towards the canopy target and identify priority areas.

4. Protecting Our Trees

Randwick City Council recognises the social, economic, and environmental benefits that the urban forest provides. The enhancement, management and protection of trees on private and public land is given high priority in Councils' operational, regulatory and work activities. The relevant Tree Management controls in the State Environmental Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021 (SEPP) and the Randwick City Council's Development Control Plan (DCP) provide the main statutory controls for the protection of all trees located within the Randwick City Council local government area.

4.1. Private trees

4.1.1. Tree Inspection and Assessment

We use tree inspection and assessment procedures, based on recognised industry standards, to ensure consistency in the approach to inspection, assessment and determining tree management outcomes. We will engage consulting arborists to undertake assessments where independent assessment is required or to provide specialist services.

Applications to remove trees on private property will be assessed and determined in accordance with this Policy and the relevant planning controls (SEPP and DCP).

4.1.2. Tree Management Controls – SEPP and DCP

We regulate tree pruning and tree removal through the relevant planning controls. This includes the State Environmental Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021 (SEPP) and the Randwick City Council Development Control Plan (DCP). The DCP outlines circumstances where a permit is required and where tree works or tree removals are exempt.

We assess and determine tree applications for trees located on private property either through a permit or development application process, depending on the tree and/or the property's heritage significance.

We require works to be undertaken by qualified arborists to Australian Standard AS4373 - *Pruning of amenity trees* (2007) to ensure quality pruning work is achieved.

Council will manage landscaping and tree cover through controls within our DCP. New development, or alterations and additions that changes the existing site coverage by more than 10%, must demonstrate that a minimum of 22% canopy coverage of the site can be achieved within 10 years from the completion of development.

We will ensure diverse tree species selection is compatible with the species list in the Randwick City Council Street Tree Masterplan based on the specific site planting conditions, and in accordance with the landscaping requirements.

4.1.3. Neighbouring Trees

We accept applications for the pruning of a tree located in a neighbouring property, however, applications for the removal of a tree in a neighbouring property will not be accepted without the tree owners' written consent.

Council does not have the authority or legislative powers to order a person to prune or remove a tree, unless they are a species of plant declared a biosecurity risk.

Tree issues between neighbours is a civil matter and Council will not usually negotiate or intervene to resolve disputes between neighbours. Property owners are advised to seek

mediation services or to apply to have the matter considered in the NSW Land and Environment Court.

The privacy value of a tree is not considered a sufficient reason to refuse an application for removal. The obligation to protect privacy lies with the owner of the property.

4.1.4. Register of Significant Trees

We recognise trees that contribute to the environmental, cultural, and social character of our local area through the Register of Significant Trees. We prioritise the retention and protection of significant trees for their heritage significance.

Recommendations to remove a tree listed in our Register of Significant Trees will be reported to the Council outlining the reasons to substantiate the recommended removal.

4.1.5. Development – Tree Protection

We require development applications to include all necessary information to allow full assessment of potential impacts on all trees to be retained, information on trees to be removed and details on replacement plantings to assist us to achieve the required canopy cover targets.

We require the protection of trees from construction works and other activities or events that threaten to impact their health and stability. The Australian Standard AS4970 – *Protection of trees on development sites* (2009) will be used to achieve consistency in tree protection requirements.

We will impose damage deposits (refundable if there is no damage) via consent conditions on developers to ensure the protection of trees to be retained.

We will ensure that construction hoardings on footpaths are built in such a way to protect trees to be retained. Trees will not be permitted to be removed for the provision of construction hoardings.

Exempt and Complying Development

The requirement for tree protection, removal, pruning, and setbacks associated with exempt and complying development is assessed by a private certifier and must be in accordance with the requirements of the State Environmental Planning Policy (Exempt and Complying Codes) 2008.

Where Council officers become aware that there is a noncompliance with the SEPP, Council may request the NSW Fair Trading to investigate the matter.

We will assess requests to remove street trees associated with exempt and complying development for Complying Development Certificates (CDCs) as part of civil works applications. The assessment will consider the tree species, size, health, form, and the importance in the landscape.

Any approved street tree removals for a CDC shall be subject to a Tree Amenity Fee calculated based on the draft Australian Standard DR99307 – *Amenity Trees – Guide to Valuation* which accounts for the cost to replace the canopy.

4.2. Public Trees

4.2.1. Trees and Project Planning

Tree retention, protection and planting will be prioritised when planning Council's capital works projects and maintenance works. Trees will be considered as long-term assets, similar to utilities and the built form.

We will engage with a broad range of practitioners, including developers, planners, landscape architects and engineers to guide them in how best to manage assets, and to plan and deliver projects on private or public property. These efforts will prioritise the retention of trees and recognise them as essential elements of an urban environment.

We will plant street trees in accordance with the Street Tree Masterplan to ensure the coordinated development of streetscapes that are attractive, functional and deliver the appropriate canopy cover for that street. Tree species will be selected based on site suitability, soil conditions, aesthetic, functional attributes, performance, and the potential to contribute to landscape character.

4.2.2. Open Space Trees

We will plant open space trees in accordance with identified tree planting opportunities for example landscape plans, masterplans and tree management plans. This will include planting in town centres to assist in greening, reducing heat and enhancing amenity. In addition to planned tree planting programs, we will also include tree planting in open space upgrade projects. Open space planting will take into consideration the park/reserve location, categorisation, park activities and uses and areas of high biodiversity. Larger tree species will be selected for open spaces to increase our overall tree canopy cover.

4.2.3. Tree Supply Standards

We require quality nursery stock to be planted according to the latest best practice and standards. All trees supplied will conform to the Australian Standard AS2303 - Tree Stock for Landscape Use.

4.2.4. Tree Planting Details

Standard technical specifications and planting techniques are outlined in Randwick City Council's Tree Management Technical Manual and Technical Guidelines for Urban Planting. These documents provide planting requirements to guide Council's teams, contractors and third parties to ensure successful establishment of newly planted trees throughout the LGA.

4.2.5. Tree Establishment

We will undertake tree establishment maintenance, including regular watering, fertilising, formative pruning, and mulching.

4.2.6. Tree Removal

Trees are living things that grow, age and eventually die. Over their lifespan, trees require active management to maintain their health and structure and to minimise potential risks.

The retention of significant, healthy, and structurally sound trees is a priority. Whilst tree removal is a "last resort", public safety always takes priority.

Selective tree removal and replacement planting is part of canopy cover management to ensure that the numerous benefits trees provide are sustained for future generations.

We assess all Council owned trees and undertake tree removal and replacement planting when required.

Decisions on removing trees is delegated to the General Manager to enact except where the tree is:

- a public fig tree or other species of significant size and age that has caused structural damage to public or private property and is not viable to retain;
- OR
- a public tree on Council's Register of Significant Trees

4.2.7. Assessment and Determination

We will use tree assessment procedures, based on industry standards as the basis for consistent decision making for determination of tree removals.

We will approve the removal of trees that are in poor health or have significant structural defects. We will also approve the removal of trees where there is significant damage to an approved habitable structure or significant infrastructure, where it is demonstrated that the tree's removal is the only viable option available to address the issue.

Tree removal will not be approved to facilitate views, to reduce the extent of leaf / flower / fruit drop, support installation of solar panels, or to reduce the impact from any bird / bat / other animal waste or noise.

4.2.8. Emergency Situations

Risk to public safety and property will take priority in tree removal decisions in emergency situations.

4.2.9. Public Tree Removal Notifications

Should a public tree be proposed for removal, community consultation will be undertaken as per the Community Engagement Strategy and section 6.1.1.

4.2.10. Undesirable Tree Species

We will assess and undertake removal and replacement of trees considered a biosecurity risk. The impacts to canopy cover will be a key consideration in removing trees as part of this process.

4.2.11. Tree Vandalism and Unauthorised Tree Works

We will investigate instances of poisoned or damaged trees and unauthorised tree pruning and, removals. The investigation will seek to determine if there has been a breach of this policy and if we can identify the person/s responsible for the vandalism.

Subject to collection of relevant evidence, we will undertake enforcement or, in more serious matters, seek legal advice on pursuing prosecution for the breach.

We will consider retention or delayed removal of vandalised trees and will place notices on trees or in public areas stating that tree/s have been vandalised. In response to vandalism to improve access to views Council may install view blocking screens or similar obstructions. Damaged trees will be managed until they are removed and/or replaced. Offenders may be required to rehabilitate the site, plant new trees and vegetation and maintain until maturity.

4.2.12. Trees and Essential Infrastructure

Trees are the largest living things in the urban environment and are a key component of the urban forest and thus the green grid. To provide their environmental, social, cultural, and economic benefits, they need to be integrated with civil and essential infrastructure.

We will carefully plan where trees are planted, the soil and surrounding areas to ensure that the trees can grow in a healthy manner to a mature size and to reduce the potential impact on public infrastructure.

4.2.13. Trees and Canopy Cover on Public Land

We will continue to identify opportunities for new and replacement tree planting in streets and open spaces, and ensure trees are planted in the best locations to optimise canopy cover.

We will identify streets where tree planting and provision of canopy cover should be prioritised over other uses of public space, such as on-street carparking and other road space that is underutilised.

Canopy cover is important for public health however, planting trees into existing streets can be a complex process. In selecting planting locations, we will respond to the specific context after considering the constraints, design issues, design guides and overall health outcomes.

5. Managing Our Trees

We recognise that trees are vital landscape elements and play an important role in making Randwick City a liveable, attractive and healthy city. Our trees are growing in a harsh urban environment, which requires specialised care and management.

We are committed to high-quality tree maintenance that provides adequate resources for the long-term health of Randwick City Council's urban forest.

5.1. Public Tree Maintenance Management

5.1.1. Best Practice Tree Maintenance

We will undertake best practice tree maintenance for street and open space trees, and trees located on Council properties such as depots, libraries, childcare centres etc.

We will inspect our street, open space, and property trees regularly to confirm tree health, condition and any maintenance works required.

Maintenance will be undertaken by qualified arborists, ensuring nominal footpath, road and infrastructure clearances are maintained. We will aim to meet standards for pedestrian accessibility where possible.

Works will be undertaken in accordance with Australian Standard AS4373 – Pruning of Amenity Trees (2007).

5.1.2. Tree Pruning

We will undertake street, open space and property tree pruning to improve tree health, structure and to provide nominal clearances from pedestrians, traffic, buildings and other essential infrastructure.

We will not prune or permit tree/s to be pruned to:

- facilitate views
- facilitate the installation or continued function of solar panels
- facilitate installation of temporary non-essential infrastructure
- reduce the extent of leaf / flower / fruit drop, or to reduce the impact from bird / bat / other animal waste or noise

We will consider requests for pruning back branches from the property and arrange pruning works accordingly. However, due to the requirements of Australian Standard AS4373 – *Pruning of Amenity Trees* (2007), complete pruning of branches away from the property is not good arboriculture practice and will not be supported. It should be recognised that street trees provide many benefits to the local community and therefore some encroachment onto private property should be accepted.

We will advocate for better pruning practices by Ausgrid, other third parties or their contractors of our street trees located under powerlines.

5.1.3. Risk Management and Insurance Claims

We will proactively manage tree risk management issues. Generally, these risks arise from tree root damage caused to public infrastructure and private property.

We will undertake a comprehensive investigation looking at all options available to retain large urban street trees while mitigating any damage from tree roots.

Procedures and guidelines will be provided to assist the community to address the common issues raised, outline our approach and the responsibilities for rectifying any issues.

Where the risk arising from the tree cannot be managed without ongoing financial risk, tree removal will be recommended.

5.1.4. Lighting and Other Attachments

The installation of fairy lights on public trees or attachment of festoon lighting to public trees will require an assessment by our Urban Forest Planner to ensure the proposal does not have any long term impact on the health of the tree and local biodiversity. Other attachments to the public trees are not supported.

5.1.5. Pests and Diseases

Pest and disease issues for our public trees will be managed as part of the tree maintenance program.

5.1.6. Tree Information System

We collect tree data for our public trees and maintain a database to facilitate decision making, prioritise resources and to maintain accurate historical data including tree planting, maintenance work and removals. This is done using TreePlotter™ the asset management and tree mapping software. The software also has further mechanisms to specify canopy goals, organise planting projects, and monitor tree canopy progress over time. This asset management and tree mapping software will be used as an inventory tool and to develop long term planning of our urban forest.

We will keep abreast of new technology in the field of arboriculture and urban forestry and incorporate technical tools into management and maintenance techniques where appropriate.

5.1.7. Change Over Time

Council will continue to monitor and report its tree canopy to measure the percentage coverage to assess progress towards our canopy cover target.

6. Our Community, Our Trees

We value our community's opinion and will deliver consultation, education and communication about the urban forest and tree management in accordance with the Community Engagement Strategy.

6.1. Community Consultation and Engagement

6.1.1. Community Notification and Consultation

Should a tree in a street or a park be proposed for removal, Council will undertake community consultation in accordance with the Community Engagement Strategy.

We will place a notification sign on or near the tree for a minimum period of 14 calendar days, advising the reason for removal and the intended replacement planting.

For a public fig tree or other species of significant size and age that has caused structural damage to public or private property and is not viable to retain or a public tree on Council's Register of Significant Trees a recommendation to remove the tree will be reported to Council.

When a report is submitted to Council, recommending tree removal, Council officers will notify residents in the street about the report and advise how they can address Council.

We will undertake community consultation about the proposed removal of public trees as part of capital works projects impacting on public trees.

We will provide information about the new street trees planted to the residents located adjacent to the planting.

For private trees proposed for removal as part of a Development Application notification will be undertaken in accordance with the *"Public notification requirements for development applications (DAs)"* within the Community Engagement Strategy.

6.1.2. Community Education / Awareness

We will increase community knowledge about the benefits of the urban forest, including trees, and the various strategies, policies and plans Randwick City Council uses for tree management. We will facilitate this objective by:

- providing relevant information through the Randwick Council website and other media
- notifying residents about tree planting programs
- erecting public notices about tree removals and vandalism
- recognising and supporting community tree planting programs or events, such as National Tree Day, 'Request a Tree' program and plant giveaways
- continuing to operate Council's nursery to supply locally endemic plant stock

6.1.3. Trees and Canopy Cover on Private Land

We will also engage with the owners or managers of large land areas within the LGA to educate them on the environmental and biodiversity benefits and value of the urban forest to the local community. We will outline Randwick City Council's objectives and targets for canopy cover. Landowners will be encouraged to retain and plant trees and other vegetation within their land to assist with achievement of the tree canopy cover target and establishment of the urban forest.

7. Legislation and Supporting Documents

7.1. Applicable Legislation

- State Environmental Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021 (SEPP)
- Randwick City Council Local Environmental Plan (LEP)
- Randwick City Council Development Control Plan (DCP)
- State Environmental Planning Policy (Exempt and Complying Codes) 2008
- Local Government Act, 1993
- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979
- Biodiversity Conservation Act, 2016

7.2. Standards

- Australian Standard AS4373 - *Pruning of amenity trees* (2007)
- Australian Standard AS4970 - *Protection of trees on development sites* (2009)
- Australian Standard AS2303 - *Tree Stock for Landscape Use* (2015)

7.3. Related Plans, Procedures and Guidelines

- Urban Forest Strategy (to be developed)
 - Randwick Street Tree Masterplan
 - Tree Management Technical Manual
 - Register of Significant Trees (review to commence in 2025)
 - Street Tree Identification Manual
 - Technical Guidelines for Urban Planting
- Procedure – Tree Vandalism (to be developed)
- Procedure – Claims for Damages (to be developed)

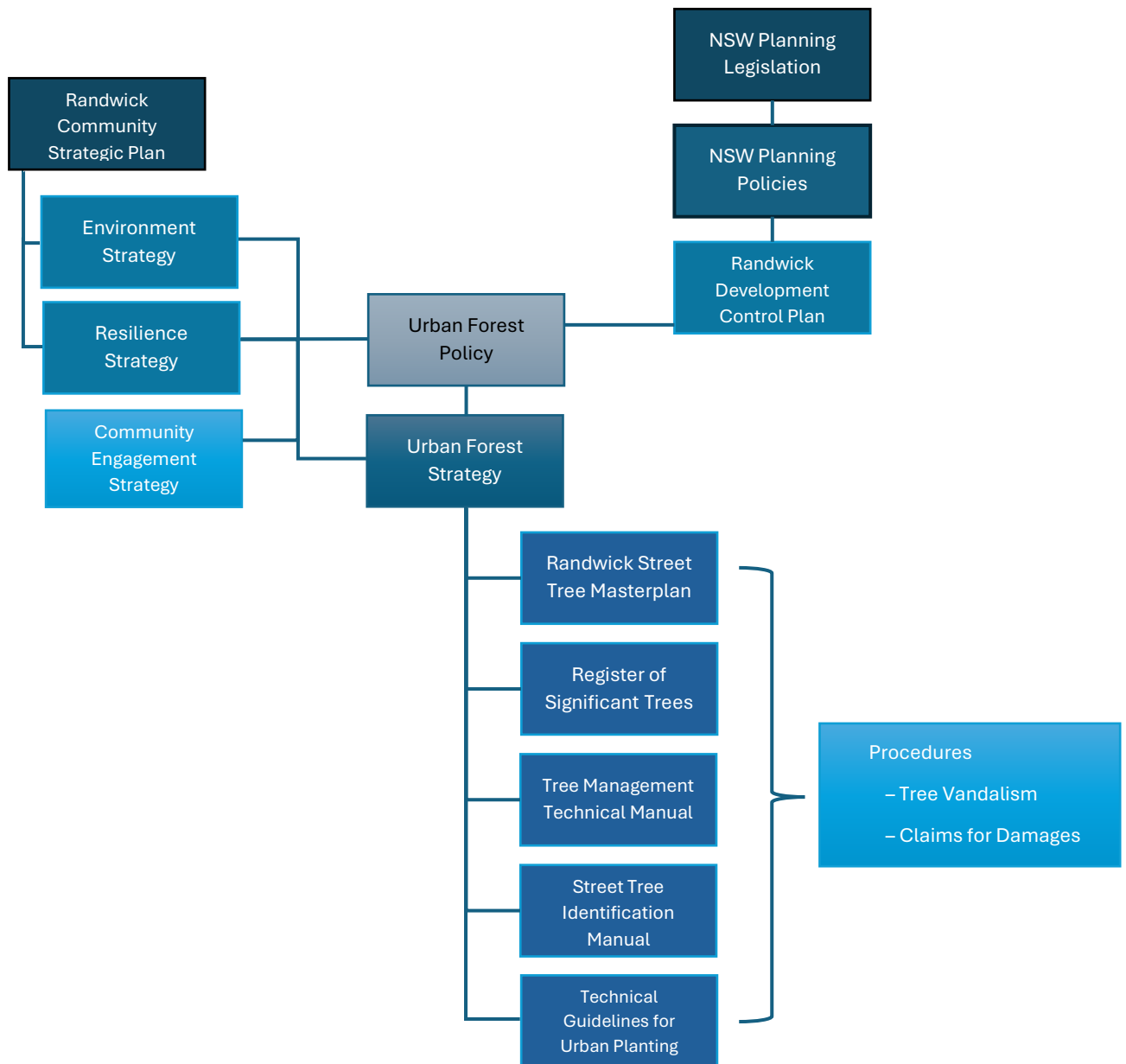
8. Review

This Policy will be reviewed every two years or as required in the event of legislative changes. The Policy may also be changed because of other amendments that are to the advantage of Council and in the spirit of this Policy. Any significant amendments to the Policy must be made by way of a Council Resolution.

9. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Urban Forest	Urban forest encompasses all trees, shrubs and bushes within towns and cities, including those on public streets, private land, and in park and bushland settings. (LGNSW).
Tree Canopy	The area of land covered by tree canopy when viewed from above.
Tree Canopy rate of change	The average positive or negative annual change in canopy cover within the Randwick City Council area.
Canopy cover target	For this policy, the canopy cover target is 22% by 2040 across the Randwick City Council LGA.
Tree	A tree includes any woody perennial plant, any plant resembling a tree in form and size – with the potential to grow to 3 metres or more in height.
Tree Species	A specific list of tree species that are considered suitable for planting within the local government area.
Street Tree	A tree planted within the road reserve, generally within the nature strip.
Green Grid	A green grid is an interconnected network of green spaces across the city that encompasses various open spaces, including parks, waterways, and urban connections, to enhance biodiversity, promote healthy lifestyles, and improve a city's resilience.
LGA	Local Government Area.
Exempt and Complying Development	Exempt and complying development is certain specified development, on certain land, that meets a set of pre-defined design standards. In meeting these criteria, the development is eligible for a fast-tracked approvals process. The relevant legislation governing exempt and complying development is the State Environmental Planning Policy (Exempt and Complying Codes) 2008 (also referred to as the “Codes SEPP”).
Randwick City Council Development Control Plan (DCP)	The Randwick City Council Development Control Plan (DCP) provides detailed planning and design guidelines to support planning controls in the Randwick Local Environmental Plan (LEP). The DCP includes tree preservation and conservation provisions.
State Environmental Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021 (SEPP)	Statutory preservation provisions for trees and other vegetation.
Open Space	Community land that is a park or reserve used for public recreation.
Planting space	Un-treed bare ground or grassed area considered to have potential for plantings.

A. Appendix - Urban Forest Management Framework



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1300 722 542
council@randwick.nsw.gov.au
www.randwick.nsw.gov.au

Randwick City Council
30 Frances Street
Randwick NSW 2031