

8.1 PEEL RIVER ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

DIRECTORATE: WATER AND WASTE

AUTHOR: Daniel Coe, Manager - Water and Environmental Operations

Reference: Item 8.2 to Ordinary Council 11 April 2023 - Minute No 72/23
Item 6.1 to Ordinary Council 27 May 2025 - Minute No 113/25

1 ANNEXURES ATTACHED

RECOMMENDATION

That in relation to the report “Peel River Environmental Improvements”, Council:

- (i) receive and note the report;*
- (ii) allocate \$40,000 from the General Fund Reserve for the removal of the former Jewry Street Causeway, and*
- (iii) request the Director Water and Waste allocate staff resources to the project as detailed in the report and provide further updates to Council as appropriate.*

SUMMARY

This report provides Council an update on Peel River Environmental Improvements project commenced in 2023. The report provides outcome details of recent grant funding applied for Peel River improvements under the Australian Government’s Urban Rivers Grant Program. The report also outlines the opportunity to align this project with Council’s recently adopted motion of supporting the Yarriin: Culture, Fish and Flows – Galala (Paradise Weir) Case Study Project.

COMMENTARY

At its Meeting of 11 April 2023, Council considered a report that included details of a Preliminary Environmental Assessment undertaken of the Peel River between Paradise Bridge and Jewry Street. The report considered existing Council infrastructure, land use, strategies and proposed projects. In addition, the project considered community events, engagement with community, and privately owned assets located in close proximity to the river. The study area is shown below:



The study considered how the Peel River is currently included in or could further enhance the following Council plans and strategies:

- Blueprint Strategy;
- Community Strategic Plan;
- Local Environmental Plan;
- Existing Heritage Assets;
- Flood/Stormwater Strategy;
- Active Transport Strategy;
- Bicentennial Park Master Plan;
- Viaduct Park Master Plan;
- Open Space Management Guide;
- Public Art Engagement Strategy;
- Sustainably Strategy – (previous 2017-2021 strategy noting this has recently been reviewed);
- Tamworth Tomorrow Strategy;
- Crime Prevention Strategy; and
- Office of Sport Strategic Plan.

The report identified initiatives and opportunities to improve environmental, economic and social benefits considering the following:

- protect and enhance the natural qualities of the river and its ecology;
- be inclusive;
- provide for a wider range of activities and interests than currently available;
- enable greater outcomes from existing planned and proposed Council investments;
- provide opportunities for relaxation and interaction and activity;
- incorporate safety in design;
- support learning and education, both formal and informal;

- Support walking and cycling; and
- connect the central business district to the parklands and the river areas.

The final report identified a number of potential opportunities to undertake restoration works along the Peel River in Tamworth. These opportunities include waterway uses, garden and landscaping uses, shared path trails, festivals and events and passive recreation. Overall, the report concluded it is likely that the restoration of Peel River would have significant socio-economic benefits for the community.

The report recommended potential further studies which could be undertaken to enhance the river benefits to the community. These studies include:

- traffic and parking study or survey to determine the use of the local streets and roads on the western side of the river, the need for parking, and the reasons people use the area (outside of formal sports activities). This study/survey is proposed as a result of the lack of parking adjacent to the river and the informal (use formed) tracks;
- pedestrian and bicycle movement study including movement between the central business district and the river areas, including number and location of road crossing points, paths across parklands, traversing the levee, and destinations on the river side;
- preparation of a waterway rehabilitation assessment and management plan to inform and guide the restoration of the river, that will support its ecology in typical flow and low flow periods;
- a detailed strategic land zone assessment of the appropriateness, benefits and utilisation of the existing land use zones and permitted activities, and the potential merit of a Waterway zoning and any additional activities, that may be applied to the river;
- community survey on other festivals that the community would be interested in attending, or existing events or interests that could be scaled up to larger events;
- as a side activity to the weir investigation, consider opportunities to create a water-based garden with boardwalk;
- for any initiative considered, to assess the individual and cumulative benefit of an additional pedestrian and bicycle crossing of the river;
- protection and management of the Flying Fox camp will be an important issue. It is recommended that some flowering species, such as White Box, be planted amongst more rapid-growing roosting tree species as part of a longer-term strategy to encourage Flying Fox away from less preferable areas; and
- ground based survey is recommended to confirm the extent of native vegetation and areas of potential habitat for/presence of threatened species when producing detailed designs with potential impacts or for targeting areas for regeneration.

The full Peel River Preliminary Environmental Assessment Report prepared by SMEC is **ATTACHED**, refer **ANNEXURE 1**.

In relation to the report prepared by SMEC, Council has studies, strategies and plans that relate to the majority of the above such as traffic, community events, strategic/town planning and Flying Fox management. From the review of existing strategies and plans, it was identified that a lack of detail regarding ground-based surveys in relation to the river ecology in particular native vegetation and areas of

potential habitat. In addition, there is a lack of planning to engage with the local community and improve recreation access and environmental improvements on the river such as removal of exotic plant species and erosion protection of the river bank.

The report identified and recommend a number of specific projects Council could undertake to improve river environmental health and aesthetic value. These projects with a recommended course of action and current status are summarised below:

Removal of redundant Sewer Pipeline

A disused sewer pipe that historically transferred sewage from West Tamworth to the former Swan Street Wastewater Plant was identified in the Peel River. The pipeline was located in the bed of the river which and was potentially obstructing fish passage and recreational access during low river flows. The location and extent of the pipeline is shown below:





Given the potential environmental impacts of the pipeline, it was recommended that Council remove the pipeline from the river. Council subsequently resolved to provide funding for the project from the sewer reserve and the pipeline was removed from the river during September 2023.



Revitalisation of Jewry Park

Council has previously resolved to remove an area of land from the current lease at 6-44 Britten Road. Historically, the property was used as an effluent disposal area as part of the former Swan Street Wastewater Treatment Plant. The excised portion of land is shown in the plan below adjacent to Jewry Street parkland:



The report completed by SMEC identified the opportunity for revitalising Jewry Park, including controlling vehicle access and providing formalised parking with visibility and access to the Peel River. It was recommended that Council engage a consultant to prepare design options for Council consideration in relation to extending and improving Jewry Street Park. This work will incorporate the previously leased sewer operational land and will also consider options for rehabilitating the existing causeway within the river. This project was estimated to cost \$100,000 and proposed to be funded by the Wastewater Reserve.

To date, approximately \$20,000 has been spent on the project and work undertaken included the engagement of a consultant to develop a masterplan and staged project approach for the revitalisation of Jewry Street Park. Some preliminary site works have already been undertaken, including vegetation slashing and the installation of concrete blocks to restrict unauthorised vehicle access at the western end of the site. To develop a conceptual masterplan for the site, Council staff engaged with local stakeholders/users of the area including Tamworth Regional Landcare Association, OzFish, local fishing clubs, the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council Rangers, and NSW Department of Primary Industries Fisheries to collaboratively identify priority areas for enhancement and inform the development of the conceptual Jewry Street Park masterplan.

The project was placed on hold while Council staff pursued funding through the Australian Government's Urban Rivers Grant Program. This Program aims to support river improvement initiatives such as ecological surveys, riparian restoration, and recreational infrastructure upgrades. The Program has two funding streams: one for small to medium-sized projects (Stream 1) with projects value between \$150,000 and \$2 million and another for larger-scale projects (Stream 2) for projects valued between \$2 million and \$10 million. A grant application was made in February 2024 for Stream 1 of the Program. Council's application proposed to carry out restoration works on the Peel River and Jewry Street Park area within Tamworth. Council was advised that it was unsuccessful in the grant application process in December 2024. The Urban Rivers Grant Program is expected to reopen in 2026.

Restoration or Removal of Jewry Street Causeway

The report recommended to undertake further investigation work i.e. scoping and costing in relation to converting the old causeway downstream of Jewry Street Bridge into a weir with pedestrian bridge designed to pond water but allow fish passage. If this is not done, the causeway will need to be repaired or removed as it is failing and

causing significant river bank erosion. The location and extent of damage to the former causeway is shown below:



Given the extent of current damage to the causeway and river bank erosion, it is recommended that Council proceed with removing the majority of the old causeway to prevent further erosion and reduce the public safety risk and risk of further asset damage i.e., damage to the park internal road/carpark. A cost estimate of \$40,000 has been prepared for this project. As the asset to be removed is former transport related infrastructure, it is proposed to fund the project works from the General Fund.

Further to the above, at its Meeting of 27 May 2025, Council resolved to support a Notice of Motion regarding the *Tamworth Cultural Watering Place Case Study*, developed in partnership with Kamilaroi community members and the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. Council agreed to allocate staff resources to prepare a draft action plan for the implementation of the recommendations/actions provided in the study.

Since this resolution of Council, staff have meet with NSW Department of Primary Industries staff to be gain better understanding of the study and to identify how the environmental improvements currently being undertaken by Council can be aligned and integrated in to this project. From these meetings it is proposed that Council align its previous/current river environmental works with the *Tamworth Cultural Watering Place Case Study*. An example of how both project initiatives can be aligned is provided in the following table.

	Peel River Environmental Improvements Recommendation	Corresponding Yarriin Waterways Case Study Objective(s)
1	Traffic & parking study to determine informal use and needs on the western side of the river	Objective 1 - Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeroi Gamilaraay people continue to care for Country, taking the lead on caring for country projects.
2	Pedestrian & bike movement study between CBD and river, including crossing points and levee access	Objective 1 - Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeroi Gamilaraay people continue to care for Country, taking the lead on caring for country projects.
3	Waterway rehabilitation assessment and management plan to support ecology during typical and low flow	Objective 2 - Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeroi/Gamilaraay knowledge and science are integrated into native guya

		management decisions and practice. Objective 3 - Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeri/Gamilaraay people have a voice in decisions and are partners in guya management in the Peel valley.
4	Strategic land zone assessment of existing uses and potential waterway zoning	Objective 3 - Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeri/Gamilaraay people have a voice in decisions and are partners in guya management in the Peel valley.
5	Community survey on interest in festivals/events or upscaling existing ones	Objective 1 - Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeri/Gamilaraay people continue to care for Country, taking the lead on caring for country projects.
6	Water-based garden with boardwalk as a side project	Objective 4 - Knowledge is shared and Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeri/Gamilaraay maintain cultural practice on Country (education, both ways, for all).
7	Flying Fox habitat management using targeted tree planting (e.g. White Box)	Objective 2 - Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeri/Gamilaraay knowledge and science are integrated into native guya management decisions and practice. Objective 3 - Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeri/Gamilaraay people have a voice in decisions and are partners in guya management in the Peel valley.
8	Ground-based survey of native vegetation and potential threatened species habitat	Objective 2 - Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeri/Gamilaraay knowledge and science are integrated into native guya management decisions and practice. Objective 3 - Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeri/Gamilaraay people have a voice in decisions and are partners in guya management in the Peel valley.

By aligning the projects, it is considered there would be a greater opportunity for grant funding to be realised. In addition, the overall project will provide potential opportunity to work with universities in respect to ongoing environmental studies and management programs for the river.

(a) Policy Implications

Nil

(b) Financial Implications

Council has resolved to allocate staff to staff resources to prepare a draft action plan for the implementation of the *Yarriin: Culture, Fish and Flows – Galala (Paradise Weir) Case Study*. For the project to proceed, it is expected that grant funding from other levels of Government would be required. Further reports to Council will be provided as the project progresses.

(c) Legal Implications

Nil

(d) Community Consultation

Should Council agree with aligning the projects detailed in the report, the initial stage of the project continuation would be for Council staff to meet with NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development staff to develop a project delivery plan. This would include the development of a community engagement plan to facilitate the project delivery. It is considered this will be key to a successful project outcome and increasing the opportunity for grant funding to be provided for the project.

(e) Delivery Program Objective/Strategy

Focus Area 6 – Working With and Protecting Our Environment
