ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS VICTORIA

HERITAGE VICTORIA PERMIT APPLICATION AND

HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT

This Application and Statement forms part of a permit application for: -
Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Melbourne Gardens
Fern Gully Restoration Project – Taxodium Deck, Bitumen Paths and Terracotta Spoon Drains

Victoria Heritage Register number:-
H1459

Address:-
Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra, Vic, 3141

Prepared by:-
Philip Bowyer-Smyth
Project Manager
Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

Date:
22nd May 2017
# Table of Contents

Application form ............................................................................................................................................ 3  
Heritage Impact Statement ........................................................................................................................... 4  
  2.1 Overview ........................................................................................................................................................ 4  
  2.2 Historical Context and Cultural Heritage Significance .................................................................................... 4  
  2.3 Current Use ..................................................................................................................................................... 7  
  2.4 Existing Condition ........................................................................................................................................ 7  
    2.4.1 Existing Landform and Plants ................................................................................................................ 7  
    2.4.2 Existing Pathways and Terracotta Drains .............................................................................................. 7  
  2.5 Proposed Development .............................................................................................................................. 7  
    2.5.1 New Taxodium Deck .............................................................................................................................. 7  
    2.5.2 Pathways and Terracotta Spoon Drains ................................................................................................. 8  
  2.6 Physical and Visual Impact ......................................................................................................................... 8  
  2.7 Detrimental Impacts .................................................................................................................................... 9  
  2.8 Local Planning Scheme Provisions and other Permitting Requirements ..................................................... 9  
    2.8.1 Melbourne Planning Scheme ................................................................................................................. 9  
    2.8.2 Cultural Heritage .................................................................................................................................... 9  
  2.9 Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 9  
  3 Attachment 1. Figures 1 – 9 ......................................................................................................................... 10  
  4 Attachment 2. Plans 1 – 8 ........................................................................................................................... 18
Application form

The formal application form is contained overleaf. This application is supported by the Heritage Impact Statement contained in this report.
Heritage Impact Statement

2.1 Overview
This Heritage Impact Statement is associated with the works that are proposed in the Fern Gully within the Melbourne Gardens, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, and are listed under Landscape Development Priorities in the Implementation of Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne Master Plan (1997): A Ten-Year Review.

The Fern Gully is one of the most highly valued and popular areas within the Melbourne Gardens. Designed by William Guilfoyle in the late 19th century the Fern Gully was transformed from a creek that flowed through the centre of the gardens into a place of beauty and horticultural richness. Guilfoyle planted both native and exotic palms, ferns and shrubs which are still thriving today. He also enhanced the alignment of the creek with rocks and spillways to produce water movement and sound. The Fern Gully is an iconic part of the Melbourne Gardens that must be actively managed to ensure it remains a healthy and thriving landscape for many years to come.

The Fern Gully is a mature landscape and given pressures of drought and 30,000 roosting Grey Headed Flying Foxes that were removed in 2004, it has deteriorated quite rapidly over the last 15 years. The Fern Gully restoration project aims to turn this trend around through a total management approach that looks at the issues of public amenity, tree health and water quality.

The whole restoration project comprises of several stages, with Stage 1 being complete during April 2015. Completion of Stage 1 was a major component of the restoration project which removed the existing bitumen path and replaced it with a raised steel boardwalk and five bridge crossings of the creek. The first part of Stage 2 has already been approved and works are planned to start in the not too distant future with the restoration of Fern Gully Rest House and the construction of three Health and Wellbeing Gardens.

The next components are listed below

Taxodium Deck, Bitumen Paths and Terracotta Spoon Drain Upgrade

This component of the project centres around the magnificent National Trust classified Taxodium mucronatum, an impressive tree and imposing element of the Fern Gully. To help retain and improve the health of the Taxodium tree it is proposed to create an all ability access viewing deck with seating around its huge base. This will eliminate the current soil compaction caused by visitors on the trees roots, and it will enhance the visitor experience to interact and connect with this impressive specimen.

Other works include a significant upgrade of the existing bitumen path and terracotta spoon drains that form the path network around Fern Gully. This will improve visitor access and safety, while also rectifying current drainage runoff and damage caused by broken and missing sections of terracotta spoon drain. It is proposed that the damaged sections of bitumen and terracotta spoon drain will be re-laid path around Fern Gully.

2.2 Historical Context and Cultural Heritage Significance

Melbourne Gardens is of historical, architectural, scientific, aesthetic and social significance to the state of Victoria.
The Gardens were created in 1846 on the south side of the Yarra River on a site selected by Superintendent Charles La Trobe. It is located adjacent to Government House, Melbourne Observatory and the Domain. In March 1846 John Arthur was appointed the first Superintendent, and later an area of 2 ha (5 ac) was fenced and developed near Anderson Street and the Yarra River. The Gardens were later enlarged in 1875 to include additional land from the Domain. The Gardens reserve is now 38 ha.

From 1846 the Gardens was planted and landscaped under early curators, Arthur and Dallachy. In 1853 Ferdinand von Mueller was appointed Government Botanist and commenced the National Herbarium. In 1857 Mueller became Director of the RBG and, under his direction, the Gardens embarked on a scientific program, introducing foreign plants from other parts of Australia and overseas. Many plants and animals were acclimatised for scientific research and education. The Botanic Gardens contained a systems garden, glasshouses, palm house, iron arbours, gates and fences, animal enclosures, and an aviary.

Walks were formed with avenues of trees, beds and lawns planted, and the lagoon with islands was landscaped. An Under-gardener’s cottage was erected in 1850, and the Director’s residence in 1854.

In 1873 William Guilfoyle was appointed Director of the Botanic Gardens and, under his direction, the landscape was redesigned in a more picturesque style; the straight paths were replaced by curved sweeping paths, avenues were removed, and the lawns were dotted with botanical collections in beds and specimen trees. The lakes and islands were further landscaped and altered in layout. Rustic bridges, rockeries, rotundas, pavilions, nursery buildings and gate lodges were built. In 1901 the Temple of the Winds, designed by Guilfoyle, was erected as a memorial to La Trobe. The Nymphaea Lily Lake was formed in 1903 and was the last major development by Guilfoyle before he retired in 1909.

The layout, established by William Guilfoyle between 1873 and 1909, has been maintained by subsequent Directors. The rustic bridges have been replaced and a few pavilions removed and new buildings erected, but the landscape generally conforms to the Guilfoyle style. There is continual renewal of the planting as plants have to be removed and new plants and collections introduced. Melbourne Gardens still retains many mature plants, including remnant vegetation, trees from the Arthur, Dallachy, Mueller and Guilfoyle period, and plants rare in the wild. There are many plants of outstanding size and aesthetic and botanical value.

A new Herbarium was constructed in 1934 as a gift from Sir Macpherson Robertson to celebrate the centenary of European settlement in Victoria. This new development included the addition of extra land to the Gardens and the erection of new gates (F Gate), originally from the Carlton Gardens. The Herbarium was further enlarged in 1988. The glasshouses and a few gate lodges have been removed and replaced by modern buildings. The System’s Pavilion was removed and there have been numerous building changes in the Nursery. The Palm House, which was relocated to the Royal Zoological Gardens, is now in storage at Werribee Park. In 1964 the Nareeb Gates, from a mansion in Toorak, were relocated and are now at D Gate. A new Herb Garden was built in 1983 on the site of the former Medicinal Garden, and new plant collections have been established including a Grey Garden, Perennial Border, Grass Garden, and Species Roses, New Caledonia, California and Southern Chinese collections. In 1994 the William Tell Rest House burnt down and was replaced by a replica the following year. In 1999 a new path was formed between the Gardens and the Melbourne Observatory (Observatory Gate).

The Melbourne Gardens contain some of Victoria’s oldest cultivated and commemorative trees. There are also remnant plantings of *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, *Eucalyptus melliodora*, and *Melaleuca ericifolia*. Beneath a large River Red Gum, known as the Separation Tree (now deceased), Governor Charles La Trobe and the public celebrated the separation of Victoria from New South Wales in July 1851. The 1846
English Elm trees known as Arthur's Elms are amongst the oldest known exotic trees in Victoria, and the Gardens retain a few other trees from the 1850s and 1860s. On his appointment as Director, William Guilfoyle planted a *Quercus canariensis* (Algerian Oak) in 1873.

The Melbourne Gardens are of aesthetic significance for the layout and planting established by William Guilfoyle between 1873 and 1909. It is an important nineteenth century landscape style that combines both picturesque and gardenesque landscape features, structures, botanical collections and the extensive use of subtropical species and bold foliage. The Gardens are of outstanding aesthetic significance incorporating a landscape of natural landforms, water, planting, buildings and structures. The layout is an outstanding response to the sloping site, and the landscape with sweeping paths, lawns, dense shrubberies, beds and specimen trees, internal and external vistas, and the location and design of buildings and structures impart a design of the highest quality. The Gardens are of significant beauty with the seasonal change, contrasting forms and foliage, and plant maturity form an attractive landscape. Key elements in the design are the use of water, landscaped islands, sloping green lawns, curved paths, triangular beds, rockeries, specimen trees, the mounds and a reservoir shaped as a volcano. The planting themes include an Oak Lawn, Fern Gully, Palm Collection, Arid Garden, Australian Forest Walk, New Zealand Collection and Southern Africa Collection. There are significant views to the Government House tower, Temple of the Winds and Director's residence.

The Melbourne Gardens is of social significance for the valuable recreational and educational role it provides to visitors. It is one of the state's major tourist destinations and attracts many international and interstate visitors of all ages. The Gardens play a major role in environmental, botanical, horticultural and aboriginal history education in Victoria. The Gardens has been a venue for major public events, including theatrical and musical performances, and official celebrations throughout their history. The Gardens are currently enjoyed by the public throughout the year from 7.30 to sunset. On occasions, as operational needs dictate, small areas of the Gardens are closed to allow routine maintenance or more extensive capital works to be undertaken.
2.3 Current Use

The Taxodium tree is an impressive 157 year old tree in the lower sections of the Fern Gully that is classified by the National Trust, and we suspect was planted by Baron Von Mueller. The Taxodium is currently only accessible for public interaction when they walk into the garden bed impacting on the surrounding landscape. This is causing worn and unsightly areas around the tree as well as compacting the soil that supports the root zone. The bitumen paths are currently used to provide pedestrian and vehicular access around Fern Gully while the terracotta spoon drains facilitate surface water drainage.

2.4 Existing Condition

2.4.1 Existing Landform and Plants

The area around the Taxodium tree is primarily pathway and garden bed with sparse vegetation. The condition of the garden bed is very poor suffering from compaction caused by visitors interacting with the tree. The root zone of the tree is impacted further by the asphalt path and terracotta spoon drains along the path edge. (refer fig. 3-6)

2.4.2 Existing Pathways and Terracotta Drains

The existing condition of the pathways are extremely poor and a public safety hazard. Many parts of the path system are uneven and the surface is loose having been breached by tree roots. This significantly detracts from the aesthetic of the area and creates a number of tripping hazards. The existing condition of the terracotta spoon drains is also highly compromised by tree roots effectively destroying the drainage channels resulting in flooding and erosion in certain areas. (refer fig.7-8)

2.5 Proposed Development

The proposed development is summarised below. The development has been designed in accordance with the Royal Botanic Gardens Master Plan (1998) and the Implementation of Royal Botanic Gardens Master Plan (1997): A Ten Year Review

In addition the Fern Gully Project (as a whole) has been endorsed by the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria’s Executive Team.

2.5.1 New Taxodium Deck

The existing land form around the Taxodium mucronatum will have some minor modification to levels to accommodate the proposed new all ability access deck and seating area. The deck will be constructed from mild steel and timber to match the existing Fern Gully board walk and seating. It will extend out into the garden bed and onto a narrow section of the existing path which will require re-alignment. Upon completion of construction. The garden area around the deck will be planted to hide any adverse visual impact that the deck may cause. This will formalise the current visitor interaction with the Taxodium while assisting in the protection of surface roots and a reduction in the risk of localised compaction. (refer plan 1-7)
2.5.2 Pathways and Terracotta Spoon Drains

There will be no modification to the current use of the existing paths in and around the Fern Gully. Access around the Fern Gully precinct and up to the Rest house will be enhanced as a result of the path upgrade works.

Existing bitumen paths and terracotta spoon drains are in extremely poor condition, creating trip hazards and drainage issues. It is proposed to realign a section of terracotta spoon drain around the lower section of the Fern Gully to allow relaying of the spoon drains without damaging numerous tree roots. Further sections of the terracotta spoon drain will be lifted and re-laid where they are either broken or dislodged. Existing damaged sections of asphalt path will be re-profiled where necessary before being resurfaced. (refer plan 8)

2.6 Physical and Visual Impact

The proposed works will have a positive physical and visual impacts on the Gardens.

The new deck will improve the battered and worn appearance that presently exists around the Taxodium mucronatum and the surrounds be planted with interesting flora to help blend the deck into the landscape.

The design of the deck is of a low profile, using natural colours and materials that match existing Fern Gully materials.

The path and terracotta spoon drain works will provide a safer and more visual appealing area for visitors, and will replace the current broken and even surface and eliminate flooded areas.
2.7 Detrimental Impacts

There are no detrimental impacts to any of the proposed activities. Indeed, the proposed activities will enhance the Gardens by reducing the impact of worn garden areas around the base of the tree and by providing all ability access, improving visitor safety and improved tree health.

Any transitory impact due to the works will be fully reinstated.

2.8 Local Planning Scheme Provisions and other Permitting Requirements

The relevant planning provisions and permits are summarised below:

2.8.1 Melbourne Planning Scheme

Pursuant to Clause 36.02-2, a planning permit is not required to construct a building or carry out works 'carried out by or on behalf of a Public Land Manager or Parks Victoria under the Local Government Act 1989, the Reference Areas Act 1978, the National Parks Act 1975, the Fisheries Act 1995, the Wildlife Act 1975, the Forest Act 1958, the Water Industry Act 1994, the Water Act 1989, the Marine Act 1988, the Port of Melbourne Authority Act 1958 or the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978.

2.8.2 Cultural Heritage

Due diligence advice has been received in relation to the Fern Gully project. This advice finds that the proposed activity does not trigger a mandatory CHMP under the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2007.

2.9 Conclusion

The works are part of the Fern Gully project that is described in the Implementation of Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne Master Plan (1997): A Ten-Year Review. The aim of the Fern Gully project is to improve the general amenity throughout the Fern Gully at Melbourne Gardens.

The constant water flow that now exists as a result of Working Wetlands Stage 2, and the five new bridges completed in Fern Gully Stage 1 have already transformed the Fern Gully and partly help restore its magnificent beauty. This next stage in conjunction with the already approved wellbeing spaces and Fern Gully Rest House restoration will add to the enjoyable experience for all.

Any adverse visual impacts have been mitigated by designing elements that are low profile and recede into the landscape and by using appropriate materials that are already part of the Melbourne Gardens suite of materials.

Due to the compact and somewhat hidden nature of the Fern Gully, and given that it is divided into three distinct activity zones, the construction activities will create minimal physical and visual impact on the wider Gardens.