

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
Australian Drylands Learning Hub**

Application Number P40658

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List of Attachments

Attachment 1	Australian Drylands Learning Hub Architectural Plans and Materials Schedule
Attachment 2	Australian Drylands Learning Hub Landscape Plan
Attachment 3	Australian Drylands Learning Hub Tree Plan
Attachment 4	Extract Melbourne Gardens Conservation Management Plan 2018 (Vol 2A p57-63)
Attachment 5	Extract Melbourne Gardens Conservation Management Plan 2018 (Vol 2B p80-93)

1 Introduction

This Heritage Impact Statement has been prepared by the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria to support the Heritage Victoria permit application, P40658, and has been prepared following a pre-application meeting with Jessica Antolino of Heritage Victoria.

The Australian Drylands Learning Hub comprises two small buildings with an interconnecting boardwalk to be built in the new Australian Drylands precinct, in the southeast corner of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

The development will allow the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria to broaden its engagement programs, ensuring that they continue to be meaningful and contemporary into the future. This delivers on a core objective of the Royal Botanic Gardens Act (1991) and Living Collections Plan 2022-2042 and is a reasonable economic use for this space.

The development is the final stage of the Australian Drylands precinct development (Permit P35240), a significant landscape succession and renewal project. This stage of works is sited entirely within the Australian Border on the south-east corner of the Gardens (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Location of proposed works



2 Registration Summary

2.1 Application Details

Address:	Birdwood Avenue, Melbourne, Victoria 3004
Alternative Name:	Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Melbourne Gardens
Supporting the Permit application for:	P40658 Australian Drylands Learning Hub
Date:	February 2025
VHR Number:	H1459
Prepared by:	Karen Rosenberg, Senior Project Manager Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Karen.Rosenberg@rbg.vic.gov.au m: 0499 517 973
On behalf of:	Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria
World Heritage:	The site is not in a World Heritage Environs area

2.2 Adjacent Sites of Significance

Site	Melbourne Observatory
Registration	Victorian Heritage Database, National Heritage Listing
VHR Number	H1087
National	Melbourne's Domain Parkland and Memorial Precinct
Impact of Proposal	None. Works do not impact the fabric or view lines of the Melbourne Observatory.
Site	Domain Parklands
Registration	Domain Parklands
VHR Number	H2304
Impact of Proposal	None. Works do not impact the fabric or view lines of the Domain Parklands.
Site	Government House
Registration	Government House Complex
VHR Number	H1620
Impact of Proposal	None. Works do not impact the fabric or view lines of Government House.
Site	Shrine of Remembrance
Registration	Shrine of Remembrance
VHR Number	Ho848
Impact of Proposal	None. Works do not impact the fabric or view lines of the Shrine of Remembrance.

In summary, the proposed Australian Drylands Learning Hub project is not considered to have any negative impact on the heritage values of sites surrounding the Melbourne Gardens.

2.3 Additional legislation

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.

Building Permit

A building permit will be obtained for this work.

Royal Botanic Gardens Act

The management of the Melbourne Gardens is governed by the Royal Botanic Gardens Act 1991 (amended 2017). The statutory authority under the Act is the Royal Botanic Gardens Board Victoria, who oversee the organisation's following objectives under the Act:

- *to conserve, protect and improve the botanic gardens and managed land and their collections of living plants;*
- *to conserve and enhance the State botanical collection and National Herbarium;*
- *to provide for the use of the State botanical collection or plants or plant specimens at the botanic gardens or managed land for scientific or reference purposes, consistent with accepted international practice;*
- *to increase public knowledge and awareness of plants and plant communities;*

- *to provide for the use of the botanic gardens for education, public enjoyment and tourism;*
- *to provide for the carrying out of and contribution to research into biodiversity; and the conservation of biodiversity.*

2.4 Strategic Documents

Conservation Management Plan

The proposed works are consistent with Conservation Management Plan: Melbourne Gardens & Melbourne Observatory, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria recommendations as follows:

- *Policy 12 (Vol 1, 7.6.1 Views and Vistas, p. 167-168) That important views and vistas are recognised and conserved*
- *Policy 13 (Vol 1, 7.6.2 Fabric, p. 168-170) That all fabric identified as Outstanding, Significant or Contributory is conserved or retained where possible in particular 13.10 – Apply a consistent design palette (colour, font, materials) approach for all infrastructure, furniture, signs and amenities unless it has identified significance and 13.12 – Conserve the roots of significant trees rather than the path surface where there is a conflict between the two*
- *Policy 15 (Vol 1, Section 7.7.1 Future Use, p. 170-171) – That future uses of the place respect and acknowledge the heritage values of the place in particular 15.9 – Allow future uses which are consistent with the conservation of the significant layout, fabric, and character of the views of the place*
- *Policy 17 (Vol 1 Section 7.8 Future Development, p. 171) That any new development, works or construction be considered and assessed in the context of its potential impact on the identified cultural heritage significance of the place in particular 17.2 – Introduce new structures and elements only where there is genuine and proven public or organisational need and a suitable location can be found that does not adversely impact on cultural heritage values of the place.*
- *Policy 20 (Vol 1, Section 7.10 Adopt, monitor and review, p. 172-173) – That the heritage values set out in this CMP are taken into account in future site planning.*

Melbourne Gardens Master Plan 2020-40

The proposed works are consistent with Melbourne Gardens Master Plan 2020-40 recommendations, with the following citations:

- *Development Guidelines (p. 5) "providing guidance on the protection of the picturesque landscape, improvement of the living collection"*
- *Section 5.2.1 Landscape Character (p. 63 - 65) Action 1. Conserve Guilfoyle's picturesque landscape as described in Section 4.4.1 and the Landscape Character Plan (page 62)*
- *Section 6.4 Arid and Drylands Precinct (p. 104-105) Major Elements. Extend the Australian Forest Walk around the Eucalypt Lawn, including the minor pathway to meet Guilfoyle's Volcano.*

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Corporate Plan 2025-2029

The proposed works addresses aims and actions within the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Corporate Plan 2025-2029 as follows:

- *Engagement – Action – (we will) Curate and deliver nature and science-based programming experiences for a range of visitors, p22*
- *Place – Action – (we will) Implement priority projects from Melbourne Gardens Master Plan 2020–2040 and Cranbourne Gardens Master Plan 2016–2026; Year 1 Action - Deliver Australian Drylands Stage Two (p26)*

3 Existing Conditions of the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Melbourne Gardens

Melbourne Gardens occupies 38.6ha on the banks of the Yarra River, within the eastern end of the Domain Parklands. The site is bounded by Alexandra Avenue and the Yarra River to the north, the Anderson Street residential area to the east, Birdwood Avenue and Domain Parklands to the south and Government House to the west. Small fingers of Melbourne Gardens land extend around the northern and southern boundaries of Government House and connect directly to the Kings Domain.

The overall landscape design of Melbourne Gardens derives much of its qualities from the topography of the site. Occupying a hill on the banks of the Yarra River (Birrarung), the site falls approximately 28m from the high points at Guilfoyle's Volcano and the Melbourne Observatory to the Central Lake. A further high point exists along the top of a rock escarpment below Temple of the Winds, the original southern bank of the Yarra River and a place of importance to the Traditional Owners. A drainage line to the Yarra River (Birrarung) sweeps through the centre of the Gardens, providing a natural focus in the Fern Gully and lakes. This sense of serenity, and a secluded, contemplative atmosphere is reinforced by the dense plantation of evergreen trees, which surrounds the site and creates a buffer to the city, emphasising the Gardens' inward-looking aspect. Within the Gardens, wider views punctuated by soaring conifers provide a pleasing juxtaposition of greenery against the Melbourne skyline.

The layout and character of Melbourne Gardens today owes much to the design and stewardship of William Guilfoyle, Director of the Gardens from 1873 to 1909. Guilfoyle used the natural beauty of the site to create a garden that is considered to epitomise the best of the picturesque/gardenesque landscape style. The genius of this design lies in its ability to reconcile the potentially competing functions of a high-level public open space and a scientific institution. By placing the botanical collections within a cohesive and designed setting, Guilfoyle was able to create a unified landscape, which met the aesthetic and recreational requirements of a public garden and the scientific obligations of a botanic garden.

Within the Gardens the scenic landscape is made up of a series of highly planned views framed by trees and ornamental garden beds, laid out with a strong sense of balance between mass and void. The main component of the mass is the plantings, including the remnant and historic trees, decorative garden beds, indigenous vegetation and the living collections; complemented by the buildings. Guilfoyle's unified approach to planting design allows this mass to be artfully contrasted against the open void spaces of the paths, lawns and lakes – all of which provide the canvas for displaying the beauty of the plant collections.

Within the Gardens movement is generally via a network of broad, gently curving asphalt pathways. These paths, laid out by Guilfoyle, are an essential component of the landscape character and provide an enduring framework for the various landscape elements. Generally, they follow the topography of the site, with some notable exceptions where they plunge down the hill near the Temple of the Winds, and around Hopetoun and Tennyson Lawns. The system creates a series of loops that link all parts of the Gardens and provide a myriad of ways to traverse the site.

As a picturesque landscape (a contrived idealised view of nature with an idyllic pastoral landscape of lakes, sweeping lawns and carefully placed architecture), buildings are placed as either picturesque follies, focal points for important view lines, or as complementary features, such as the historic Gate Lodges. A series of follies located carefully around the Gardens shape the view lines, becoming both focal points and destinations. A number of these are in the rustic gardenesque style, such as the William Tell, Separation Tree and Fern Gully Rest Houses. Of more imposing stature are the Rose Pavilion, Tecoma Rest House and classically derived Temple of the Winds.

Specimen trees, including palms, are used throughout this landscape to provide vertical emphasis and horticultural interest. Placement of these trees is critical, as they are positioned to enhance and frame the important views, not to obscure them. The serpentine pathways, typical of the picturesque style, emphasise these view lines by taking visitors on a meandering journey, which carefully directs attention and gradually unfolds vistas of the landscape. Meanwhile, island garden beds frame views and encourage visitors to step off the pathways and into the landscape. The overall result is a garden of immense beauty.

In recent years several new additions and redevelopments have occurred, guided by the 1997 and 2008 Master Plans. These have been in response to contemporary pressures, including revitalising tired infrastructure, landscape succession planning and meeting modern visitor expectations. They include the Fern Gully Restoration, Guilfoyle's Volcano, Perennial Border, Long Island redevelopment, Working Wetlands, Arid Garden and Sensory Garden. All these projects have been implemented to display the best of contemporary design and a strong sense of place, being inspired by and responding to the Gardens' landscape and visitor experience. Of importance is the way these elements, while clearly contemporary, sit sympathetically within the Guilfoyle design, with the hardscaping being subservient to the display of the plant collections and the rigorous control between mass and void being carefully maintained. These new developments are now amongst the most popular visitor destinations in the Melbourne Gardens.

3.1.1 Existing Condition of Proposed Works Location

The Australian bed is an extension of the Australian border, extending past Domain Gate (formerly D-Gate) and encircling the Australian Drylands precinct (formerly the Eucalyptus Lawn; or Australian Lawn). Its mixed plantings form a backdrop for the South-eastern corner of the gardens and screens this area from the Tan Track.

The Australian Bed boasts several mature trees, thought to be up to 150 years old, and a number younger trees and saplings. The understory ranges from dense shrubs and ground cover to open ground.

A small red brick building, the D Gate Shed (also known as D-Gate toilet block), sits near D Gate on the boundary fence line within the dense vegetation of the Australian Border. It is a solid, rectangular red brick structure with a concealed custom orb squillion roof draining to the rear. The tops of the walls on three sides are capped with concrete. There are two arched doorways on the garden side, now secured with green painted timber doors.

The D Gate Shed was constructed c1920 and formerly used as a female toilet block before being converted to a storage shed in 2006. It is considered to be of contributory significance to the Melbourne Gardens.

3.1.2 Current Use of the Melbourne Gardens

The Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Melbourne Gardens is used as a scientifically functioning Botanic Garden and as one of Melbourne's premier public gardens and gathering spaces. The Gardens received 2 million visitors in the year ending June 2019. Historically, the Gardens have been fenced since at least 1862 and are open from 7:30am to 5:30pm each day in winter and 7:30am to 7:30pm in summer.

The Gardens support the work of the plant scientists working in the National Herbarium of the Victoria; the team of horticulturists who curate twenty-three Living Collections and research by visiting academics and other botanic gardens. It is also a place of learning and engagement, with around 40,000 school students attending learning program activities at the Gardens each year.

The lawn that abuts the Australian bed has historically been favoured for passive recreation and education uses. With a gentle slope and plenty of shade this is an area where people regularly gather for picnics or to sit and enjoy the gardens.

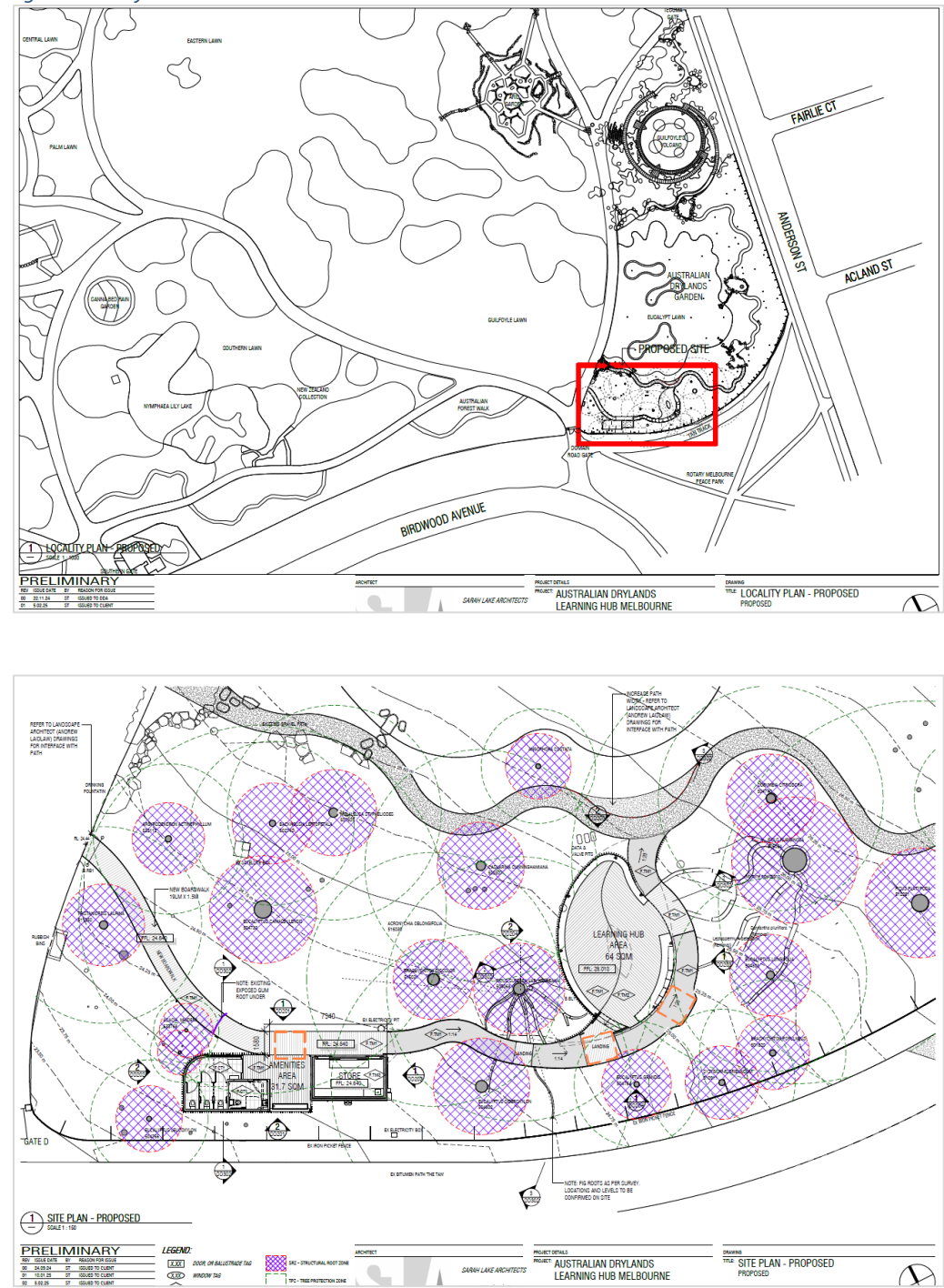
Its recent redevelopment into the Australian Drylands Precinct has retained the passive recreation space and added a new collection of plantings, interpretations, and gathering spaces designed to engage people with the changing nature of the Australian landscape. It is also now increasingly sought after as a location for learning and participation activities.

4 The Proposed Works

4.1 Overview and Purpose

The Australian Drylands Learning Hub development comprises a small pavilion, toilet block, and connecting boardwalks, set amongst mature trees in the Australian Border in south-east corner of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne (see Figures 1 and 2 below).

Figure 2 Locality and Site Plans



Heritage Impact Statement: Australian Drylands Learning Hub

Figure 3 Proposed development renders



4.2 Location

The Australian Drylands Learning Hub will host learning and engagement activities related to dry climate gardening, indigenous landscapes, and general plant awareness in this space. Its location is close to bus pull-in areas, and the site itself enables practical demonstration of landscape and gardening approaches that respond to our changing climate.

The exact position of this development was carefully considered due to the large number of mature trees in this location. Its proposed site preserves the open space on the lawn and avoids changes to the existing view lines .. Its visual intrusion is further reduced by setting the buildings amongst mature ficus and eucalypt trees. Setting the new buildings next to the existing D-Gate Shed (M42, former female toilet block) also avoids trenching to connect to power, water, and sewer services.

4.3 Buildings construction and amenity

The main building in this development is the Learning Hub, an open-air, timber-clad pavilion with a floor area of approximately 64m². It is designed to accommodate up to two classes of secondary school students and will also be open to all garden visitors to enjoy when formal programs are not underway. It will have built in seating, school bag storage space, and a tv monitor housed behind timber cabinet doors.

The second building is a toilet block for learning and engagement program participants. It will sit beside the existing D-Gate Shed (M42, former female toilet block), which is identified in the Conservation Register as a contributory structure in the Australian Border precinct.

Re-purposing the D-Gate Shed for use as the toilet block was considered, however this would require significant alterations to meet current construction standards. Most notably, the existing building is too small to fit the number of pans required for a learning facility under the NCC, so an extension would be required. Its doorway is also too narrow to meet modern accessibility requirements and additional penetrations would be needed to provide ventilation and other services. Instead, a new purpose-built toilet block is proposed. The new toilet block will be a stand-alone building with no connection to the D-Gate Shed to avoid any structural impact.

The D-Gate Shed will instead be used by RBGV staff and facilitators to store equipment and as a change room. A minor interior refit is proposed, with no changes to the building's external fabric. Works include adding a false floor over the existing concrete slab, re-orienting the kitchenette, and updating the shelving units. The roller doors will be replaced with sliding doors, and new light fittings will be installed. The old sewer connection in this building will be sealed off.

A continuous timber boardwalk will provide access to the buildings from the (internal) road near Domain Gate in the south and from the Australian Drylands Walk to the north. The boardwalk will also connect the buildings together and provide a pedestrian pathway over the tree roots, protecting the gardens.

The buildings and boardwalk have been designed as above-ground structures to minimize the impact on the garden beds. The steel frames will have sufficient clearance to allow water and air to the ground beneath. Pinion style "Surefoot" footings will be used to minimize impact on the tree roots and garden bed.

The two new buildings have gently curved walls and will be clad in open timber battens to soften their presence against the surrounding landscape. The permeable cladding style offers views out to the landscape and provides natural light and ventilation into the space.

The Learning Hub features apertures on its north-east and south-west walls opening out to the significant *Ficus rubiginosa* and *Ficus superba* trees, in an effort to further connect visitors to the surrounding landscape. A solid section of wall on its southeast corner protects occupants from prevailing winds and will house concealed audiovisual equipment for the learning groups.

4.4 Landscape

Entrance landscaping will be constructed at either end of the boardwalks. This will feature bluestone pavers, feature rocks, and plantings designed to connect and compliment the character of the surrounding Australian Drylands precinct.

Other landscape treatments include new screening plants along the southern boundary fence, and additional low shrubs around the learning hub. All plantings will be thoughtfully selected to compliment the Australian Drylands precinct and to preserve the character and legacy of the Royal Botanic Gardens.

4.5 Significant Trees

There are a number of trees slated for removal to facilitate this development, as listed in the attached Tree Removals Plan. Care has been taken to ensure that none of these trees are individually listed under the Heritage register, and that they do not include rare or one-of-a-kind specimens. Most of the mature and healthy trees in this area will be retained, including large *Eucalypt*, *Syzygium*, *Agonis*, *Acacia*, *Allocasuarina*, *Tristaniopsis*, *Myoporum*, and *Ficus* trees, ensuring that the overall overall aesthetic of the landscape is retained.

Trees to be removed include invasive species (eg *Pittosporum undulatum*), trees in poor health (*Acacia maidenii*, *Melaleuca linariifolia*, *Macadamia tetraphylla*, *Syzygium floribundum*, *Agonis hypericifolia*, *Ligustrum lucidum*), and up to 12 trees that are in the building footprint (*Syzygium* sp, *Elaeocarpus reticulatus*, *Leptospermum petersonii*, *Melaleuca linariifolia*, *Acacia maidenii*, *Syzygium smithii*). Undergrowth shrubs will also be pruned or removed to improve sightlines to the amenities in line with public safety standards.

A planting plan is being prepared as part of the Landscape works. Species selection to favour more dry tolerant plants as part of the transition toward the projected 2050 climate conditions.

4.6 Strategic Link

The Australian Drylands Landscape redevelopment is listed under Future Developments, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne Master Plan 2020-2040 as part of item 6.4 Arid and Drylands Precinct. It aligns with the Landscape Succession Strategy Melbourne Gardens 2016-2036.

Completing the Australian Drylands project, including the Learning Hub, is a short-term Action in the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Corporate Plan 2025-2029 (p26). The Learning Hub will provide essential infrastructure to grow and evolve its learning and engagement programs, supporting the Engagement aims within the Corporate Plan (p22) and enabling the organisation to continue to meet its mandate under the Royal Botanic Gardens Act 1991 of Increasing public knowledge and awareness of plants and plant communities.

4.7 Reasonable and Economic Use

The new Australian Drylands Learning Hub is designed to provide all the features necessary to host and engage with learning groups of all ages and abilities. In doing so, this development will enable the Gardens to expand its programs to reach broader audiences and increase revenue opportunities to support our ongoing business operations.

The Royal botanic Garden's learning and participation programs are a cornerstone in its knowledge and engagement activities. They are an integral part of the Garden's business operations, delivering on one of its core purposes and providing operational income through participation fees. The Corporate Plan 2025-2029 includes aims and actions to develop and expand our learning programs, identify new growth and revenue opportunities, and expand our influence and reach in the broader community through knowledge sharing.

Internal analyses of the learning and participation programs at RBGV note that the lack of suitable facilities is a key

limitation to our secondary school and adult learning group programs. A viable facility requires access, shelter, storage, and proximity to toilets. Connection to digital media is also considered an important feature for modern learning facilities.

This development, in this location, will help facilitate direct engagement with secondary school and adult learning groups on the importance of transitioning our landscapes to suit hotter, drier conditions to be resilient to the effects of climate change, drawing on the surrounding Australian Drylands landscape for example and inspiration.

5 Cultural Heritage Values

The cultural heritage values of the Melbourne Gardens have been established through the production of the Conservation Management Plan: Melbourne Gardens & Melbourne Observatory, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria: Melbourne Gardens & Melbourne Observatory, commissioned by the Royal Botanic Gardens and produced by Context Pty Ltd in 2018. The understanding of the heritage impact of the Australian Drylands Redevelopment is based on the analysis and policies in this document.

5.1 Melbourne Gardens Statement of Significance

The following Statement of Significance is based on that provided by the Conservation Management Plan: Melbourne Gardens & Melbourne Observatory, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria (Context, 2018). This new SoS has some minor changes from that in the VHR registration (1982 / 2002) to acknowledge shared Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal values for the place and some minor additions to the text, based on more recent assessment. There is an intention to update the registration for the Melbourne Gardens through application to the Heritage Council to reflect the revised Statement of Significance.

What is significant?

The Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, now known as the Melbourne Gardens, part of the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, commenced in 1846 on the south side of the Yarra River on a site selected by Superintendent Charles La Trobe, are located adjacent to Government House, the Melbourne Observatory and the Domain Parklands.

Prior to European colonisation the Melbourne Gardens was a camping and gathering place for Aboriginal people, being rich in food resources owing to the fresh water supply, billabongs and flood plain, and this activity continued into the early colonial period. It was significant as a meeting place for Aboriginal clans and burials are known in the area. At the time of settlement there are records of events, including corroborees and battles, taking place across the area. In March 1846 John Arthur was appointed the first superintendent, and later an area of 2ha (5ac) was fenced and developed near Anderson Street and the Yarra River. The Botanic Gardens were later enlarged in 1875 to include additional land from the Domain. The Botanic Gardens reserve is now 36ha.

From 1846 the Botanic Gardens were planted and landscaped under early curators, Arthur and Dallachy. In 1853 Ferdinand Mueller was appointed government botanist and commenced the National Herbarium. In 1857 Mueller became Director of the Botanic Gardens and under his direction the Botanic 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. A number of indigenous remnant Eucalypts and Melaleuca were deliberately retained within the designed landscape. An Undergardener's cottage was erected in 1850, and the Director's Residence in 1854.

In 1873 William Guilfoyle was appointed Curator of the Botanic Gardens in 1873 and Director in 1876. Under Guilfoyle's 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. Many of Mueller's early tree plantings were removed from 'plantation style' arrangements to become specimen trees to create this landscape. The lakes and islands were further landscaped and altered in layout. Rustic bridges, rockeries, rotundas, pavilions, nursery buildings, and gate lodges were built. Guilfoyle also added a number of new botanical collections to the Melbourne Gardens during his tenure. Of particular note are the Australian Forest Walk, the New Zealand collection, the Camellia collection, the Araucariaceae collection and the Quercus collection. 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 the New Zealand collection was established, as was the Eucalypt Lawn as the last major developments 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. The Melbourne Gardens still retain many very early plants, including remnant vegetation which predates 1846 trees from the Arthur, Dallachy, Von 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 Systems Pavilion was removed and there have been numerous building changes in the Nursery. 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, bamboo and grass, 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 Melbourne Gardens and the Melbourne Observatory (Observatory Gate).

How is it significant?

The Melbourne Gardens are of historical, architectural, scientific, aesthetic, and social significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Melbourne Gardens are of historical significance as Victoria's earliest botanic garden. The site was instrumental in the introduction and acclimatisation of plants, and animals, in Victoria. The involvement of Mueller and Guilfoyle, and the earlier Curators Arthur and Dallachy, established the Botanic Gardens as the State's principal botanical resource and as the centre for botanical research in Victoria. The association of Ferdinand Von Mueller, a botanist of international importance, as Government Botanist (1853-1896) and Director of the Botanic Gardens (1857-73) and the founder of the National Herbarium is significant. Mueller was instrumental in supporting the establishment of regional botanic gardens and parks by providing many plants and advice, resulting in an exceptional collection of nineteenth century botanic gardens and plants in Victoria. Guilfoyle was involved in the redesign of a number of these botanic gardens, and several private gardens, and many are regarded to be outstanding examples of his landscape style.

The Melbourne Gardens contain some of Victoria's oldest cultivated and commemorative trees. There are also remnant specimens of Eucalyptus camaldulensis, E. melliodora, and Melaleuca ericifolia. Beneath a large River Red Gum, known as the Separation Tree, Governor Charles La Trobe and the public celebrated the separation 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 an Algerian Oak in 1873.

The Botanic 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 Melbourne 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 Melbourne Gardens are of outstanding beauty and the seasonal change, contrasting forms and foliage, and plant maturity form an attractive landscape. Key elements in the design is 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. Particularly significant aesthetic plantings include the Oak Lawn, Fern Gully, Palm Collection, Cacti and succulent collection, Araucariaceae collection, the Australian Forest Walk border, New Zealand beds and South African triangle. There are significant views to the Government House tower, Temple of the Winds and Director's Residence.

Within the Melbourne Gardens are several buildings and structures of historic and architectural significance. These include the 1850 Under-gardener's Cottage (now Plant Craft Cottage), the oldest building in a public garden in Victoria; the 1854 Director's Residence (now Gardens House) and home to Gardens Directors until 1910; 1901 Temple of the Winds designed by Guilfoyle in a classical style incorporating staghorn fern capitals; an unusual masonry Directors' roll; and a significant collection of pavilions, gate lodges, arbours, seats, rockeries, gates and fences, and nursery buildings. In the Nursery is a rare example of a prefabricated iron house manufactured by Walmsley of London, and a paint shop with a roof lantern in a picturesque style.

The Melbourne Gardens and National Herbarium are of scientific significance as the centre of botanic research, plant acclimatisation and species introduction into Victoria since its establishment in 1846. The living collections form the most extensive collection of plants in Victoria and are a depository for rare and threatened exotic, Australian and Victorian species. The Melbourne Gardens contains several significant living collections and specimen plants incorporating geographic, horticultural, and ecological collections. The Camellia collection is listed as the Australian National Reference Collection and the Viburnum collection is registered by the Garden Plant Conservation Association of Australia, and both are important reference collections.

The Melbourne Gardens are of social significance for the valuable recreational and educational role they provide to visitors. They are one of the State's major tourist attractions and include many international and interstate visitors of all ages. The Melbourne Gardens play a major role in environmental, botanical, horticultural and aboriginal history education in Victoria. They have been a venue for major public events, including theatrical and musical performances, and official celebrations throughout their history.

5.2 Australian Border Significance

The Melbourne Gardens Conservation Management Plan 2018 (p57-63) describes the Australian Border as follows.

The Australian Border was established by Guilfoyle in the 1880s as a large collection of native vegetation from all states across Australia. Over time, the border has been added to and has become a specialised collection of Australian forest plants along the southern boundary of the Gardens between F Gate and C Gate.

Description and Condition

The Australian Border zone extends along the southern periphery of the Gardens from F Gate next to the Herbarium past E Gate to the Nareeb Gates (D Gate) at the south-east corner where it rounds at right angles to enclose the Eucalypt Lawn, formerly the Australian Lawn, in an area extending up to the southern side of the reservoir (Guilfoyle's Volcano). The soil, being sandy for much of its length, is possibly better suited to some native flora than sedimentary soils elsewhere in the Melbourne Gardens.

In the vicinity of E Gate, a collection of tree ferns and ground cover has been established. Fortunately, the fine rainforest trees with their interesting bark textures and buttress roots can now be appreciated from close by with the introduction of the 'Australian Forest Walk' in the 1990s. This is an informal path network constructed within the entire southern length of the Australian Border with the aim of experiencing plants native to eastern Australia's unique forests, from dry to tropical, coastal to alpine. These paths within the Australian Border have a natural-looking appearance from within the border.

A former brick toilet building remains hidden in the bed south of the Eucalypt Lawn close to the Nareeb Gates. The Ellis Stones' Rockery provides some diversion on the northern side between the Nareeb Gate and E Gate.

Analysis

This area has retained its current planting theme since the late 1880s. The erection of E Gate Lodge appears to have coincided with the commencement of 'Australian' planting. It is the only large component of the Melbourne Gardens where Australian plants are used exclusively.

The original intention of the border as set out by Guilfoyle appears to have been to demonstrate the diversity of the native flora, from cool-temperate to subtropical and from a range of vegetation types. Plants from arid areas may be seen alongside those from rainforest. At present there are no clear thematic plantings although the border has an important selection of mature rainforest trees from New South Wales and southern Queensland that are rarely cultivated in Victoria. These occur in pockets along the border and provide most of the screening for the Melbourne Gardens along the border. They also produce considerable shading for the understorey which needs careful selection and pruning to survive without becoming 'leggy'. It is possible, based on evidence from the Guilfoyle notebook, that even in Guilfoyle's time there was a practice of allocating plants to an area and giving the gardener discretion to distribute them. Although Guilfoyle was an Australian plant enthusiast (he published on them late in his life) the Australian Border may have been quite experimental and its eventual appearance may have been more accidental than planned.

The Australian Border originally enclosed the Eucalypt Lawn on three sides in the south eastern corner of the Gardens. A major change has occurred with the northern border of the lawn being replaced with the new collection of succulents associated with the recent redevelopment of the reservoir, although this is in a separate zone.

Views

Significant views of the Australian Border include:

- *Sequence of views along the main path from enclosed views opposite the New Zealand collection and the South West Pacific Islands collection to filtered views through to the Southern and Oak Lawns.*
- *Views of the Australian Border from Birdwood Avenue and the visual relationship to tree planting in the South Domain.*

Assessment of Significance Summary Statement

The Australian Border is significant as an early example of a collection of Australian plants and the concept of a densely planted border. The Australian Border is also significant for its path layout and fence alignment and as a collection of trees planted by Guilfoyle.

6 Means of Limiting Impact

RBGV has controls in place to ensure that the historic values of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne site are preserved and celebrated. These controls have been carefully applied to the design of this development and will continue to be applied throughout the construction and completion phases.

The proposed design for the Australian Drylands Learning Hub has been sited to avoid damage to historically significant trees, preserve significant view lines, and maintain the values and principles of the Australian Forest Walk Collection. Materials and finishes selected for the project are consistent with the current suite of materials and finishes used within the broader gardens and are appropriate for use in the project setting.

The potential for these works to damage trees has been further reduced through innovative design practices. The surface roots of the ficus trees were surveyed and included in the architectural model to ensure the structure would sit above them. Footing locations have also been pegged on site prior to design finalization to reduce the likelihood of tree root interference.

While some tree removal and site clearance will be required to deliver the works, the overall landscape quality will be enhanced with new plantings throughout the site.

All works of this nature are delivered according to best practice project management processes and this includes appropriate consultation with RBGV staff, in particular the Horticulture, Arboriculture, and Landscape Architecture teams, and stage gate approvals by RBGV management.

These measures will limit the impact of the development on the heritage values of the gardens, as outlined below.

6.1 Historical significance

The Australian Drylands Learning Hub development proposal is considered to have a neutral impact on the historical significance of the Melbourne Gardens for the following reasons:

- The location of the buildings and their separation from existing structures does not impact on any heritage fabric
- The project will not impede any historical vistas
- The project will not negatively impact individually significant plants or plant collections
- The RBGV have strict protocols in place with regards to visual impact and conservation of view-lines throughout the Gardens for introduced structures

6.2 Aesthetic and Architectural

The Australian Drylands Learning Hub development proposal is considered to have a positive impact on the aesthetic and architectural significance of Melbourne Gardens for the following reasons:

- The new buildings and boardwalk are minimalist in design and do not compete with or detract from the existing historic structures in the Gardens
- The buildings are not overly large in scale and their position near the Garden's perimeter and set amongst mature trees will ensure they are visually recessive in the landscape
- Natural and historically relevant RBGV approved materials such as timber, bluestone pavers, and rocks will be used throughout the development
- The buildings and boardwalks will sit lightly in the landscape by being elevated above the forest floor, having curved edges, and featuring undulating and visually permeable cladding treatments
- New plantings around the building and along the fence line will further nest the structures within the landscape
- Landscape treatments at either end of the boardwalk will tie these built elements to the Australian Drylands
- The historic view lines across the Australian Dryland lawn will be preserved

- The construction works and subsequent planting will reinvigorate the area by removing and replacing selected end of ULE plants.
- The RBGV have strict protocols in place with regards to visual impact and conservation of view-lines throughout the Gardens for planned works

6.3 Scientific and Social

The Australian Drylands Learning Hub development proposal is considered to have a neutral impact on the scientific significance and a positive impact on the social significance of the Melbourne Gardens for the following reasons:

- The new facilities provide opportunities to deliver additional educational programs, particularly for secondary school age students
- The location of this facility will enable direct connection between learning programs and RBGV's scientific landscape transition works
- The new Learning Hub will be available for general enjoyment by all visitors when not in use for formal education and engagement programs
- New plantings that form part of the project will generally be wild collected, climate suited and increase the % of rare and threatened plants within the gardens
- The RBGV have strict protocols in place to prevent damage to the heritage elements of the place during all stages of design and construction, including protection of the living collections
- The RBGV have strict protocols in place with regards to introduced structures throughout the Gardens. These protocols control works and ensure that visitors are impacted as little as possible

6.4 Reasonable and Economic Use

The Australian Drylands Learning Hub development proposal is considered to align with both reasonable and economic use of the Melbourne Gardens for the following reasons:

- The proposed development facilitates recreation and educational activities within the gardens that align with both legislative and strategic mandates for the RBGV
- The proposed development will enable more paid learning and participation activities to be delivered by the RBGV which will contribute to the ongoing financial viability of the organisation

Refusal to obtain a Permit for these works would have the following impacts:

- Impede the RBGV's opportunity to grow its learning program and reach new audiences
- Prevent the RBGV's from meeting an endorsed aim under the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Corporate Plan 2025-2029
- Cause reputational damage by reversing arrangements with private donors who have contributed funds to this project

7 Conclusion

The development of the Australian Drylands Learning Hub will allow the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria to broaden its engagement programs, ensuring that they continue to be meaningful and contemporary into the future. This delivers on a core objective of the Royal Botanic Gardens Act (1991) and Living Collections Plan 2022-2042 and is a reasonable economic use for this space.

The approval and development of the Australian Drylands Hub/walk will further enhance visitor amenity and learning outcomes and build on the work already completed as part of the Australian Drylands project. The teaching hub will allow larger groups of students to gather and orientate themselves before heading out into the smaller planted nodes of the Drylands walk.

This new asset has been designed to have minimal impact on the heritage value and visual amenity of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne. The new buildings have been placed carefully within the Australian Border and utilize materials and form that are sympathetic to the surrounding landscape. The structures will be elevated to sit lightly in the garden bed and avoid damage to the surrounding trees and their roots. The existing historic brick building will also be protected by keeping new structures separated and avoiding unnecessary changes to its original fabric.

The Melbourne Gardens has a proven track record on the delivery of projects under the expert guidance of the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Staff. This project will be overseen by the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, which has complete commitment to the responsible management of the site.