



Moreland City Council

Select Committee on Public Land Development

Legislative Council

Parliament of Victoria

Submission from Cr Andrea Sharam, Moreland City Council

This submission concerns lands acquired by VicRoads for the proposed F2 freeway, plans for which have since abandoned. It refers to

- a) four parcels of land north of Murray Rd Coburg between the Edgars Creek and Newlands Rd (Exhibit 1); and,
- b) several other parcels along the Merri Creek in Fawkner (Exhibits 10 & 11).

Council and residents believe that the land should not be developed and that Vic Roads should gift the land to the people of Moreland.

Introduction

The City of Moreland stretches from Royal Park in the south to the Western Ring Rd in the north and is bounded in the west and east respectively by the Moonee Ponds and Merri Creeks.

The inner urban area of Brunswick historically had very little provision for public open space. What exists today largely results from the closure of quarries. Linear parks have developed along the Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks although the later is highly compromised by the Tullamarine Freeway and associated works to the creek itself (a concrete culvert replaced the creek).

Further to the north, parts of areas such as Pascoe Vale remain without public open space within the 400m nominated as desirable maximum walking distance.

Moreland is under-provided with public open space (POS) and changes in land usage patterns are not expected to deliver opportunities to increase POS. For example the only way POS could be provided in Pascoe Vale would be to acquire

housing. Further details can be obtained by examining the Moreland Open Space Strategy

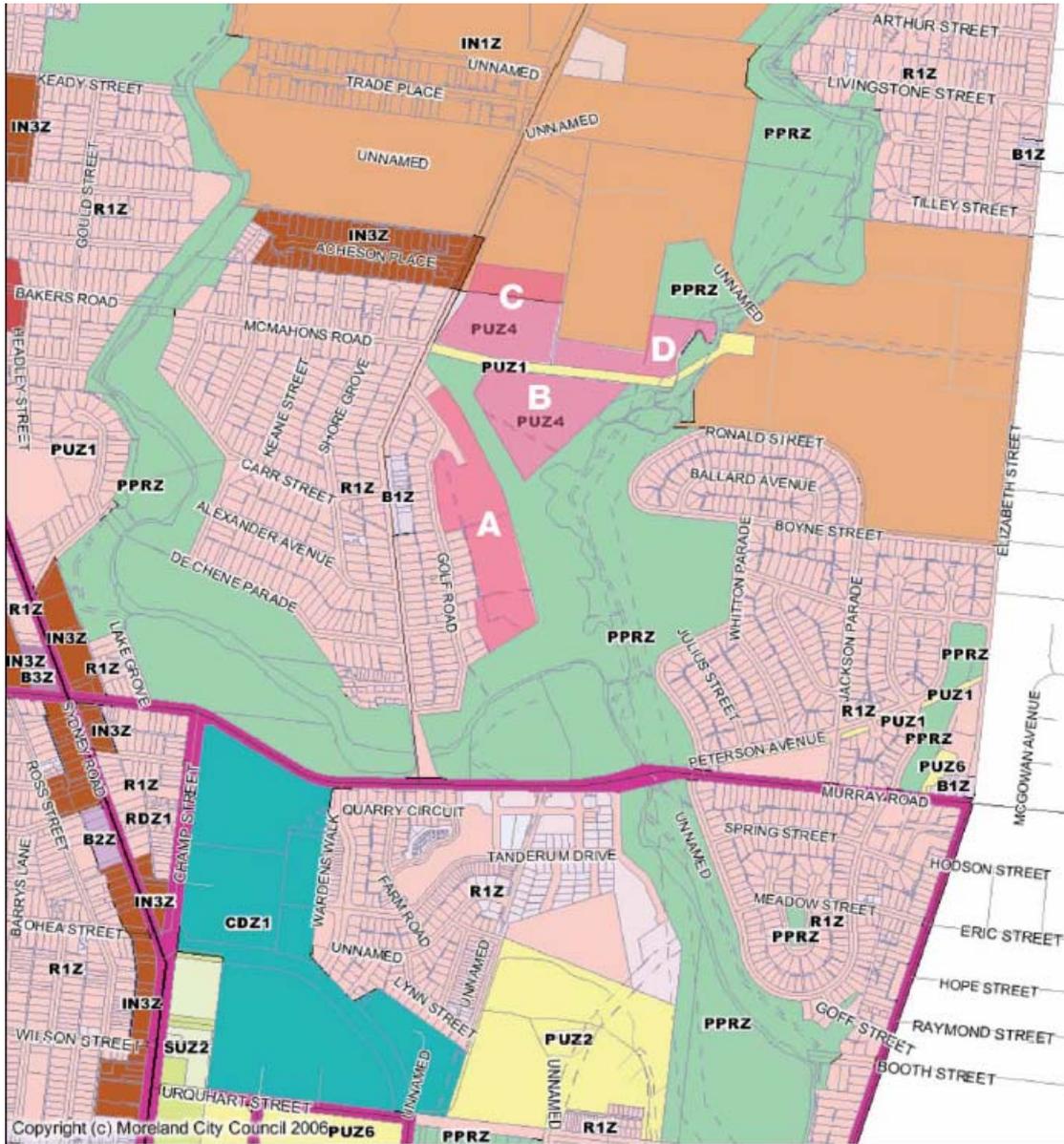
<http://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/pdfs/Moreland%20Open%20Space%20Strategy%202004.pdf>).

It is also worth noting that Moreland's ratepayers contribute approximately \$3m per annum to Parks Victoria through the Parklands levy on their water bills. To date Moreland has received almost nothing in return for that annual payment (some sites in Glenroy West, along the Moonee Ponds Creek were retained for public open space). This raises an issue of equity both because the money is spent on regional parks outside of Moreland although Moreland has less POS than desirable and that housing densities are far higher restricting access to private open space – Melbourne's regional parks are generally located in areas that have low housing densities and large suburb blocks that provide for private open space. In addition, Moreland is historically an area of low socio-economic households and this remains true for large parts of the city. The ability of Council therefore to purchase POS is constrained by ratepayers ability to pay.

A) The Edgars Creek land

For at least 30 years the City of Moreland and its predecessor councils have maintained the land at Edgars Creek as public open space at no charge to VicRoads. These four parcels at around 10ha represent about 50% of the total open space in this area. All the parcels are subject to an Environmental Significance Overlay. There is remnant vegetation on one of the parcels and extensive revegetation has occurred across all parcels.

Exhibit 1 – zoning – Land Subject to Inundation and Environmental Significance Overlay



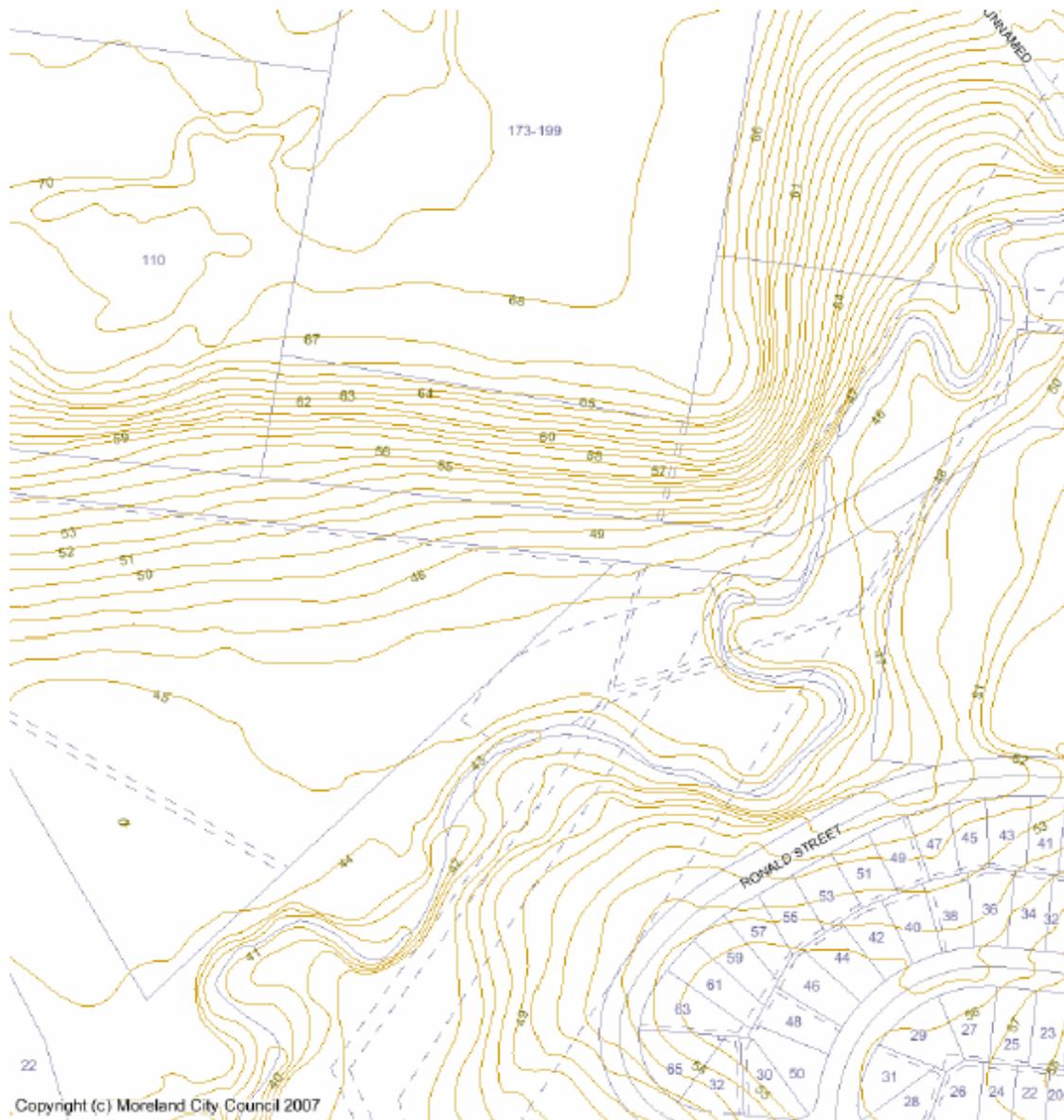
The northern part of Parcel B and Parcels C and D are subject to two exclusion zones: one in relation to a lead factory and one in relation to concrete batching plant (the Newlands Core Industrial area is to the immediate north and north west. Heavy industrial usage is expected to continue at these sites for the foreseeable future).

Exhibit 2 – Exclusion zones



Part of Parcel D is comprised of a steep embankment some of which is unstable. This embankment forms part of the Edgars Creek cliff areas designated as of regional geological significance.

Exhibit 4 – Topography of site: contour map



The northern parcels take in a considerable rise in height and offer an unimpeded view of the city just 9 km away.

These parcels of land have been declared surplus to requirements by VicRoads. VicRoads has offered first option to the City of Moreland who has been in discussions with VicRoads since 2004. In late July 2006 public advertisements appeared in the metropolitan newspapers advising of intention to sell. Unfortunately, members of the government have insisted on advising concerned residents that Vic Roads is obliged to sell the land at market value. The Government Land Monitor has, of course, confirmed that this is a policy of government and there is no legislative obligation.

As of 7 June 2007 the Valuer-General put deemed the following values (exc. GST):

Parcel A (3.630ha) \$4,350,000

Parcel B - (2.936ha) \$3,450,000

Parcel C & D – (4.137ha) \$2,050,000

Vic Roads offered a bulk discount of \$300,000. Moreland City Council was being asked to purchase these parcels for a total of \$9,550,000. This assumes that the land would stay as public use rather than be developed. Commonsense suggests that the poorest level of government should not be financially responsible for preventing the loss of POS.

According to Melbourne 2030, the Parkland's Code necessitates the 'Environmental and recreational value of surplus government land will be fully evaluated before any decision is made on a proposal to sell land held by the Crown, a government department or a statutory authority' (M2030:104). No such assessment has been made available to Council or the public.

The City of Moreland supports the aims and objectives of M2030 and has actively facilitated higher density development in our activity centres. Immediately to the south of this parkland, several thousand new residents will call the former Pentridge prison site home. To the immediate east of the park, the redevelopment of the former Kodak complex will likewise result in several thousand new residents. M2030 recognises the need to preserve and improve public open space to ensure the urban amenity as density of housing increases. Yet it would appear that this aim is being ignored.

Likewise, the proposal to sell the land for residential and commercial development would have some difficulty meeting the *out of centre* policy objectives of M2030. In regard to housing, the site is too far from public transport and services (especially if it were to be affordable housing, which has been mooted). Moreland is very supportive of affordable housing and is aiming for a high proportion in Central Coburg as part of that urban renewal project. Whatever housing may be built, it would in all likelihood be low density – which would mean a low benefit use (low density housing) would replace a high benefit use (open space).

While the site abuts the Newlands Industrial Core, expansion of that core to the south would merely bring industrial land use closer to the residential zone which will cause future conflict and threaten the future viability of such industrial development (the

eastern part of the former Kodak site is to be re-zoned reflecting existing conflict). It is desirable to maintain a green buffer between surrounding residential areas and the Newlands Core Industrial Precinct to help manage noise pollution, impact of potential emissions, 24/7 illuminations etc.

The proposal for commercial development faces poor road network infrastructure and, as noted previously, poor public transport.

Land use planning is undermined by approvals by Melbourne Water for development on flood prone land and by the Environmental Protection Authority approvals for residential development within industrial buffer zones. Given that both these authorities have granted similar approvals elsewhere there is concern that the same could occur at Edgar's Creek.

Exhibit 6 – Flooding issues

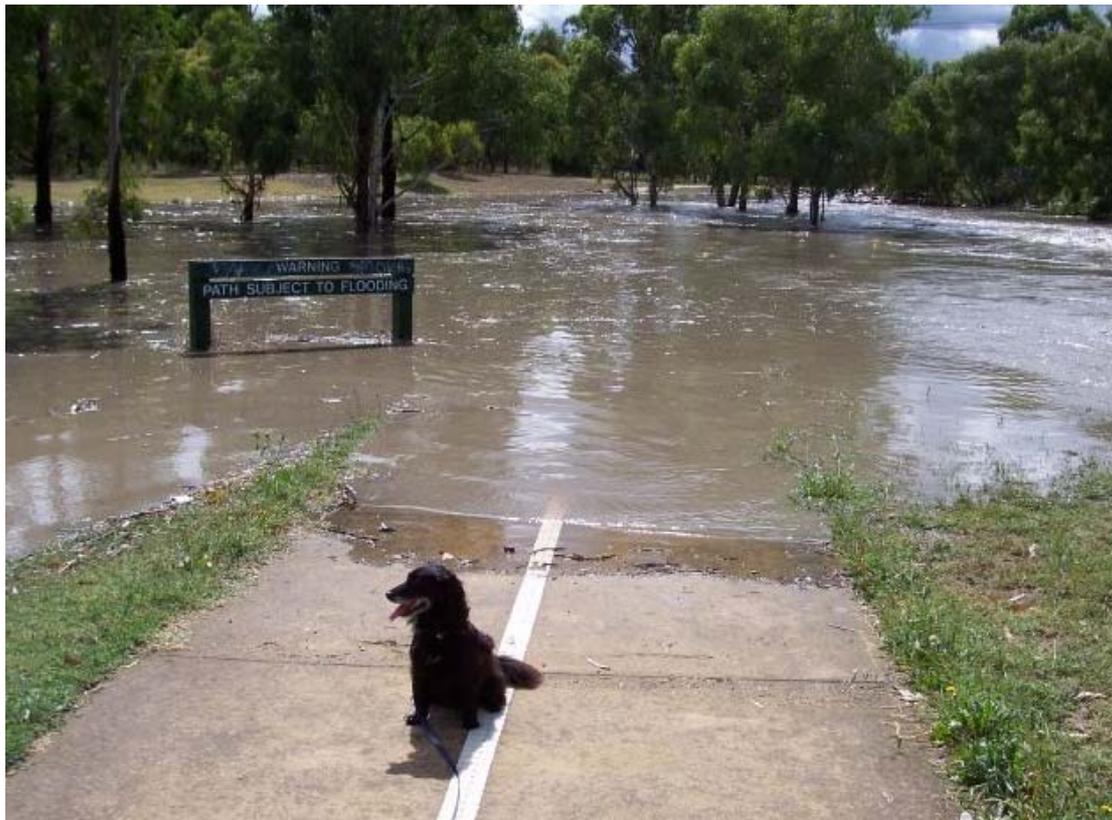


Exhibit 7 – Flooding issues



Exhibit 8 – Flooding issues



This parkland is of ecological significance. The Department of Sustainability and Environment (2006) Atlas of Victorian Wildlife records 48 fauna species within 1.5km

of the Kodak Bridge over Edgar's Creek. Approx. 280 trees already exist on the site, including areas of remnant vegetation. 'Waterfall and Geological structure' (Exhibit 9) has a regional significance rating. The report strongly recommends the discontinuance of vehicle use of this site. There is also a recommendation to allow some natural erosion and for a meander pattern to develop in this area. The practice of rock-walling needs to be discontinued.

Exhibit 9 – Regional Geographical significance



Edgars Creek looking south (downstream) from footbridge at the natural ford and waterfall, 8 Feb 2007. Melbourne Water engaging in inappropriate 'cleaning up the site and rock walling to prevent natural erosion).

The existing parkland is used daily by walkers, joggers, golfers using the free golf-driving range, and dog walkers. It is used regularly by dog training schools, and by the Coburg Harriers Athletics Club and their affiliates. Cross-country athletics training and events are conducted in the parkland (eg. the Bluestone Classic Run). The size of the parkland and its varied topography along with its proximity to the city ensure its attractiveness for such use.

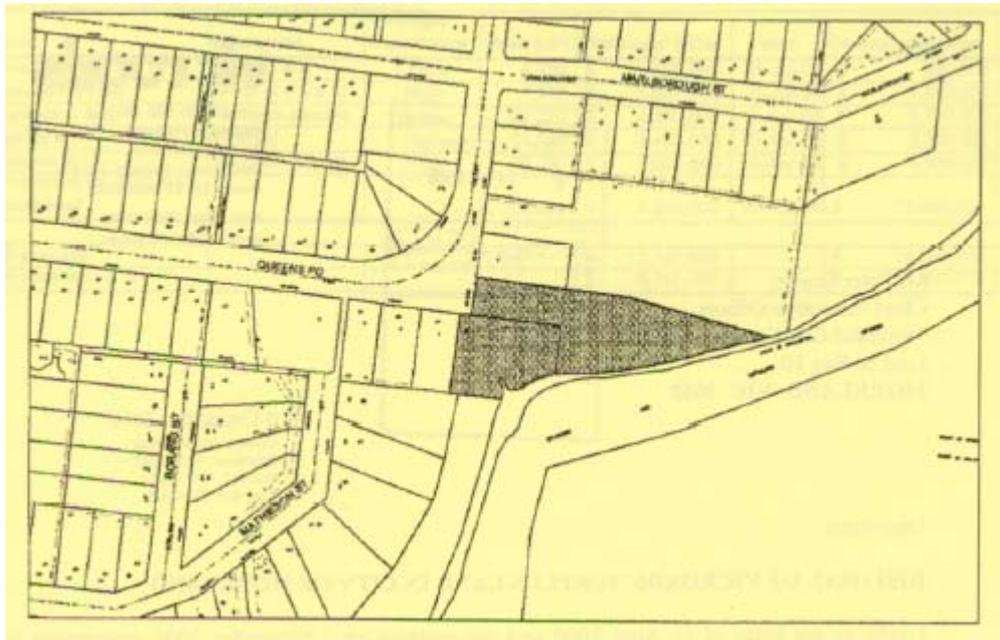
In summary, replacing much needed public open space in an area undergoing significant residential population increase with low density housing and/or industrial uses that are not supported by either the planning scheme or by infrastructure is contrary to the larger strategic view of Melbourne 2030.

b) The Fawkner land

VicRoads also has parcels of land in Fawkner alongside the Merri Creek that it is disposing of (Exhibits 10 and 11).

The land at Queens Pde has been offered to Council at a cost of \$190,000 exc. GST. The land has a major stormwater drain outlet to the creek that cannot be built over. The remaining land has a problematic relationship to the existing street frontage, and the eastern part would not gain permits for residential use. The current value of the land is that it provides bicycle access to the Merri Creek bike trail. Given that the State government has contributed to the funding of the trail and has policies aimed at encouraging active lifestyles, it is nonsensical to contemplate development of this site and counter-productive to shift the cost onto local government.

Exhibit 10 – Queens Pde, Fawkner



The land parcels at Leonard St have been offered to Council at a cost of \$1,057,500 exc. GST and are subject to an agreement to rezone to Public Purpose zone.

Exhibit 11 – Leonard St, Fawkner

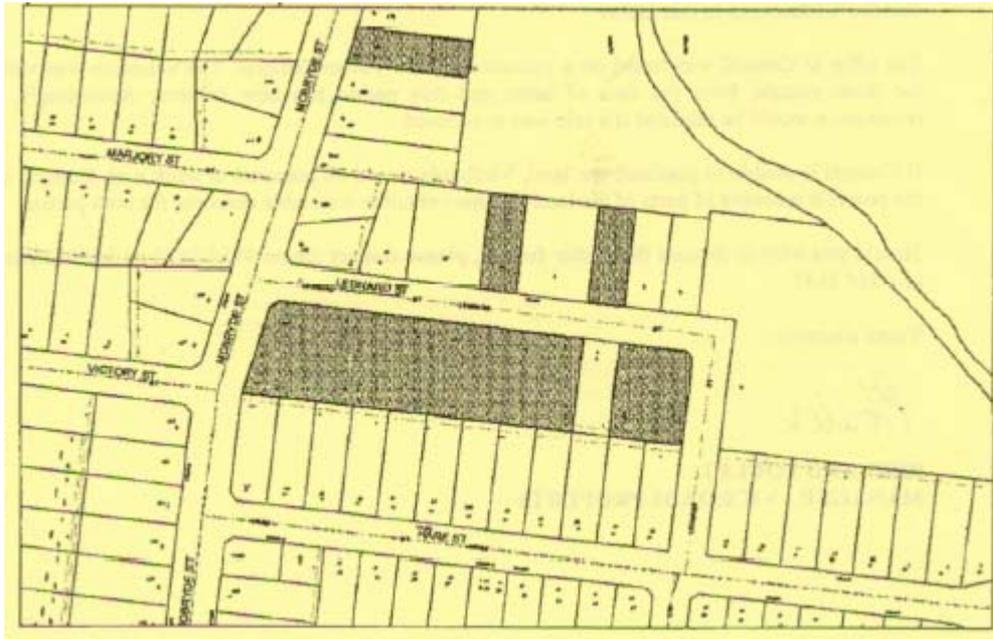


Exhibit 12 – Zoning Leonard St



Exhibit 12 shows that the land is also subject to an Environmental Significance Overlay. This relates to high quality remnant grassland that Council is keen to see protected. This would also require that the surrounding blocks avoid development.

Exhibit 13- current usage Leonard St



Exhibit 13 shows that much of the adjoining land is not yet developed. It is my understanding that some of the other blocks are owned by Melbourne Water. As not all the land could be required to protect the natural values and ensure connection to the existing parkland, there is scope for land swaps and some disposal. This should be done as an arrangement between VicRoads, Melbourne Water, Council and other state agencies as necessary but Council should not need to purchase the land in order for this to happen. Council is willing to take the responsibility of the long term maintenance.

Conclusion

VicRoads has failed to undertake an assessment of all the values of the land it is seeking to dispose of as required by the Parklands Code of M2030. The policy of VicRoads to obtain market prices for land that is declared surplus to requirements fails to take account of other state policies and objectives. Placing the onus on local government to protect public open space is cost-shifting and an abrogation of state responsibilities. Moreover, local government can ill afford, in most cases, the cost of purchasing such land.

A process needs to be developed, beyond the Parklands Code to determine the future of public open space and how change in use or management should be considered and managed.

Yours Sincerely

Andrea Sharam

Cr Andrea Sharam

North East Ward, Moreland City Council