Sunshine Coast
Street Tree Master Plan 2018
An overview

Trees shade, cool and balance the built environment and contribute to the health, character and prosperity of our communities.

The stunning coastline, sub-tropical climate and extensive network of green spaces that cover the Sunshine Coast Council region are central to the enviable Sunshine Coast lifestyle. Street trees are key components of these green spaces providing shade, cooling and many other visual, social, economic and environmental benefits.

Trees bring character and beauty to our streets. They improve the look and feel of our immediate environment and the places we go. They make our towns vibrant places to live by providing quality spaces for day to day life. Shady streets bring urban life outdoors and encourage people to exercise and socialise, improving the health of our communities and helping to drive the local economy. Leafy streets have been shown to attract higher sale prices (Plant et al., 2017) as well as increase general feelings of wellbeing in local residents.

The Sunshine Coast is growing and changing

A direct relationship exists between areas shaded by trees and cooler land surface temperatures (Shashua-Ba et al., 2010). In a rapidly growing and warming region like the Sunshine Coast, street trees offer one of the most cost-effective sources of natural shade and cooling. Recent home-grown and international research has also highlighted an impressive range of measurable environmental, social and economic benefits, which support the business case for greener neighbourhoods (see Part A of the plan: Trees and temperature and Trees and ecosystem services).

As local temperatures rise as projected, the shade, cooling and 'ecosystem services' provided by trees will become more important than ever. Proactive street tree planting is needed to both mitigate heat and sustain the Sunshine Coast's sub-tropical amenity into the future. Yet to deliver suitable, healthy, long-lived shade trees where they are needed most, there are key issues and challenges (driven by population growth, changing climate and community needs) to be addressed and opportunities to be embraced.
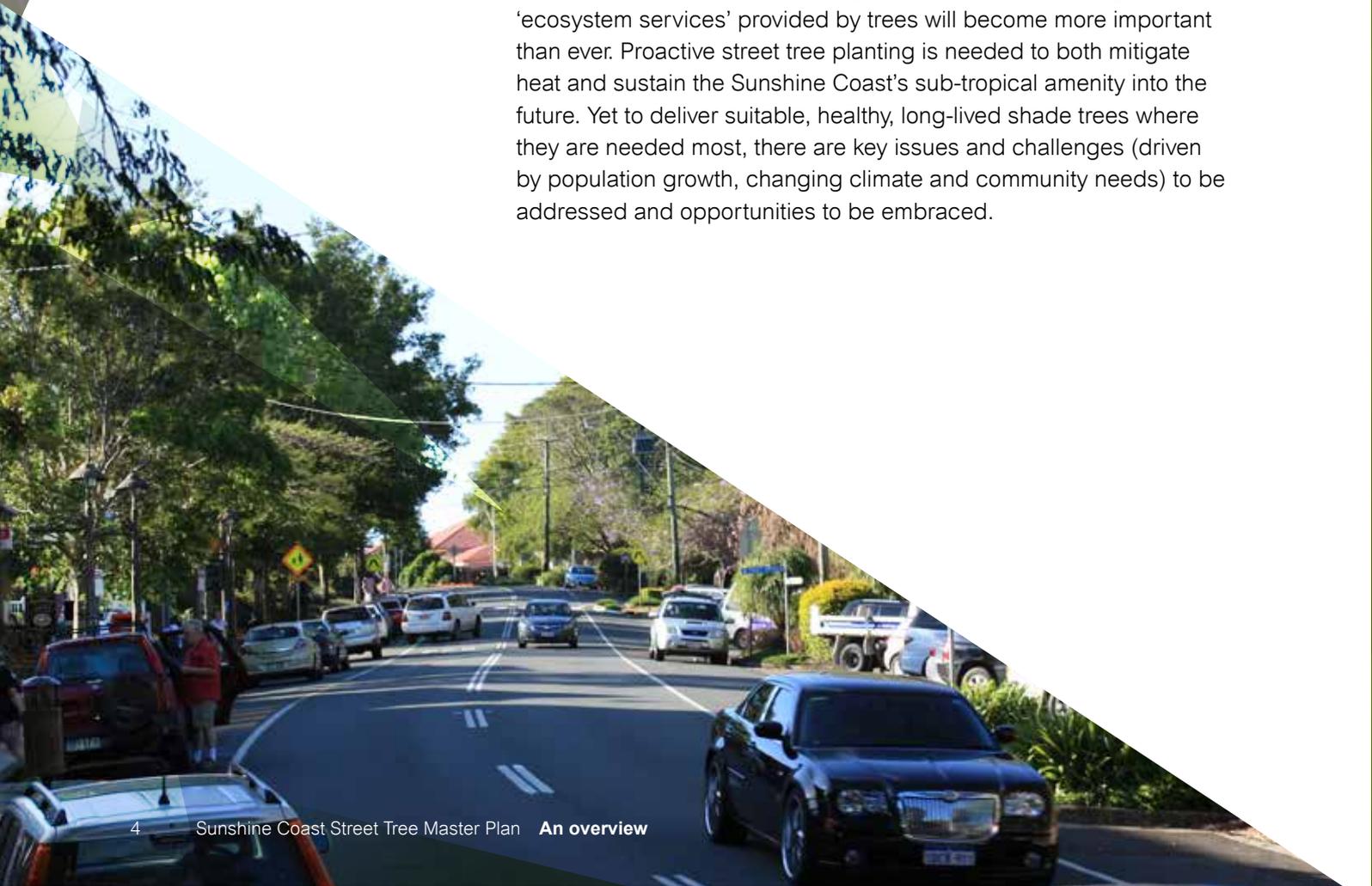
Space for growing street trees is at a premium in urban areas

Population growth projections reflect the Sunshine Coast's rapid pace of residential development with both infill and greenfield development threatening the extent and quality of tree cover on private land, and placing significant pressure on existing and future street tree networks.

If we're realistic and smart about where and how we establish new street trees, we can safeguard the Sunshine Coast's urban amenity and outstanding liveability while embracing the growth necessary for our region's prosperity. Taking small steps to compensate for the limitations of the streetscape layouts of today will have a significant impact on the extent and quality of tree cover across the region in the future.

In a landscape that continues to grow and change, ensuring we plant 'the right trees in the right places' is more important than ever.

The evidence/analysis of the Sunshine Coast's urban forest

To help determine street tree planting priorities for the region, Council has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the Sunshine Coast's urban forest and existing street tree network.

As a very first for an LGA (Local Government Area) in Australia, a "foliage score" has been developed for each of the 27 Local Plan Areas (LPAs) across the Sunshine Coast region, using a combination of two and three-dimensional tree cover mapping considering percentage canopy cover and projected shade, foliage density and tree height.

The Sunshine Coast is confirmed as one of the greenest LGAs in Queensland with 57% of all land covered with some trees, yet our most densely populated areas score poorly for tree cover. Results suggest that Council needs to prioritise shade tree planting in the localities of Golden Beach/Pelican Waters, Caloundra, Mooloolaba/Alexandra Headland, Maroochydore/Kuluin and Kenilworth.
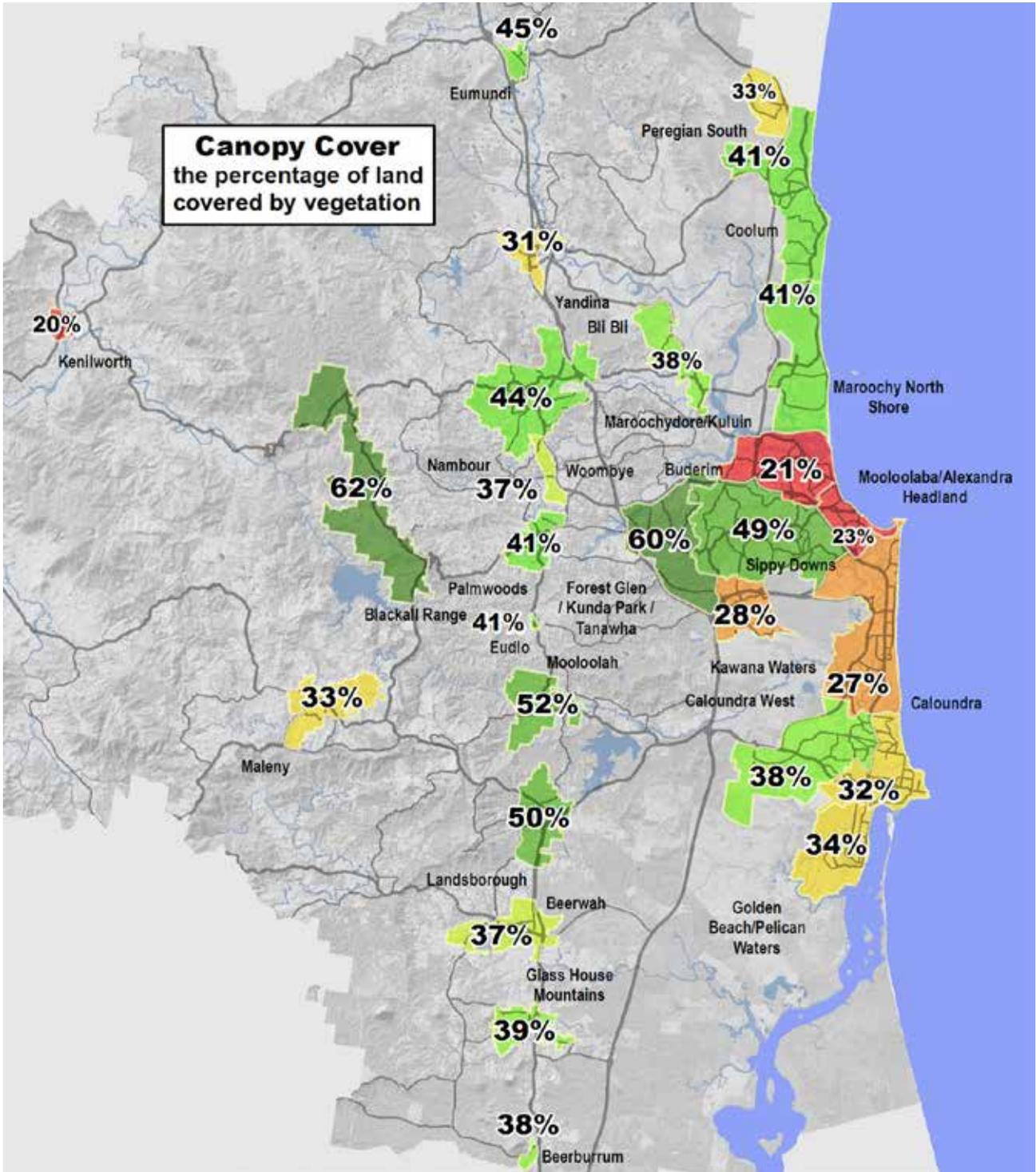
IMAGE: Map showing Sunshine Coast Council region Local Plan Areas (LPAs) and percentage canopy cover in each

Street tree species – an eye on the past, the present and the future

In addition to identifying priorities for planting, this plan reviews the suitability of street tree species with an eye on the past, the present and the future.

While there are benefits to using tree species that are known to be reliable, it's important we don't rely too much on a narrow set of species. A diverse range of tree species should be used to help avoid the risk of catastrophic losses to pest and disease outbreaks. Using a limited set of species also increases vulnerability to significant changes to climate or future growing conditions in our region.

Some species are already proving unreliable or exhibiting undesirable traits. Many problems of today are caused because the tree species selected was not suitable for the site it was planted into. This plan identifies exciting opportunities to diversify the existing palette of Sunshine Coast street trees, expanding use of uncommon Sunshine Coast native species and promoting greater use of signature plants of local origin as feature and gateway trees. The plan also provides opportunity for non-local native, and in some situations, exotic trees to be trialled (where appropriate).

The strategic response – this plan

Together with key tree management priorities for each stage of life cycle of street trees (from ensuring good quality street tree stock, to partnerships with infrastructure providers to better protect existing trees, to tracking Council's existing commitment to "no net loss" replacement for existing trees), the plan identifies eight guiding principles to protect, sustain and enhance the region's existing and future street tree network.

The eight principles developed to guide future street tree planting on the Sunshine Coast are to:

Ensure locally responsive species selection and placement that reflects or complements existing character and design intent.

Plant large canopy trees and groups of trees to build canopy wherever space permits and conflict potential is low for provision of ecosystem services.

Ensure adequate space is reserved and created for future street trees (specifically engineered for tree planting if necessary).

Shade and cool major pedestrian routes and urban hot spots with higher street tree densities.

Create attractive and coherent streetscapes. Plant large canopy feature/anchor trees in strategic locations. Infill and extend avenues along major thoroughfares and town lead–ins to enhance the subtropical look and feel of the region.

Reduce conflict potential through better tree selection and placement of street trees and ongoing partnerships with the community and stakeholders.

Sustain the existing extent of canopy cover across the region through continued planting of offset trees, and building population resilience through diversification of species and succession plantings. Increase health and longevity of street trees through appropriate selection, planting and care of new trees.

Partner with the local community and corporate sector to help establish and care for new trees.

Implementing the plan

Although the plan sets a vision for the next 20 years, specific actions have been identified for the next five years to align with the current Sunshine Coast Council Corporate Plan 2018-2022.

Supported by field surveys, local Street Tree Strategies have been tailor-made to each of the region's 27 Local Plan Areas (LPAs) (Part B). These consider existing landscape character, land use, local priorities, existing opportunities and constraints for sustaining and building tree canopy cover in the future.

Street tree planting priorities

Short-term priorities include identifying opportunities to plant large feature trees in available locations, enhancing avenues of trees on our major thoroughfares and targeting local shade-hungry streets along major pedestrian routes.

Example of tree planting priority 1:
Shade major pedestrian routes.

Example of tree planting priority 2:
Plant trees where space permits and conflict potential is low.

Example of tree planting priority 3:
Infill and extend tree avenues on major thoroughfares.

Treemendous Tree Partnerships

Young street trees that are desired and nurtured by adjacent residents have the best chance of surviving and thriving in urban landscapes.

Council is committed to partnering with local residents to establish and care for new street trees in locations where they are wanted the most. Council will work with local communities to identify priority locations where residents would like to see new feature trees and street trees established.

Council is also committed to working more closely with internal and external partners to ensure street trees are adequately protected and accommodated for in all programs of infrastructure renewal and capital upgrade.