



Mount Hawthorn Primary School

Fig tree position statement

Prepared by the MHPS Grounds Committee
August 2017

The Mount Hawthorn Primary School (MHPS) and the Mount Hawthorn Education Support Centre (MHESC) occupy a compact 2.39 Ha inner city site in Perth, Western Australia, where space for the large and growing student cohort is at a premium. The school grounds and green space are widely recognised as being critical to student and community wellbeing. We are proud to have a tree as our school logo.

Context:

- A new seven classroom two storey build has been approved for the school for construction during 2018. It is of critical importance to the school community that this build is not delayed. However, the current plans for the building footprint overlap the position of a large Jackson Bay fig tree.
- Since 2005, the school has lost over 270m² of tree canopy cover, reducing the overall canopy cover for the school from 28% to 15% (i.e. less than 60% of the cover in 2005). In this 12 year period only 4 new trees have been planted, with numerous trees removed and others that have been heavily pruned.
- The fig tree in question is easily the largest tree canopy at the school. Providing a shaded area of over 200m², the tree is conservatively estimated to be around 80 years old (i.e. planted in the 1930's) and has a professionally estimated by the Arbor Centre to have an amenity value of over \$400,000.

As such, the MHPS Grounds Committee (GC) are committed to conserving the fig tree in recognition of its iconic status and its significant value to the school and the wider community.

Rationale:

- Given that current plans for the building footprint overlap the position of the fig tree, four options emerge:
 - 1) No change to existing plans (i.e. the tree is felled and lost);
 - 2) Conserve the fig tree by moving it to a new location as part of the new build landscaping;
 - 3) Conserve the fig tree by forcing a building design change (i.e. a campaign for changing the plans);
 - 4) Engage in a collaborative design process to revisit the current plans.
- Given our position statement above, Option 1 is eliminated. Options 3 and 4 are high risk strategies for project timing. Furthermore, Option 4 may or may not result in a plan that conserves the tree in its current position.
- Given the above context, Option 2 is most likely to achieve the goal of conserving the tree. As such the MPHS GC supports exploring all options to ensure Option 2 can happen.

Justification for conservation

- *Social*

- [Research](#) shows that key wellbeing issues of retaining the tree include reduced health risks, increased opportunities for physical activity, [positive effects](#) on behaviour and improved mental health [outcomes](#).
- At over 80 years old, the tree has significant local historical value; many thousands of kids have played in and under its branches.
- The tree ties the school to the wider community (e.g. forming a link to Braithwaite Park).
- Tree canopy restoration and conservation is a responsibility on current generations as a legacy for future generations. We are all custodians of this tree for the MHPS students of the future.
- With an [increasing focus](#) on the benefits of [outdoor classrooms](#) to learning quality, the tree is value adding to learning opportunities.

- *Environmental*

- The tree provides instant canopy cover that cannot be replicated by newly planted trees. Planting four of the largest feasible trees in place of the fig tree would collectively represent just 25% of the shaded area provided by the fig canopy. For these trees to subsequently equal the shaded area of the fig canopy would take another 20 years, assuming the optimal species were planted.
- The tree remains an iconic landscape centrepiece in the new pre-primary play space (*in situ* or moved).
- Conservation is in line with the [2020 Vision](#) adopted by the City of Vincent (who also have their own [Greening Policy](#)) to conserve and restore tree canopy cover in Mount Hawthorn.

- *Economic*

- The tree is valued at over \$400,000 and is irreplaceable. The equivalent shaded area in sails would cost over \$60K to install and would not offer any of the social or aesthetic benefits that the tree provides.
- The tree reduces heat loading to the play space below and for the new build nearby.

Addressing misunderstandings

- It has been claimed that the tree is too messy (dropped fruits) to warrant retaining. On the contrary, (i) representatives for the Pre-Primary area have spoken of the value of the shade provided and of innovative ways to deal efficiently with the fruits, and (ii) further landscaping enhancements with the new build could further reduce any fruit drop inconvenience to a negligible level.
- It has been claimed that the tree represents a high risk due to limb drop. However, given that the tree remains in good health, has been without incident for some 80 years, and noting how common the tree is across other Perth parks (e.g. Braithwaite, Hyde, and Kings parks), this risk should be viewed as negligible.
- It is true that the tree is often listed on 'don't plant' urban tree lists, but this is considered to be primarily due to its large mature size (i.e. too big for small properties) and habit of roots cracking old clay piping (it does not represent a threat to modern PVC piping).

Basis for moving the tree if necessary

- It is likely that conservation of the tree will require the tree to be moved because: (i) the current building design overlaps with the tree; (ii) the DoE, BMW and School Board all support the currently proposed designs; (iii) a change in design may impact on delivery timeframes; and (iv) a campaign to change the design is likely to be divisive and polarising.
- There is a viable option to move the tree (it is able to be conserved *in situ* or moved), as seen for [other large fig trees](#) in Perth. A detailed quote received from Arbor Centre is for \$45k+GST.
- The risk of failure of the move is low. Arbor Centre are confident, experienced and provide a guarantee.
- With a prompt decision, there is no risk that moving the tree will affect build timeframe or constraints.

Revision	Purpose	Author	Reviewer	Approver	Date
0b	Initial issue	B. Webber & T. Lithgo	T. Swart	T. Lithgo	30 Aug 2017