

Haining Farm Community Update

January 2018



Haining Farm in the Yarra Valley will see increased community access for recreation and education, and will provide habitat for the critically endangered Helmeted Honeyeater and lowland Leadbeaters Possum



Over the past 18 months, Parks Victoria, the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP), Greening Australia, Zoos Victoria and the Don Valley community held a series of conversations and community activities to seek feedback and insights on the future of Haining Farm.

This update collates the community and stakeholder feedback received during this process and outlines the key recommendations that will be included in a Haining Farm Concept Plan.

Community Working Group

In February 2017, a Haining Farm Community Working Group was established to seek community feedback and investigate a range of factors including concerns about bushfire risk. This working group included seven Don Valley community members and representatives from Parks Victoria, DELWP, Yarra Ranges Council, CFA, Yellingbo Conservation Area Coordinating Committee and Yarra Waterways Group.

After a series of conversations and technical investigations into factors including bushfire risk, hydrology and habitat, the Haining Farm Community

Working Group presented three concepts for the site:

1. Boutique Dairy Farm with Conservation
2. Commercial Agri-Tourism Farming Operation
3. Habitat Protection for Threatened Species with Community Access

As part of the Working Group's investigations, the local community and the broader Victorian community were invited to contribute their knowledge, concerns and opportunities for the Haining Farm site based on these three concepts

Consultation and Working Group Outcomes

Parks Victoria and DELWP thank everyone who took the time to provide feedback and advice on this project. In particular to the Haining Farm Working Group for their efforts and time in investigating the options and providing their recommendations.

Over 2300 submissions were received during the consultation into the three concepts.

The results of the community engagement process show the overwhelming majority of respondents (~80%) are supportive of Concept 3.

Respondents within 10km of Don Valley were more supportive of Concept 2. Whereas respondents outside 10km from Don Valley were more supportive of Concept 3.

Feedback showed a significant level of support for the site to be used to provide habitat for the Helmeted Honeyeater and Lowland Leadbeaters Possum. To achieve this, it is recognised that the site must include some habitat restoration including wet environments and dense mid-story vegetation.

We heard concerns about the future management of the reserve in relation to managing bushfire risk to the local community.

We heard that the presence of farm animals, particularly along the northern and southern boundaries, is important to the community.

We also heard that access, recreation and education opportunities were important to both the local and broader community.

The key outcomes

The Haining Farm Redevelopment Working Group recommended that the site provide for conservation for threatened species, increased community access and primary production. To achieve this, a new design was developed that meets the key interests of both the broader and local communities.

Parks Victoria and DELWP will now progress the new Haining Farm Concept Plan to the detailed design stage with a clear understanding of the views of the broader and local community, and the recommendations of the Working Group. The Concept Plan will seek to balance the importance of conservation to the broader community, with the views of the local community and considerations to prevent increased bushfire risk.

The concept plan will be consistent with the gifting of the land to the people of Victoria by Sir John Reid to use for conservation and education.

The following factors raised by the community are seen as priorities for implementation by Parks Victoria in the detailed design stage of the project. The attached Concept Plan shows a general representation of how Haining Farm could look.

The three key priorities are:

1. To provide for the restoration of 42 hectares of habitat for two of Victoria's most threatened species, the Helmeted Honeyeater and lowland Leadbeaters Possum
2. That the site includes bushfire mitigation measures to ensure the plan does not materially increase the bushfire risk to the local and broader communities
3. That there will be increased opportunities for community access and recreation, education and small scale primary production to acknowledge the history of the site as a dairy farm

Key considerations

To ensure the reserve provides for the needs and desires of the local and broader community, Parks

Victoria will follow these principles in the design and management of the site:

Fire and Emergency Management

The Victorian Government has made a commitment that the development of Haining Farm will not materially increase the bushfire risk to the community. Also, given the significant investment in this project, it is critical that the endangered species are not introduced into an environment at high risk of bushfire.

Phoenix Bushfire Modelling indicates that the Haining Farm project will not materially increase the existing bushfire risk to the community. This has been reviewed by independent fire experts.

A significant effort will be put into talking with the local community about fire management of the reserve including how Parks Victoria manages fire in collaboration with DELWP and CFA.

Emergency vehicle access into and around Haining Farm will be developed as a part of Parks Victoria's Melbourne Fire and Emergency Program.

Water points will be upgraded and created at Haining Farm for use for fire suppression needs throughout the valley.

As recommended by the technical fire experts, an open woodland area to prevent an increase in bushfire risk will be created on the northern and eastern boundaries of the site.

Community Access

Activities such as walking, jogging or visiting to appreciate Haining Farm's natural values will be supported.

Large areas of public open space and a track network open to the public will be provided.

Conservation

Areas of Haining Farm will be restored to create habitat for two of Victoria's most endangered/threatened species, the Helmeted Honeyeater and Lowland Leadbeaters Possum.

Greening Australia, Zoos Victoria and Parks Victoria will continue to work with animal experts, plant ecologists and soil scientists to develop the plan for the revegetation and habitat restoration.

Habitat restoration will include earthworks, wetland creation and floodplain revegetation to create the flooding conditions required for wet forest plants to grow. This will involve the reinstatement of wetlands and billabongs across the farm and the creation of new wetlands along Don Road and Dalry Road.

Some streamside areas will be revegetated and more natural water flows will be introduced to improve the water quality in the Don and the Yarra rivers.

A deer exclusion fence will be constructed to protect the revegetation. This fence will include several gates and pathways to allow visitor access.

Agriculture/Farming

The future management of Haining Farm will recognise the history of the dairy farm and seek to incorporate some form of farming on the site.

Consistent with Parks Victoria's procedures for commercial lease management, grazing by farm animals around the boundary of the site within the open woodland area will be explored through an expression of interest process.

Education

The reserve will include signage and potential artefact displays to provide information about the former use of the site as a dairy farm as well as information on the two-threatened species.

Parks Victoria will invite partnerships and opportunities for education and community use of the reserve.

Tourism

Parks Victoria is committed to supporting nature-based tourism in parks. Haining Farm will offer locals and visitors with opportunities to view unique native species in the wild.

Next Steps

Detailed Design

Over the next few months, with the support of landscape architects, these key considerations will

be developed into a detailed design plan which will include technical information and revegetation details ready for earthworks and landscaping.

Parks Victoria, Zoos Victoria and Greening Australia will be out meeting with locals and the broader Victorian community to explain more about the project and to seek input into refining the final design of the precinct plan. This will include discussions on playground design, tree species in the open woodland and uses for the trail network e.g. dog walking, cycling and running.

Site clean-up

Areas of the farm are being cleaned up including the removal of weeds and asbestos.

The Dairy Farm

The farmer is selling his dairy herd and the cattle will leave the property in early 2018. The farmer may decide to retain calves on site for some months to come. The farm equipment will be sold sometime in the coming months.

Artificial wetland

Early in 2018, minor earthworks will be undertaken to reshape the water flow in the conservation area to create wetlands and suitable conditions for revegetation. As part of this work, technical assessments will be conducted to ensure that adjoining properties are protected.

Deer exclusion fencing

A deer exclusion fence will be installed around the 42 Ha conservation area in 2018.

Revegetation

Planting of trees, shrubs and understorey plants to create habitat for animals and places for people to enjoy will commence in spring 2018.

We are happy to talk through any questions you have. Project updates are available on the Engage Victoria website by going to <https://engage.vic.gov.au/yellingboconservationarea> and clicking on the Haining Farm tab

by email at Hainingplan@parks.vic.gov.au or by phone at 13 1963.

Haining Farm Concept Plan

