


MASTER PLAN
Progress Report
April 2025



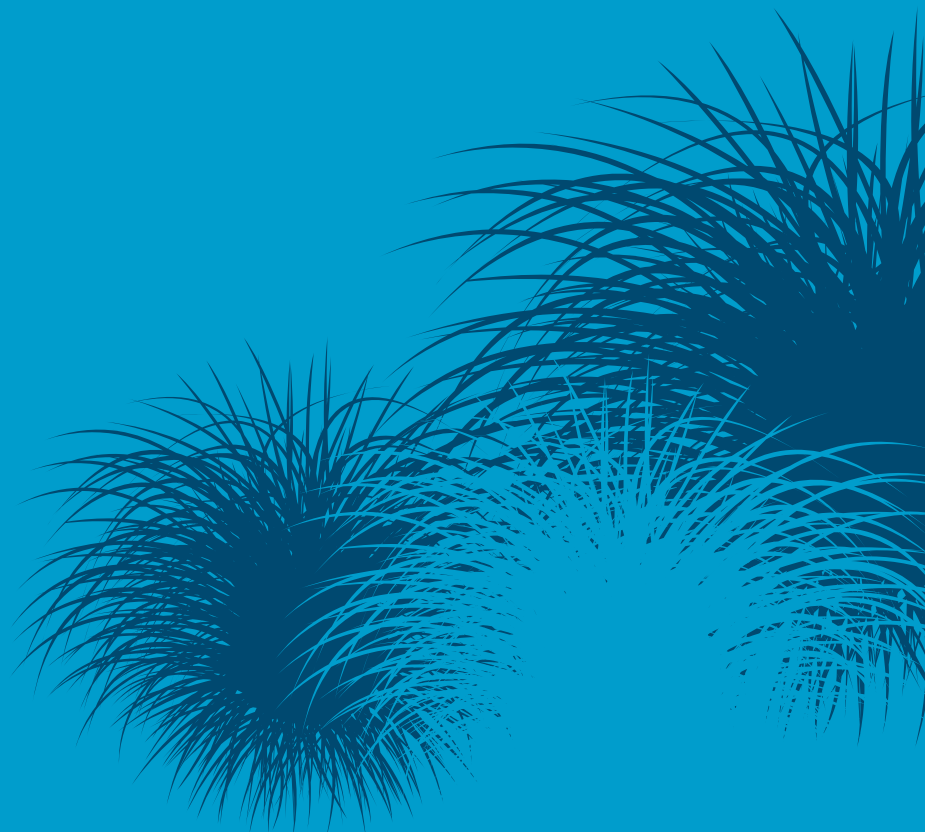
**MORNINGTON
PENINSULA**
Shire

The background image is a landscape photograph. In the foreground, there's a body of water reflecting the sky. To the left, a small, dark, rocky or pebbly shore is visible. In the middle ground, a dense forest of trees covers a hill. The sky is bright and hazy. A large, semi-transparent white circle is centered over the image, containing a block of text.

Mornington Peninsula Shire acknowledges
and pays respect to the elders, families and ancestors of the
Bunurong/Boon Wurrung people, who have been the custodians
of this land for many thousands of years. We acknowledge that
the land on which we meet is the place of age-old ceremonies,
celebrations, initiation and renewal; and that the
Bunurong/Boon Wurrung peoples' living culture continues
to have a unique role in the life of this region.

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BACKGROUND



THE SITE

The Briars is an historic property and conservation park located in Mount Martha on the Mornington Peninsula. The parcel of land, which originally spanned from Mornington to Mt Martha, was named *Tichin-Gorourke*, the Boon Wurrung word for Voice of Many Frogs – named for the many frogs inhabiting Balcombe Creek.

The homestead was originally established in 1846 by Alexander and Emma Balcombe, who named it after their family home on the island of Saint Helena. The Balcombe family had a connection to Napoleon Bonaparte, who was exiled to Saint Helena in 1815. Bonaparte gifted the family many items which they brought to Australia and which form part of the Dame Mable Napoleonic Collection, which is due to return to The Briars for exhibition soon.

Additions were made to the homestead between the 1850s until 1976 when it was gifted to the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) and the Mornington Peninsula Shire (MPS). The NT and MPS co-own the approximately 8-hectare historic precinct which includes the homestead, while the remaining 220 hectares is owned and managed by the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

Since commencing management of The Briars, several additions have been delivered at the site, including:

- Wildlife Sanctuary
- Visitor Centre
- Eco Living Display Centre
- Shire Nursery selling native and indigenous plants
- Picnic areas with free BBQs
- Josephine's Restaurant
- Angus and Rose children's workshop space
- Outdoor Education Camp
- Mornington Peninsula Astronomical Society



THE MASTER PLAN

COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL VISION:

The Briars is a site of innovation and inspiration. We foster social change to create a vision where our people and place thrive.



Council recognised that The Briars is a significant asset on the Peninsula – one of the largest parcels of green space available for recreation and conservation.

While visitation to the site has grown to almost 200,000 per year, there are still many in the community not benefiting from this community asset as it is not accessible nor offers the amenity our community need. The Briars has huge potential to provide more benefits to the community, delivering conservation outcomes, recreation activities and as a significant contributor to the peninsula's economy.

To realise the site's potential and increase community use, development of a Master Plan commenced in 2018. The plan was built from significant community consultation and articulates both Council and the Community's vision for the site.

THE MASTER PLAN

Council was engaged early to confirm the plan's objectives and guiding principles. The initiatives in the plan were assessed against their ability to deliver against these priorities. The priorities identified by Council were:



The Briars to become cost neutral at minimum, if not generate revenue to be used on other Council projects.



The Master Plan should enable Council to repay any borrowings within 10-15 years.



Wherever possible, seek funding for implementation through grants, partnerships and revenue generated at The Briars.



Minimise additional significant infrastructure, with a preference to use existing infrastructure footprints for new developments.



The Briars to become a hub of recreation, conservation, and education – *a site of innovation and inspiration.*



Provide an experience which attracts people from the coast to the hinterland during peak periods.



Support the delivery of the Council Plan.

THE MASTER PLAN



The adopted Briars Master Plan 2019-29 is a comprehensive vision for the future enhancement of The Briars.

The plan aims to protect, enhance, and celebrate the natural, cultural, and heritage aspects of this beloved community space while introducing new experiences which were requested by the local community, and which are forecast to attract visitors to the region.

The accompanying business plan demonstrated that The Briars could shift from being subsidised by Council for approximately \$1.7 million (FY24 operating budget) a year to contributing over \$4 million in revenue to the Shire's budget.

The additional revenue would support Council to become financially sustainable while continuing to deliver an experience which community love.



IMPLEMENTATION ELEMENTS DELIVERED AND UNDERWAY

SANCTUARY EXPANSION

This project will increase the size of the existing Wildlife Sanctuary from 90 hectares to approximately 130 hectares.

Revegetation efforts have already begun – the community has already planted over 18,000 indigenous plants.

New walking trails, outdoor education nooks, quiet reflection nooks and educational signage (including Aboriginal Cultural stories) will all be installed. The expansion will enable the reintroduction of more endangered species.

Completed projects

- Fencing of the new section of the Sanctuary is almost complete.
- Over 18,000 plants have been planted in the expansion.

Pending projects

- Finalisation of a Cultural Heritage Management Plan.
- Detailed design and delivery of all paths and furniture.
- Design and delivery of interpretive elements (signage, sculpture etc.)



| Funding Source/s | |
|---|---------------------|
| Regional Tourism Investment Fund: State Government of Victoria | \$1.5 million |
| Mornington Peninsula Shire Council | \$764,000 |
| Plant donations from major event | 2390 plants donated |



IMPLEMENTATION ELEMENTS DELIVERED AND UNDERWAY



THE ARK PROGRAM

The Ark Program was established in 2018 as part of the Master Plan. This plan aims to reintroduce locally endangered and extinct species to the site. Not only are these species precious in their own right, but they contribute valuable ecological services which enhance the health of the environment and create unique educational opportunities.

In 2021, the first Ark species was reintroduced, the Mt Martha Bundy (*Eucalyptus carolaniae*). At the time, only 300 could be found in small pockets across the peninsula. The Briars now cares for over 800 trees – planted by the community in partnership with Deakin University and the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

Work to reintroduce Southern Brown Bandicoots commenced in 2017. Bandicoots play a critical ecosystem engineer role, improving soil health and water retention, invertebrate diversity and the health of old-growth trees. To be considered a site suitable for their reintroduction, eradicating all pests from the Sanctuary was required as was engaging with species recovery groups and consulting species experts.

In partnership with DEECA, Melbourne Uni and Cesar, the first bandicoot was released in 2024.

To date, 22 bandicoots have been reintroduced to the Sanctuary. In January 2025, the first photographic evidence of a bandicoot with young in the pouch was captured, a great sign that the species is thriving at the site.

The Sanctuary Expansion will enhance our ability to reintroduce additional species as it expands the pest/predator-free area and enables us to revegetate with plants required for the species identified in the Ark plan.

Ongoing consultation with experts including conservation organisations, recovery groups and DEECA will confirm which species will be returned to the site.

IMPLEMENTATION ELEMENTS DELIVERED AND UNDERWAY



RECYCLED WATER PROJECT – GREEN DREAMING PRECINCT

The recycled water project is critical to the realisation of the Green Dreaming Precinct. This project will reduce The Briars' reliance on potable water for the expansion of agriculture and improvement of the historic gardens and landscapes. It will demonstrate to the community and visitors how recycled water can be used for regenerative agriculture purposes and supports the realisation of the peninsula as a significant Victorian food bowl.

| Funding Source/s | |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| Externally funded | \$3,065,000 |
| Mornington Peninsula Shire Council | \$375,000 |

Completed projects

- Detailed design of the pipeline and tank locations
- Environmental Impact Assessments
- Design of an irrigation system to disperse the water across The Briars.
- Commencement of a CHMP.

Pending projects

- Finalisation of a Cultural Heritage Management Plan
- Delivery

IMPLEMENTATION
ELEMENTS DELIVERED
AND UNDERWAY



HOMESTEAD
RESTORATION

Completed: Stage 1

During routine electrical works, significant termite damage was discovered in the Homestead. While no live termites were detected, it appeared that historic damage had never been fixed. Works to rectify this damage and restore parts of the Homestead which had not been maintained for a long time has now been completed.

Pending: Stage 2

To re-open the Homestead, further works to improve accessibility are required in order to be compliant with current legislation.

On 8 April 2025, Council resolved that priority funding for The Briars be allocated to these works to re-open the Homestead. Upon completion of this project, several experience initiatives will be explored including:

- The reinstatement of guided tours
- Expansion of the farm animal experience.
- Utilisation of the commercial kitchen and grounds for weddings, small functions and small events (e.g. quartets)

| Stage 1 Funding Source/s | |
|---|-----------|
| Living Heritage Fund: Heritage Victoria | \$150,000 |
| Mornington Peninsula Shire Council | \$800,000 |



IMPLEMENTATION ELEMENTS DELIVERED AND UNDERWAY



RESTAURANT RESTORATION



Funding Source/s

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

\$280,000

Josephine's Restaurant ran at The Briars until just prior to COVID. A heritage stable was leased to a restaurant provider, who made additions to the building to accommodate a growing audience. Minimal maintenance and improvements were made to the historic building during this time.

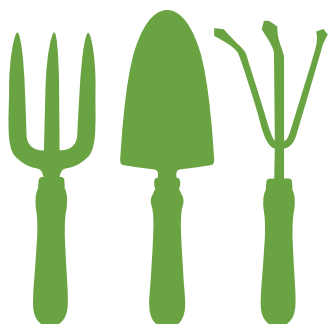
We are now seeking to ensure the building is safe and to make the necessary improvements to enable it to be leased as a restaurant/café and function space. Detailed scoping of works requirements is underway. The process to find a tenant for the restaurant will be undertaken in 2025.

IMPLEMENTATION ELEMENTS DELIVERED AND UNDERWAY

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE – GREEN DREAMING PRECINCT

Within the Green Dreaming Precinct (agricultural land), spaces have been set aside for social enterprise activities. In 2021, The Briars welcomed its first such organisation to the site – Food for Change (F4C). F4C grows and rescues food and distributes it to people in need. The organisation is primarily run by volunteers who grow food at The Briars and collect and distribute food collected from local supermarkets.

Following the completion of the Recycled Water project, further social enterprises will be explored for the Green Dreaming Precinct and ideally, for the café/restaurant space.



IMPLEMENTATION ELEMENTS DELIVERED AND UNDERWAY

DELIVERY OF FIRST NATIONS STORIES

The Traditional Custodians of the Land, the Bunurong People, cared for The Briars for thousands of years. Currently, their stories are somewhat missing from the site. Re-connecting First Nations People to this place and appropriately sharing First Nations Stories is a key objective of the Master Plan.

In 2024, the Shire obtained a grant from the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) to deliver a Junior Ranger Program. This program aims to connect First Nations youth to Country. This grant is funding two First Nations positions who have commenced running programs for First Nations school children at The Briars.



| Funding Source/s | |
|---|-----------|
| National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) | \$480,000 |



IMPLEMENTATION ELEMENTS DELIVERED AND UNDERWAY



FOSTERING SOCIAL CHANGE – PASSIVE SITE USE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The Briars aims to foster social change, by inspiring our visitors to make big or small behavioural changes which will benefit the natural world. Connection to natural spaces, flora and fauna is a critical step in inspiring change. This can occur formally, through education or other experiences and informally, through simply spending time in natural spaces.

| Increase in uptake of programs and retail items | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Nursery | FY17 \$160,000 | FY24 \$240,000 |
| Education programs and celebrations | FY15 \$8,000 | FY24 \$64,000 |
| Events | FY15 \$6,253 | FY24 \$210,000 |

We foster social change several ways:

- Providing education programs is one of the ways we connect our audiences to the natural values of the site and inspire these changes. We have focused on continuing to grow school holiday programs while expanding the program offering for schools, community groups and others, both across the site and at the Nursery.
- Purchases of native and indigenous plants spread our influence beyond the walls of The Briars as visitors create more sustainable gardens.
- Passive use of the site gets people out into nature and creates opportunities for visitors to encounter wildlife, signage or our staff who might teach them something new and inspire them to return. Visitation to the site through events, celebrations and memorials has significantly increased, giving us more opportunities to engage with new audiences and expand our influence.

The figures above demonstrate the increase in uptake of programs and retail items.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

| Project | Amount funded externally | Amount funded MPS to date |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Sanctuary Expansion | \$1.6 million | FY24 \$764,000 |
| Recycled Water Project | \$3.065 million | FY24 \$64,000 |
| Heritage Homestead | \$150,000 | FY24 \$210,000 |
| Restaurant | \$0 | \$280,000 |
| Briars Master Plan Implementation: design, miscellaneous infrastructure improvements | \$0 | \$400,000 |
| Junior Ranger program | \$480,000 | \$0 |
| TOTAL | \$4.93 million | \$2.37 million |

FY24: Operating budget \$1.7 million



PROJECTS IN OUR IMAGINATION, WAITING TO BE DELIVERED

Several exciting projects are still waiting to be delivered.

TICHIN-GOROURKE (Voice of Many Frogs) CHILDREN'S GARDEN

A destination Children's Garden designed to celebrate the nearby wetlands and First Nation's stories. The garden will be a world-class, immersive space for children and families, seamlessly integrating education, play, and nature. The Children's Garden will be a unique draw card to the region.

Images are indicative only.



PROJECTS IN OUR IMAGINATION, WAITING TO BE DELIVERED

GATHERING SPACE EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION CENTRE

The Gathering Space is envisioned as a vibrant, world-class visitor centre and community hub that will redefine the visitor experience on the Mornington Peninsula. Designed to bring people together and connect them with the unique natural, cultural, and heritage values of The Briars, this space will serve as the heart of a revitalized precinct, offering new opportunities for engagement and education. *Image is indicative only.*



PROJECTS IN OUR IMAGINATION, WAITING TO BE DELIVERED

SANCTUARY DREAMING

Sanctuary Dreaming will deliver a unique glamping experience, allowing guests to stay overnight near the Sanctuary's tranquil bushland and wetlands. Accommodation will be sensitively integrated into the landscape, ensuring minimal environmental impact while maximizing guest comfort, connection to nature and deepening visitor understanding of local ecosystems and Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Image is indicative only.



PROJECTS IN OUR IMAGINATION, WAITING TO BE DELIVERED

THE VILLAGE

The Village will see the transformation of an historic brick stable into a vibrant, family-friendly restaurant and hospitality hub. The Village will serve fresh, seasonal dishes crafted from local produce, including ingredients grown on-site at The Briars. This authentic paddock-to-plate experience will set a new benchmark for regional dining, attracting food lovers and supporting local producers. *Image is indicative only.*



PROJECTS IN OUR IMAGINATION, WAITING TO BE DELIVERED

HERITAGE FARM TRAIL

This immersive trail will guide visitors through the heart of one of the region's first established farms, connecting them with living history, rare heritage breeds, and authentic farm experiences. *Image is indicative only.*



THE FUTURE



Much has been accomplished but there is still more to do to turn The Briars into one of Victoria's must-visit destinations.

If you're excited by our vision and want to join us to deliver it, contact The Briars at the.briars@mornpen.vic.gov.au or Rebecca Levy on 0419 549 116.



Contact Mornington Peninsula Shire



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NRS

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