 **Landcare Broken Hill Inc**

***Greening the Hill Mk.2***

ABC Radio interview No.14 – 30 July 2019

**NATURE STRIPS**

**Intro**

A nature strip is a very Australian term. I remember once whilst in the USA I used the word ‘nature strip’ and I got blank looks from the Americans I was with, having to explain what the term meant.

The nature strip is a characteristic of most Australian streetscapes – described as an **iconic feature of Australian cities and townscapes.**

Some formal dictionary definitions of ‘nature strip’ are pretty limiting:

1. Verge

2. A narrow strip of land between two carriageways, where grass, shrubs etc are planted.

A ‘verge’ means: a narrow strip of turf bordering the edge of a road, pathway, etc

I think the best way of appreciating what is truly a naturestrip is to pull the words apart: **its an area of nature, a natural narrow strip of land, along-side a contrasting roadway.**

Given the focus on ‘nature’ in the term, I don’t think a proper nature strip is a strip of gravel, or concrete or the frequently seen strip of cracker dust (crushed mine rock to a fine

gritty material) which is increasingly common in Broken Hill.

Sadly, we’re seeing more and more strips of cracker dust along our Broken Hill streets as people give up on maintaining their naturestrip.

**Model Naturestrips Project in Beryl Street commenced – comments received**

As listeners know from last week’s interview and subsequent newspaper coverage yesterday, Landcare Broken Hill, in partnership with the Centre for Community Inc. last Friday commenced the reinstatement of the Demonstration Naturestrips outside the Centre for Community – a ***Greening the Hill Mk.2*** project.

It’s the many comments conveying congratulations and expressions of pleasure which set me thinking – just why do we all love our naturestrips?

**Why do we have nature strips?**

Obviously, a primary intention of a strip of land between a roadway and an adjacent footpath, is to provide separation. Providing a physical and visual separation between roads and pedestrians, naturestrip offer safety between otherwise competing movement.

More often than not, naturestrips are also utilised for public utilities – telegraph poles holding overhead power and telephone cables, underground NBN cabling and access points for water and sewer easements. Post boxes, telephone boxes, bus shelters, public rubbish bins and bench seats are often placed on naturestrips. These are all necessary functional uses, but it is the environmental benefits I wish to focus on today.

Nature strips provide far more than the functionality of separation. They play an important role in an aesthetic, environmental and social sense.

They are places of social interaction – as people walk along, such as walking the dog – or through the activity associated with maintaining and watering nature strips.

They are places providing natural aesthetic relief to the surrounding built environment. They will often be designed to reflect the local character of the district – the trees or plants might actually establish or provide the memorable character of a town. A good example is Mildura with its avenues of palms along so many of its roads. Those palms give Mildura much of its visual character.

They perform many worthwhile environmental functions. When planted with trees, nature strips provide amenity – such as protective shade from the harsh sun. When planted with shrubs, a nature strip might shield us from the wind. With good vegetative cover, a nature strip will contain wind-borne dust, being contained under the vegetation. Dust containment is a real and constant need in Broken Hill

Nature strips can also offer much by way of encouraging biodiversity, if planted with trees and shrubs. Flowering plants will attract bees. Habitat can be provided for birdlife and urban wildlife.

A well-designed vegetated nature strip can add considerable value to the private properties that abut them. The properties have greater appeal in the real estate marketplace. (I remember I once had a valuation case before a Victorian Court and part of the evidence accepted by the court was that a mature tree in the naturestrip added about $20,000 to value of the property adjoining the tree in the naturestrip).

Some nature strips have been utilised for growing food plants, in fact some have become linear community gardens. I remember seeing how ‘Mr Sustainability’ – Michael Mobbs – won over his local community and Council in Chippendale in Sydney to convert the naturestrips into community food gardens. Using the naturestrips in this way not only produced useful food and created really interesting streetscapes, but contributed to a real sense of community. People along the streets coming out to tend their naturestrips got to know each other, developed friendships. The Christmas street parties in such communities are reported to be really fun – all brought about by a shared love of their nature strips.

Most recently, I saw on Michael Mobbs’ website that he has this year, working with the community abutting a street in Bondi in Sydney, created along a nature strip a new community garden to grow herbs and vegetables for the nearby cafes and houses. Interestingly, subterranean compost pods were set into the naturestrips amongst the plants so that the people living along the street can place their organic waste, like food scraps, into the pods to rot down and feed the roots in situ of the plants in the naturestrip.

Such social interaction out on nature strips is a real benefit: enriching local communities, creating a sense of belonging. When neighbours become friends, they tend to look out for each other – an informal neighbourhood watch evolves.

**What about the management of nature strips?**

Nature strips are usually on public land, just like the roads and footpaths. So the local Councils have the legal rights over nature strips. They can make local laws regarding them and will often have policies, such as planning and landscaping policies applicable to nature strips.

Contrary to many people’s belief, the responsibility for day to day maintenance of a nature strip is normally that of the adjoining property owners. Councils will have safety and maintenance responsibilities with respect to larger street trees, but naturestrips sown with grass or planted with shrubs are normally to be maintained by citizens.

Most Councils have lists of preferred plant species which they prefer their citizens to plant in their naturestrips. Many Councils have a fairly flexible approach to naturestrip plantings. Broken Hill Council requires consultation and, in the past, has offered to provide a couple of trees per property for their nature strip. The best course is always to consult the Council.

Another key piece of advice is to check that you can dig in your naturestrip. There is a free online national service called Dial Before You Dig which can alert people as to what might be under a nature strip – like a telephone cable or a gas or water pipe. If you are advised there is a service utility present, you then need to have a sweep with a metal detector carried out by a certified operator. The local certified operator is Vertex, who gave Landcare Broken Hill the all-clear to dig and plant trees in the naturestrip outside the 3rd Broken Hill Sea Scouts scout hall on Sunday.

**The future of nature strips in Broken Hill**

Landcare Broken Hill is determined to see more nature strips in Broken Hill planted out and greened – for all the reasons discussed above. Aesthetic, environmental, community health, social well-being etc

We’ll make this City look better, keep the dust down and potentially cause a positive micro-climate effect by lowering temperatures. The more hard surfaces and less green areas, scientific studies have shown the hotter the urban environment becomes.

We hope to encourage street communities to form, so that they can plan together to beautify their streets with new plantings. We hope to see people using their grey water to keep their nature strips alive. Together we can make it happen.

**Next public meeting to provide an update on *GREENING THE HILL MK.2* and continue of consultation with the community**

**Centre for Community, 200 Beryl Street, 7.00pm Thursday 29 August**

***ALL WELCOME!***

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