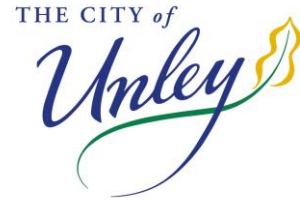


Media Release



Tuesday, 22 July 2025

City of Unley's Tree Offset Fund: Growing Tomorrow

City of Unley proposes Tree Offset Fund to protect and restore local tree canopy

The City of Unley is seeking community feedback on a proposed Tree Offset Fund - a bold new incentive aimed at restoring tree canopy cover across the city and addressing the growing impact of private development on our urban forest.

What is the problem, and why does it matter?

Unley's current tree canopy coverage is around 25%, well short of the State Government's target of 31% by 2045. At 31% canopy cover, Unley is estimated to be 10-12°C cooler, creating safer, cleaner and healthier neighbourhoods on a 42°C day than a city with 10% tree canopy cover. At 30-32°C we can still walk or ride, our main streets are active, and the city is liveable. At 42° we stay indoors.

However, across the City of Unley, more trees are being removed each year than we are planting. Between 2022 and 2024, the loss of trees compared to new trees planted was equivalent to almost two Unley ovals in canopy cover.

Most new tree planting is occurring on Council land, but we will soon run out of traditional spaces to plant more trees. With 80% of land in Unley privately owned, achieving the long-term canopy target will only be possible with strong community commitment to plant more trees on private land. Without action on private land, Unley's overall canopy will start to decline, as our larger older trees are removed from front and back yards and no longer replaced.

How do we propose to solve it?

To help address the issue, Council is exploring a ten-year trial of a Tree Offset Fund. Under the proposal, all new future developments approved during the trial period that increase the building footprint would be required to either:

- Maintain or achieve a minimum of 15% tree canopy cover on-site, or
- Pay an additional 10% in Council rates until the canopy target is met.

Funds raised would be used to purchase land within the City of Unley for tree planting and canopy restoration, ensuring that the benefits of urban trees are preserved and enhanced locally. The Fund would not be applied retrospectively to past approved developments.

Mayor Michael Hewitson said the proposal complements Council's existing efforts to support private landowners and green public spaces.

"Each year, Council plants over 600 new trees, which in time will grow to deliver the equivalent of 1.5 Unley Ovals in future tree canopy across Council land," Mayor Hewitson said. "But between 2022 and 2024, across the city we recorded the removal of around four Unley Ovals of canopy, with only two ovals' worth of new canopy gained in return. That's a loss we can't afford."

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“With 84% of land in Unley not under the care or control of Council, we simply can’t meet our canopy targets without working in partnership with our community - including developers and property owners. The Tree Offset Fund is one way to support this.”

While Council supports South Australia’s planning laws, recent increases in tree protection and the requirements for tree planting in new developments, tree loss on private land continues.

The trial is considered by Council as an incentive that builds on the existing framework, to help strengthen outcomes and better protect Unley’s urban forest.

Council already supports trees on private land through a range of initiatives, including:

- Free tree vouchers for residents
- 50% subsidies for maintenance of significant and regulated trees, through conservation grants
- Property-level tree canopy data included on rates notices
- Education and expert advice on planting and retention

“The Tree Offset Fund would be another valuable tool in our kit,” said Mayor Hewitson. “It offers a practical way to offset tree loss and reinvest in our neighbourhoods—bringing us closer to the canopy targets that support a cooler, greener, healthier, liveable and resilient Unley.”

Community consultation on the proposed Tree Offset Fund closes at 11.59pm, Friday 8 August 2025.

Council is encouraging everyone to get involved by visiting yoursay.unley.sa.gov.au/tree-offset-fund to learn more and complete the short survey, with strong support potentially helping us to advocate to the Minister for a ten-year trial of the Tree Offset Fund.