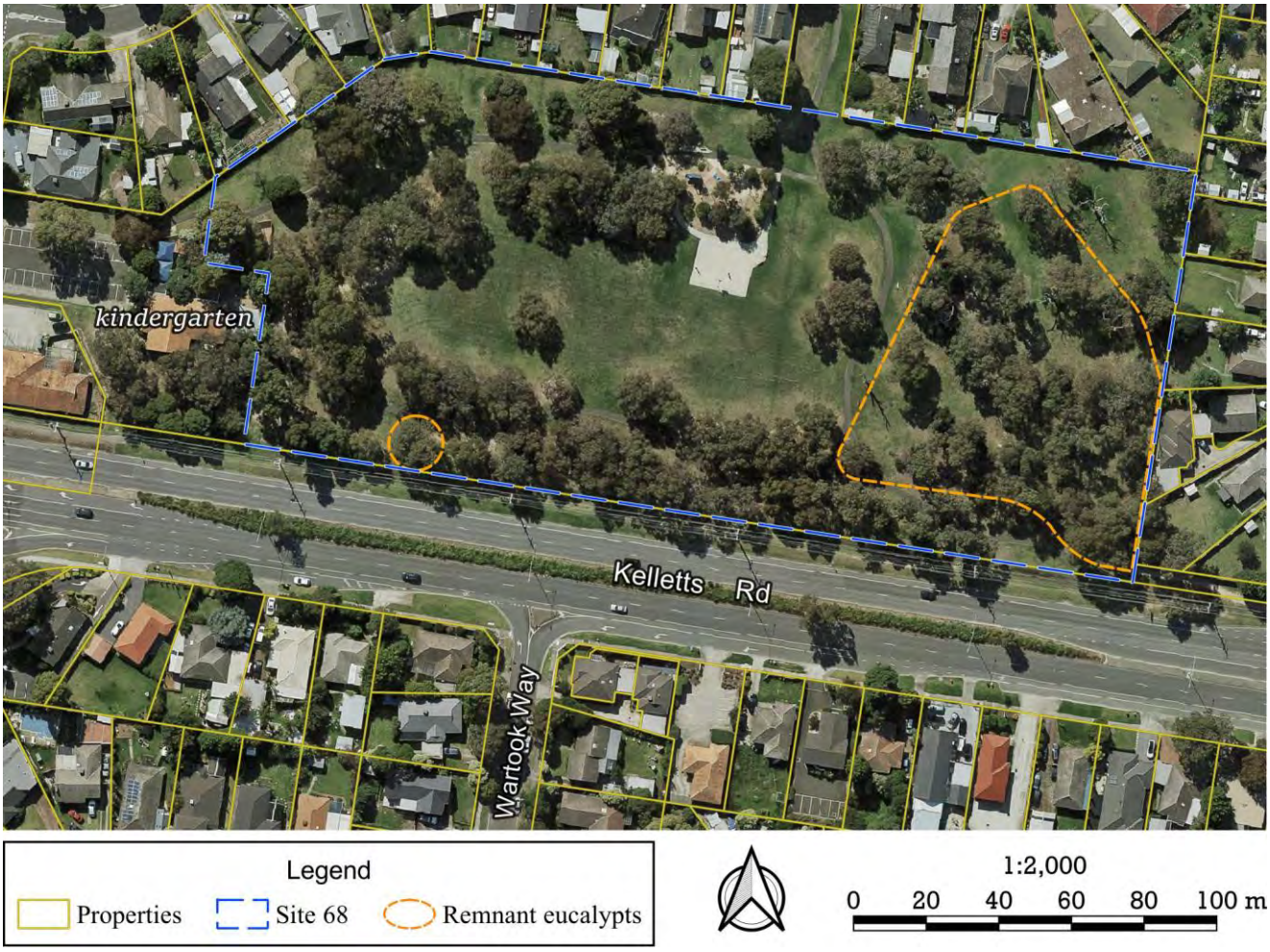
Site 68. Hillside Park, Rowville

A park in Kelletts Rd near Taylors La, with remnant trees and revegetation.

Summary of significant features:

- Locally significant: a habitat link or ecological stepping-stone along the habitat corridors of Corhanwarrabul Creek and Monbulk Creek;
- Locally significant: a stand of the locally-endangered Mealy Stringybark (*Eucalyptus cephalocarpa*), some of which can be seen as mature trees on a 1946 aerial photograph;
- Provides habitat for forest and woodland birds in an area substantially depleted of suitable habitat, e.g. kookaburras nest in one of the stringybarks.



Boundaries

The site is outlined with blue dashes above. The northern, eastern and southern boundaries follow property boundaries. The western boundary has been drawn to enclose planted trees that serve some habitat function, skirting kindergarten buildings and associated facilities.

Land use & tenure: Council park with a playground.

Site description

Hillside Park is located on a minor knoll in very gently undulating terrain, at elevations between 70 m and 80 m. The slope is shallow and predominantly faces east toward Corhanwarrabul Ck, approximately 300 m away.

The soil is shallow, poorly draining, silty, pale loam over clay subsoil, derived from weathering of the underlying Lower Devonian siltstone of the Humevale formation.

The orange dashes on the aerial photograph encompass where remnant eucalypts are growing. The non-circular dashed area also contains planted indigenous shrubs and trees. Apart from the remnant eucalypts, the only naturally-occurring indigenous plant known to occur in the park is a solitary Wattle Mat-rush (*Lomandra filiformis* subsp. *coriacea*). (One or two indigenous grass species that often persist in local lawns might be detected at the right time of year.)

A 1976 aerial photograph shows that there was less than 1% cover of trees or shrubs within a 1 km radius of what is now Hillside Park. Most of those trees and shrubs were within the eastern third of Hillside Park, followed by the road verges of Taylors Lane (Site 116b) and Karoo Rd.

Some of the remnant eucalypts within the park today can be seen on that 1976 photograph. Several of them can also be seen on a 1946 aerial photograph, but most of those have died in the last two years – particularly in the park's northeastern corner. More generally, the remnant eucalypts are in poor or very poor health. Fortunately, the park's largest and oldest remnant eucalypt – the one inside the orange-dashed circle above – remains in reasonable condition; its trunk is over 1 m in diameter and it can be seen on aerial photographs as far back as 1946.

Some mature non-indigenous eucalypts and Silky Oaks from the 1980s grow in the park, particularly in an arc 10–20 m inside the park boundary. This century, indigenous revegetation areas have been planted more widely through the park. As can be seen from the aerial photograph above (taken in 2020), the amount of tree cover in the western two-thirds of the park is very different from the solitary eucalypt that was present there in 1980.

Relationship to other land

There is only a very patchy distribution of habitat for indigenous flora and fauna within 1 km of Hillside Park, most of it along the western side of Taylors Lane (Site 116b) through to Corhanwarrabul Creek (Site 66, approximately 600 m to the north). Planted native trees are scattered within residential properties in the surrounding area.

Eastern Rosellas, Spotted Pardalotes, Laughing Kookaburras and abundant lorikeets can be seen moving through Hillside Park. This indicates that the park represents an ecological stepping-stone as these birds move around the local landscape. The birds may well also be nomadic along nearby Corhanwarrabul Creek and Monbulk Creek.

Bioregion: Gippsland Plain

Fauna of special significance

None recorded during field surveys, although some of the significant bird species associated with nearby creeks and their floodplains may visit the reserve.

Fauna habitat features

Remnant trees within the park provide good habitat for forest and woodland birds in an area otherwise substantially depleted of suitable habitat. There are abundant lorikeets, along with smaller forest birds such as the Spotted Pardalote.

The park's large remnant trees contain natural hollows suitable as shelter and breeding locations for birds, possums, bats or invertebrates. There was an active kookaburra nest in one hollow when the park was inspected for this report in September 2024.

Significance ratings

The following is an assessment of the site's biological significance against the Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Action's standard criteria (Amos 2004).

Ecological Integrity & Viability

> The site is a component or ecological 'stepping stone' of a habitat corridor, as explained above under the heading, 'Relationship to other land'. The link that it provides appears to be important for fauna movement at the local scale (or perhaps more widely). This represents **Local** significance under criterion 1.2.6 of Amos (2004).

Locally-threatened plant species

The risk of Mealy (or Silver-leafed) Stringybark (*Eucalyptus cephalocarpa*) dying out in Knox is in the 'endangered' range. The stand in Hillside Park is in poor health but the population may be viable, in which case in meets criterion 3.1.5 for **Local** significance.

Some of the large remnant trees within the site are also locally significant because of their age and size, particularly the old specimen of *Eucalyptus cephalocarpa* along the Kelletts Rd frontage, marked on the aerial photograph. However, this does not meet any of the standard significance criteria of Amos (2004).

Threats

- Human-induced climate change, which is predicted to cause more severe droughts, heatwaves and storms, as well as substantially lower rainfall (particularly in winter). These effects could accelerate the decline of the eucalypts' health;
- Failure of the population of remnant eucalypts to be replenished by a new generation because seedlings cannot germinate within the mulched areas and any that germinate elsewhere will be mown.

Strategic planning

- The previous (2010) edition of this report led to this site being covered by Schedule 2 of the Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO2). Since 2010, the stand of remnant eucalypts has dwindled and the amount of naturally-occurring indigenous understorey has reduced from small vestiges to perhaps a single plant. On the positive side, the revegetation has matured and now represents superior habitat for native birds and insects compared with 2010. The net outcome is that there is no apparent need to change the application of ESO2 to the park;
- The park is zoned 'Public Park and Recreation Zone' (PPRZ).

Information sources used in this assessment

- Description of the site by Water Ecoscience (1998), in which Hillside Park forms their Site 45;
- An ecological survey undertaken by Rik Brown on 24/5/02 for the first edition of this report. This included a description of the composition and condition of the vegetation, compilation of lists of indigenous and introduced plant species, incidental fauna observations, and checks for fauna habitat, ecological threats, management issues and populations of scarce or threatened plant species;
- An inspection of the site by Dr Lorimer on 15th September 2024, recording the indigenous plant species, noting bird activity and checking for changes in features relevant to this report compared with pre-existing information;
- Flora and fauna observations stored in the Atlas of Living Australia;
- Aerial and satellite imagery from between 1946 and 2025;
- The Victorian Government's 'NatureKit' website;
- Maps of geology, topography and strategic planning information produced by agencies of the Victorian Government.