



## The Carlton Residents Association Inc

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**Proposal to conduct a review of the use of the Carlton Gardens as the venue for the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show (MIFGS) and to consider a City based alternative venue for the Melbourne International Festival of Flowers (MIFoF) following the conclusion of the current contract in 2026.**

### Background

In 2004 the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens was included on the National Heritage List under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and on the State Heritage Register of Victoria in 1998 under the Heritage Act 1995. The listing requires that any proposed use inside or outside the boundaries of a National Heritage or a World Heritage Property that has an impact on the heritage values is not permissible under the Heritage Act 1995 or without the approval of the Federal Minister.

In 1996 the City of Melbourne as the Committee of Management for Carlton Gardens issued a licence to Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show Ltd to conduct the show in the Carlton Gardens. This was to be an international show that would attract visitors from across Victoria, Australia and beyond to Melbourne to enjoy the role of flowers and gardens in our lives and spend time in the City and the State. However the MIFGS has attracted only around 100,000 paying customers over 5 days each year and its pull and positioning of Melbourne and Victoria has not been reflected in the impact as was promised.

The MIFGS occupies a large section of the southern section of the Carlton Gardens and requires for set up and staging purposes this area of the Gardens being closed to the general public for 2 to 3 weeks plus the 5 days of the Show. The closure of the gardens make it difficult for those who traverse the Gardens on their way to and from the City and also children often with their parents who make their way to and from the two adjacent schools. The closure also impacts on those who spend time relaxing and enjoying the ambience of the garden environment 7 days a week. This is a high price for users of the Gardens to pay for the commercial use of the Carlton Gardens. The repair to the Carlton Gardens following the heavy traffic of bumping in and out of the exhibitors and those who visit the Show has according to the Council provided 'no evidence of long term damage'. However many would argue that the impact in the short term is observable in the form of long term scarring of the lawns and the long term damage is arguable.

In September 2022 a 3 year licence was granted to MIFGS (2024 – 2026) with 3 year option (2027 – 2029) by mutual agreement. As reported in the Inner City News (September, 2022) under the headline, 'Flower and Garden Show issued new licence for Carlton Gardens, but heritage concerns remain', the article stated 'City of Melbourne councillors have given the all clear for the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show (MIFGS) to continue to be held in Carlton Gardens despite continued concerns from heritage groups over the event's "damaging impact" on the World Heritage-listed site'.

### Proposal

The Carlton Residents Association believes that following three decades of locating the MIFGS in the Carlton Gardens it is time for to consult on the future of the MIFGS and provide an evaluation of the short and long term impact of the use of the Carlton Gardens as a venue and how the City of Melbourne can gain additional value from the hosting the MIFGS in the future.

This should include the added value in terms of audience reach and City trader buy in that could be derived by staging the MIFGS in a central city location such as Birrarung Marr, a purpose built event venue, the leveraging of the MIFGS into a 14 day festival, and the refocusing of the MIFGS on Greenline and its staging posts including Federation Square.

We therefore believe that there is an arguable case for the Melbourne City Council to give consideration to relocating the MIFGS to to Birrarung Marr. The CRA has identified a number of advantages that we believe the Council and the community and stakeholders should consider in an appraisal of the current location and a relocation of the MIFGS.

In 2002 the City Council established Birrarung Marr as an urban park on the north bank of the Yarra River, next to Federation Square as a place for community and to celebrate public activities, major events, and festivals. It is the first public space in the City to be created for over a century and holds a special place in the indigenous history of Melbourne located on the lands of the Wurundjeriu of the Kulin Nation. In the 2018 Masterplan it was estimated that some 4.6 million visitors annually visit Birrarung Marr with 90% coming from metro Melbourne and across Victoria and interstate. The planned Greenline project along the northern banks of the Yarra will extend from Birrarung Marr to the Bolte Bridge. It's a green infrastructure intervention that will add to the City of Melbourne's credentials as a liveable and sustainable city. It follows that existing and proposed developments along the northern banks of the Yarra will be enhanced by the Greenline including Federation Square which will be activated as a focal point for the City to display, celebrate its past, present and future.

The opportunity to move the MIFGS from the Carlton Gardens to Birrarung Marr and the centre of the City will enhance its status both nationally and internationally. The MIFGS could be expanded into a 14 day 'Festival of Flowers' that would increase both participants and audience and place the City of Melbourne at the epicentre of the international greening cities movement. A 'Melbourne International Festival of Flowers' (MIFoF) would extend from Birrarung Marr along the expanding Greenline and be celebrated at Federation Square in a Community Gardens display bringing those from across Melbourne in an exhibition and promotion of gardening for food and health. It would allow city based businesses, in the retail and hospitality sectors, to promote their venues with flower displays and green produce and could culminate in a 'Blooming Ball' at the Melbourne Town Hall. There are many opportunities to be gained from a venue move to Birrarung Marr in 2026.

This is an opportunity needing to be explored.