

Writing and Reviewing a  
**Dry  
Stone Wall**  
Management  
Plan Guide



**City of  
Whittlesea**

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Government's Streamlining for  
Growth Program.*

**vpa**  
Victorian Planning Authority



*Fenwick Stud, Woodstock  
Source: Vicki Johnson*

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We acknowledge all Traditional Owners of Country on which these Guidelines apply. We pay our respect to the Elders and community past and present. We acknowledge that Aboriginal people represent the oldest continuing culture in the world today.



Rosso Drive, Tarneit. Source: Wyndham City Council

## 1. What is this Guide about?

The majority of dry stone walls are cultural heritage assets built in the early settlement period in Victoria. This document provides advice and guidance on how to write a comprehensive Dry Stone Wall Management Plan (DSWMP), along with explanations on the importance of dry stone wall protection.

## 2. Who should use the Guide?

This document supports anyone who prepares and/or reviews a DSWMP. This Guide also facilitates the work of local government officers and others responsible for protection and management of dry stone walls.

## 3. Why is a DSWMP important?

A DSWMP written by qualified heritage consultants/advisors may be required for permit applications that impact dry stone walls. A DSWMP must be robust, accurate and contain an appropriately detailed analysis and recommendations to protect dry stone walls.

As part of planning permit processes and requirements, a DSWMP prepared by external heritage consultants is reviewed by strategic and statutory planners, landscape designers, engineers and open space planners. The DSWMP will inform council officer decision-making for dry stone wall protection.

To learn more about how to integrate dry stone walls into the urban environment refer to Dry Stone Wall Design Guidelines.

## 4. Policy context

In Victoria, dry stone walls are protected by statutory frameworks at both state and local government levels. Recent protection regimes and community advocacy for dry stone walls reflect the growing interest of, and appreciation for, dry stone walls.

### Victoria Planning Provisions

The Victoria Planning Provisions provide for the protection of dry stone walls. Dry stone walls can be listed in the Schedule to Clause 43.01 (Heritage Overlay) and/or Clause 52.33 (Post Boxes and Dry Stone Walls), triggering the need for a permit to alter, demolish or remove dry stone walls. Some municipalities have specific local policy for dry stone walls under Clause 15.03 (Heritage), which provides guidance to assess permit applications relating to dry stone walls.

Other councils may have permit application requirements for dry stone walls under Clause 43.01 (Heritage Overlay). As part of larger historic sites, some dry stone walls are included on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) and subject to the *Heritage Act 2017*, prohibiting alteration without a permit from Heritage Victoria.

Many dry stone walls are protected in their own right while others may be contributory elements of a heritage-listed place, such as a farmstead. Actions triggering the need for a permit include repair/restoration, relocation, demolition or removal of all or parts of a dry stone wall. It is important to check with the local council before commencing planning for any activities affecting dry stone walls.

### Precinct Structure Plans (PSPs)

PSPs are strategic land use planning documents prepared by the VPA (with Ministerial approval). External heritage consultants usually reference the PSP as part of their background research for DSWMPs. In 2021 the VPA released revised Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines with a strong focus on place-based outcomes for high-quality public realm delivery for new communities in Victoria. This presents opportunities for easier integration of dry stone walls into public spaces where their heritage values and aesthetic appeal can contribute to sense of place and community identity.



Top left and above: All stone double wall, Cobblebank. Source: City of Melton  
Below left: All stone double wall, Toolern Vale. Source: City of Melton  
Right: Source: Shutterstock

## 5. How to write a DSWMP

A comprehensive DSWMP is needed to maximise dry stone wall protection and retention and should be completed by a suitable qualified dry stone wall expert. Note that dry stone wall assessments and reports for PSPs do not replace the need for a DSWMP.

### Critical contents

A DSWMP must contain the following items:

#### a. Recording, description and assessment of dry stone walls

This covers full, systematic recording with periodic measurements along the length of the dry stone wall; recording of construction changes along the length; and documentation of intact, deteriorated or damaged portions of dry stone walls.

This includes but is not limited to:

- Examination and assessment of correct location and identification of dry stone walls
- Full description of dry stone walls, including photographs, measured/scale drawings and plans
- Measurements and descriptions, including height; width at base (and at copestone level, where possible); size, shape and range of stones; double or single wall construction; and the presence of foundation, plugging and hearting stone
- Definitions, including a summary of techniques and conditions, as they apply to dry stone wall construction.

If dry stone walls are approved for demolition, the only available records (photos and measured drawings) will be those completed by the heritage advisor. *Those records must be transferred to/filed with the local council.*

#### b. Context and discussion

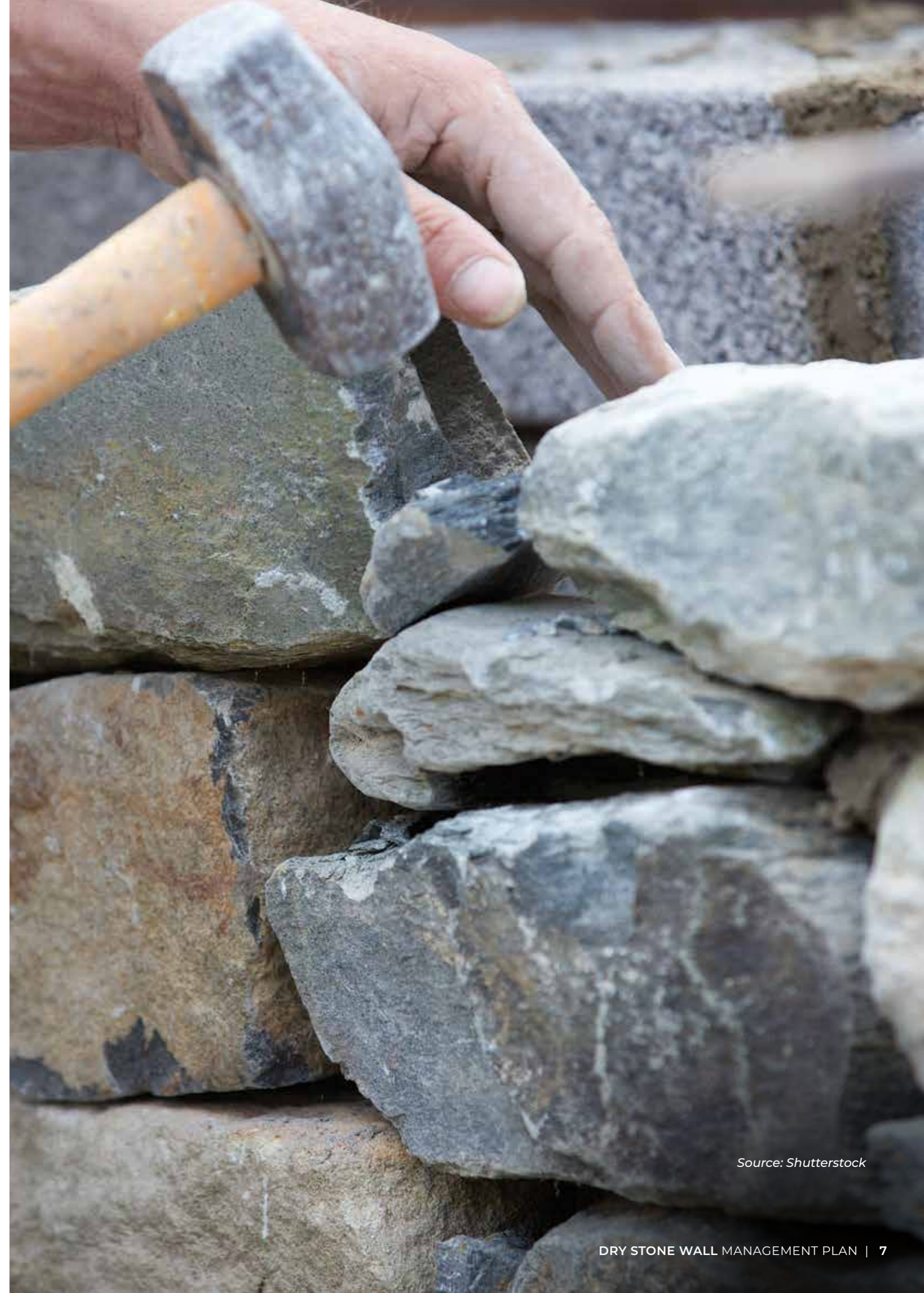
Original intact portions of dry stone walls are extremely valuable for immediate conservation purposes and understanding of Victoria's unique agricultural and settlement history. Intact parts of dry stone walls contribute to conservation policy, enable comparisons between walls and bring to light other information such as their sequence of construction. They provide a reference for assessing the condition of a particular dry stone wall and, if appropriate, a model for its restoration. They could also shed light on the development and use of particular properties, as well as the regional construction style of dry stone walls on the Victorian Volcanic Plain.

A DSWMP must include or reference:

- Meaningful historical and cultural analysis of the site's context and the history of the site itself – both historical research and analysis, including research in primary historical sources that provide correct geographic, topographic, historical or other related contexts;
- historical sources on rural land use in the district and on the site. Historical publications are appropriate but should not be considered as a primary source to assess significance of dry stone walls;
- any local government dry stone wall studies or histories.

Valuable source material can include the following:

- Historical plans (available from the Public Records Office Victoria, the State Library Victoria or a local historical society), maps and drawings;
- parish plans;
- private collections, such as family histories, photographs of former property owners and others;
- Torrens Application files, which may include statutory declarations on the age of boundary walls;
- lands Victoria: Surveyors Field Notes for the Torrens Application, where a Torrens file is not available;
- historical aerial photographs;
- title information;
- municipal rate books;



Source: Shutterstock

- other local heritage studies;
- material accessed via Trove (the national database of historical and archival sources);
- wills and probate papers for deceased owners of the property at significant periods in the property's history;
- legal proceedings, coroners' reports and similar items, which might reveal historical activity on or near the property;
- site-specific data on the Heritage Overlay in the local Planning Scheme, especially where dry stone walls are contributory to the heritage place or listed individually.

### c. Topographical context

Topography is a major consideration when assessing dry stone walls in Victoria, both in terms of their construction and their location. Dry stone walls are known to be built over and through other natural features.

### d. Heritage impact assessments

A DSWMP must provide:

- Impact assessments of the proposed project, including a clear description of what is proposed and how that will impact dry stone walls;
- statement(s) of Significance for dry stone walls that considers all available data and draws a conclusion about the level of significance of dry stone walls;
- definition and correct use of heritage terms and criteria defined in the [Burra Charter](#).

### e. Significance assessment and management recommendations

A DSWMP is a conservation plan required when dry stone walls are undergoing development or subject to a planning application. The DSWMP must include recommendations on dry stone wall conservation, as well as data and information to support the recommendations. When developing or reviewing a DSWMP, consider the following:

- Correct definition and application of terms and criteria used in consultant reports;
- excessive weight should not be assigned to construction techniques and condition alone when assessing significance;

- the [Burra Charter](#)'s direction that relocation is a last resort is especially pertinent to dry stone walls. The original layout, construction and condition of dry stone walls may relate directly to the local character;
- local planning scheme policy where applicable;
- How dry stone walls can be effectively integrated into the design of urban spaces and places in new developments. (To learn more about how to integrate dry stone walls into the urban environment, refer to Dry Stone Wall Design Guidelines);
- Whether any dry stone walls will require archaeological investigation and professional documentation according to Heritage Victoria Guidelines;
- whether dry stone walls are proposed to be demolished to make way for roads, openings for pedestrian access;
- if relocation/reconstruction of dry stone walls are proposed, council's open space and landscaping officers will need to assess and comment on relocation plans;
- any dry stone walls that are agreed to be demolished will need to be recorded properly, and copies of those records must be in the report and/or lodged separately with council (agree on options for records to be transmitted/housed/reported);
- proposals for reuse of material from dry stone walls or parts of dry stone walls that are recommended for removal/demolition;
- recommendation for restoration and repairs for dry stone walls to be retained or ends of dry stone walls where parts are to be demolished;
- plans for the ongoing maintenance of dry stone walls beyond the construction phase of the development. These must comply with council standards of clearance around dry stone walls;
- recommendations regarding professional builders for any relocation, reuse of stones, and planting design of the landscaping reserve around dry stone walls.

## Review

When reviewing a draft DSWMP consider the following:

### a. What does a compliant DSWMP look like?

A compliant DSWMP must include:

- Statements of Significance written in line with standards set out in Victoria Planning Provisions [Planning Practice Note 1](#)

Contents should include but are not limited to:

- Critical contents listed in section 5
- historic assessments of all the dry stone wall in the permit area;
- the landscape values of the dry stone wall(s) in the wider landscape, taking into consideration not just nearby roads and property boundary walls, but also views to and from other locations;
- links to the topographic features of the landscape, reflecting the fundamental relationship of the dry stone walls in terms of location and construction;
- other social, cultural and visual associations as identified through historical research;
- comparative analysis with other dry stone walls in the local area, the region or Victoria;
- summary of the levels of significance for all dry stone walls examined and assessed, including comments about any unique or historically significant dry stone walls in the study area;
- excessive weight should not be given to construction techniques and condition/intactness when providing context for assessments of significance;
- a DSWMP may proposed an option to temporarily store dry stone wall material nearby the original location, prior to reconstruction/restoration at a later date. Recording of the walls with measured drawings and photographs are critical to guide later restoration;
- specialists will need to oversee dismantling and storage of the stone, and the temporary site should be fenced off to discourage theft and vandalism.

### b. What does a non-compliant DSWMP look like?

The examples of common unacceptable approaches and recommendations in a DSWMP include:

- The client, instead of the heritage consultants, appears to be developing the removal and retention plan in the DSWMP. This may be apparent from written statements, such as *"Map 4 shows the proposed removal and retention plan for the dry stone walls within the study area, as developed by the client"*;
- heritage consultants must undertake an assessment to inform the conservation of dry stone walls. Having developers directing dry stone wall conservation and removal may result in violation of legislation on dry stone wall protection;
- dry stone wall assessments of significance must not solely reference condition/intactness, technical qualities/construction technique and style without any assessments of cultural heritage significance based on archival research and comparative analysis. DSWMPs must include impact assessments of the proposed works on dry stone walls.

Such reports may need to be revised to comply with existing guidelines, such as those published by Heritage Victoria: [Heritage Victoria Guidelines for preparing heritage impact statements](#)



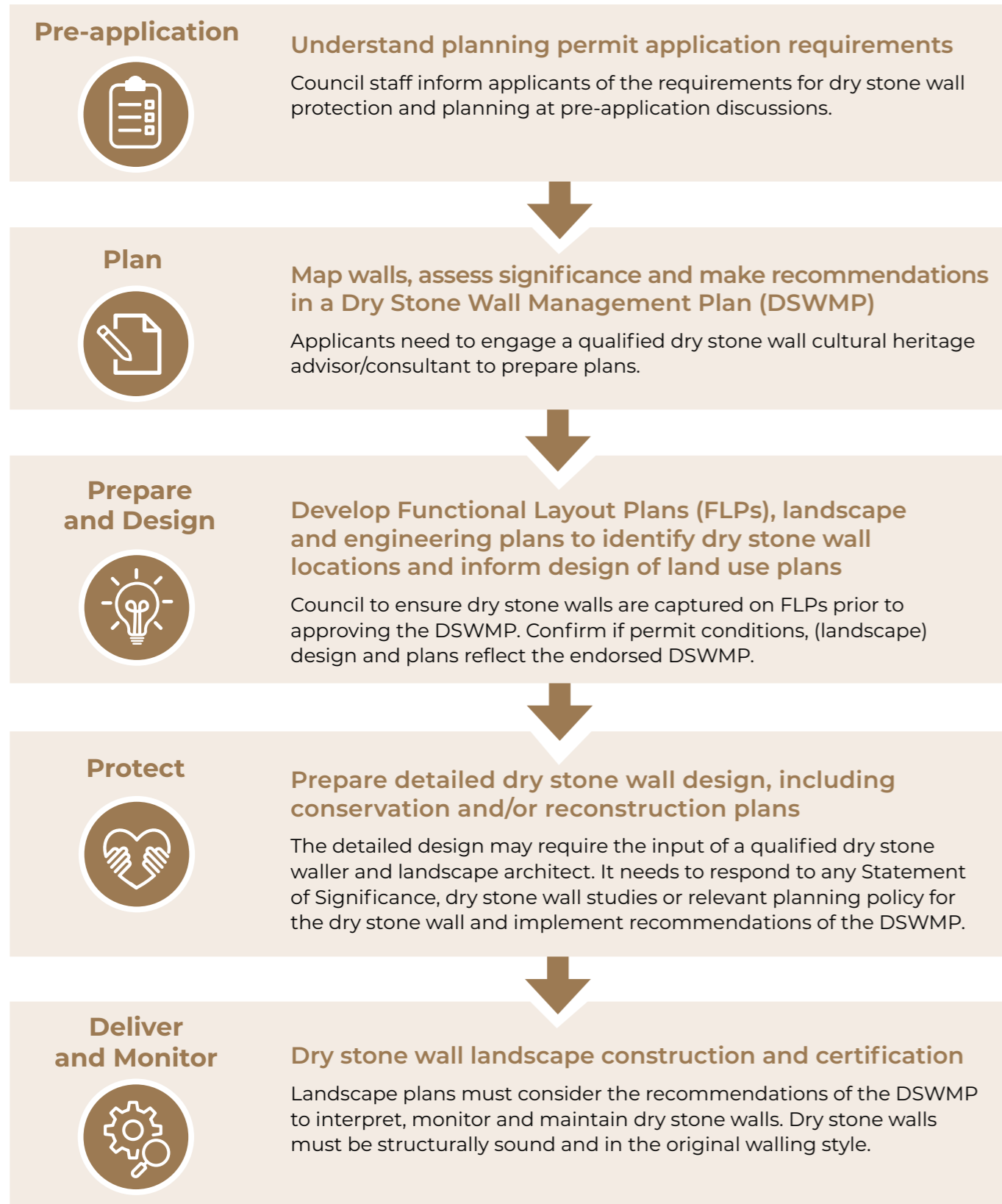
Fenwick Stud, Woodstock. Source: Vicki Johnson

## 6. Other resources

Further information to support dry stone wall protection.

### Dry stone wall management process

Below is a simple process diagram that outlines the best approach to dry stone wall protection. It is strongly advised that a pre-application meeting takes place between permit applicants and the local council to ensure all parties understand applicable requirements and standards in the local government area.



To assist with development and review of a DSWMP, heritage advisors, reviewers and councils may have access to a range of resources, such as:

- A municipal dry stone wall study where one has been completed. The City of Melton, the City of Whittlesea and Wyndham City Council;
- DSWMPs and assessments previously completed for comparative information;
- any existing mapping of dry stone walls by the local council or other authority;
- dry stone walls visible on mapping sources, such as NearMap;
- the [Burra Charter](#): the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013;

- the Dry Stone Wall Toolkit developed in 2024 by the City of Whittlesea with funding from the Victorian Planning Authority's (VPA) Streamlining for Growth Program;
- a list of heritage consultants with qualifications to undertake dry stone wall field mapping and assessments for cultural heritage significance, and to draft the DSWMP for review by council;
- a list of approved dry stone wallers whose services may be required once the DSWMP has been approved.

Councils should consider heritage training on dry stone wall protection and compliance to support officers who request and review DSWMPs and who provide appropriate advice to permit applicants and their external consultants.

## 7. Assessment by a qualified dry stone wall expert

The [Burra Charter](#) requires the engagement of a professional with the skills necessary to determine the cultural heritage significance of a place. Assessment of dry stone walls should be undertaken by a dry stone wall specialist consultant(s) with the technical, historical and assessment skills to produce the required report and/or DSWMP.

Examples of dry stone wall assessments and DSWMPs from non-specialists have shown that the resulting reports are frequently inadequate.

Of concern is that some reports often rely too heavily on the conditions of the dry stone walls to assess significance – this assumes that a collapsing dry stone wall is of low or no significance.

Based on the [Burra Charter](#), significance assessments must also take account of historical context, stylistic features, known associations, age/date of construction, frequency/rarity of type and other factors to make a determination. That process should be used for all assessments of heritage significance.



Reconstructed Dry stone wall along Findon Road, South Morang. Source: Colleen Lazenby

## Statement of Significance

*The following is an example of a Statement of Significance*

### What is significant?

The property at 17 Smith Road, Mullitown, is significant at the local level. The features that contribute to the significance of the place are the dry stone walls surrounding the homestead complex, marking the boundaries of the original 1863 farm allotment.

Specifically included are dry stone walls Nos. 53, 33, 36, 37, 39, 40, 42-47, 61-66, and 82 as shown on Figure 22; and Nos. 34, 38, 39, 41, 48, 49, 50, 51, 54, 55, 80 and 81, which enclose cultivation paddocks or stony rises across the Property as shown on Figure 23.

### How is it significant?

The Property is of local historic, representative, and aesthetic significance to the city.

### Why is it significant?

The Property is of historical and representative significance as perhaps the most intact and complete network of dry stone walls on a single farm in the City. The quality of masonry, and the size (length and height) and extent of the dry stone wall complex on site compare favourably with the best examples in other parts of Victoria including the walls found in the western districts of the state.

Walls on the Property include one very large example of an unusual cultivation paddock, a type enclosed by dry stone walls on three sides with the fourth side defined by an elevated stony rise landform. A four-sided configuration of 1.5m high walls encloses a horse yard and additional extensive walls mark the original nineteenth century Crown allotment boundaries. These magnificent walls are significant in demonstrating the regular, historic pattern of subdivision in the early farming period as well as the irregular patterns and alignment that were established to respond to the distinctive stony rises landforms of the Merri-Darebin Plains area.

The dry stone walls at the Property clearly demonstrate the human modification of this distinctive landscape for farming/agricultural purposes. (Burra Charter Criteria A and D)

The Property is of aesthetic significance as an outstanding cultural landscape combining stony rises, woodlands, and dry stone walls in the context of an original, intact nineteenth century farmstead. It is set apart by its prevailing red gum open woodland and the quality of the dry stone walls, which include some of the most visually impressive examples in the City.

The stony rises are high and wide remnants of a volcanic landscape formed 60 million years ago. Where internal boundary walls forge straight across a stony rise, they are usually structurally intact, which creates more dramatic vertical relief and elevated views of the dry stone walls from a distance. These factors add to the aesthetic impact of the walls at the Property. In places several walled cultivation paddocks are immediately adjacent to stony outcrops of high relief, featuring adjacent mature red gums, while others are set around lower stony outcrops. All remain in a park-like remnant environment of open red gum woodlands. Overall, the walls both complement and are enhanced by these remarkable landscape settings and contribute greatly to the aesthetic values by creating complex and layered landscape vistas across the property. (Burra Charter Criterion E)



Dry stone wall during construction along Findon Road, South Morang.  
Source: Colleen Lazenby







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