

Establishment of the Sustainability Design Prize in 2026/27

Strategic Alignment - Our Environment

Public

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City Planning, Development and Business Affairs Committee

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Approving Officer:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the report is to present a framework and options relating to the establishment of a Sustainability Design Prize in 2026/27.

On 28 April 2026 Council resolved to establish a design award to encourage innovation and cost efficiencies in the implementation of sustainability measures, such as street tree planting and residential EV charging, starting with a \$15,000 prize in the 2026/27 budget ([Link 1](#)).

This report provides a framework for the Sustainability Design Prize, including consideration of prize categories, based on Administration's understanding it should target innovation in sustainability.

A preliminary review of the City of Adelaide's Integrated Climate Strategy (ICS) goals, aligned projects and processes including street tree planting and residential EV charging, identified thirteen potential prize categories with potential outcomes under each category assessed.

This report recommends proceeding with a single prize category of Greening in 2026/27 as part of program establishment.

To deliver the Sustainability Design Prize, three options are presented for consideration which have been formulated from research into existing external programs:

1. Option 1: Innovation in Sustainability Design Award
2. Option 2: Sustainability Innovation Design Competition
3. Option 3: Sustainability Design Innovation Living Lab.

Each option differs in its capacity to achieve the intended outcomes and carries different implications for design implementation, timeframes, budget allocations and administrative resourcing.

This report recommends Option 2: Sustainability Innovation Design Competition on the basis it delivers Council's decision on 28 April 2026 to introduce a new opportunity for innovation in sustainability and can be delivered within the project budget and resourcing (noting launch of the Competition would be in Quarter 2 of 2026/27).

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendation will be presented to Council on 14 July 2026 for consideration

THAT THE CITY PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS TO COUNCIL

THAT COUNCIL

1. Approves Option 2: Sustainability Innovation Design Competition for implementation in 2026/27 with an initial focus on the Greening category as the most suitable approach for the establishment of a Sustainability Innovation Design Competition noting timeline, budget, resourcing and implementation implications.

2. Notes a report will be presented to Council in early 2027/28 with the outcomes of the 2026/27 implementation of the Sustainability Innovation Design Competition, including consideration of a rolling annual or biennial program.
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IMPLICATIONS AND FINANCIALS

City of Adelaide 2024-2028 Strategic Plan	Strategic Alignment – Our Environment Prioritise sustainability in our decisions for the future. Implement sustainable, renewable and green systems, infrastructure, practices and materials in our projects and services.
Policy	The Sustainability Innovation Design Competition aligns with Council's role in the Integrated Climate Strategy to "trial innovative and emerging systems, products and technologies for climate mitigation and adaption, and showcase leading climate-related initiatives."
Consultation	Internal consultation has been undertaken with the Low Carbon and Circular Economy team, Park Lands Planning team, and Design and Technical Services team. The options have been formulated from research into existing external programs.
Resource	Implementation will be coordinated across the City Infrastructure and City Shaping portfolios including leadership and administration from the Low Carbon and Circular Economy team in collaboration with the Design and Technical Services team and Infrastructure team.
Risk / Legal / Legislative	Prior to program implementation, Intellectual Property and Copyright advice will be sought on the implications of awarding design ideas and research, and how contractually outcomes can be implemented and/or embedded in Council projects, processes and operations.
Opportunities	The establishment of the Sustainability Innovation Design Competition aims to embed innovative solutions and sustainability measures in Council projects, processes and operations aligned with Council's strategic goals.
26/27 Budget Allocation	There is a \$40,000 allocation in the 2026/27 Annual Business Plan and Budget for the Sustainability Innovation Design Competition, of which \$15,000 is intended to be awarded as a prize per Council decision on 28 April 2026.
Proposed 27/28 Budget Allocation	Not as a result of this report
Life of Project, Service, Initiative or (Expectancy of) Asset	The Sustainability Innovation Design Competition will be implemented in 2026/27 per Council decision. An announcement on the program would occur in Quarter 2 of 2026/27. The potential for an ongoing annual or biennial prize will be subject to a separate Council decision pending the outcomes of the program in 2026/27.
26/27 Budget Reconsideration (if applicable)	Not as a result of this report
Ongoing Costs (eg maintenance cost)	Not as a result of this report
Other Funding Sources	Options identify opportunities for potential university and industry partnerships which could be pursued for additional funding or in-kind support.

DISCUSSION

Purpose

1. The purpose of the report is to present a framework and options relating to the establishment of a Sustainability Innovation Design Prize in 2026/27.

Background

2. On 28 April 2026 Council resolved to establish a design award to encourage innovation and cost efficiencies in the implementation of sustainability measures, such as street tree planting and residential EV charging, starting with a \$15,000 prize in the 2026/27 budget ([Link 1](#))
3. The Sustainability Design Prize aims to meet the Council's aspirations for climate resilience articulated in the City of Adelaide's Integrated Climate Strategy (ICS), including Council's role in trialling innovative and emerging systems, products and technologies for climate mitigation and adaption, and showcasing leading climate-related initiatives.

Sustainability Design Prize Framework

4. This report provides a framework for the Sustainability Design Prize based on Administration's understanding it should target innovation in sustainability to deliver long-term benefits across design processes, project management, and Council operations.
5. The framework targets innovation in how the City of Adelaide delivers its core services, including infrastructure projects.
6. Innovation is defined as:
 - 6.1. Exploring new ways of thinking.
 - 6.2. Seeking alternative outcomes.
 - 6.3. Addressing current challenges.
 - 6.4. Learning from the past to create positive impacts into the future.
 - 6.5. Implementing lessons learned.
7. Sustainability is defined as:
 - 7.1. Reducing negative environmental and social impacts.
 - 7.2. Increasing liveability, climate resilience, health, and community wellbeing.
 - 7.3. Protecting natural ecosystems and vulnerable populations.
 - 7.4. Decarbonising, mitigating the effects of climate change, and supporting the circular economy.
8. Eligibility and assessment criteria will prioritise:
 - 8.1. Innovation.
 - 8.2. Sustainability.
 - 8.3. Efficient use of public space, including coordination with underground services and competing street uses.
 - 8.4. Constructability, adaptability and scalability.
 - 8.5. Cost effectiveness.
 - 8.6. Long-term maintenance.

Sustainability Prize Category

9. Thirteen potential prize categories have been considered for inclusion in the Sustainability Design Prize based on the goals contained in the ICS with existing projects, programs and potential outcomes under each category assessed.
10. Given the broad nature of the potential prize categories, an initial focus on a single theme is proposed to establish the Sustainability Design Prize and test interest in the program.

Integrated Climate Strategy Goal	Proposed Category
Goal 1. A climate resilient city	Greening
	Green Infrastructure
	Water Sensitivity
	Heat Mitigation and Climate Adaption
Goal 2. A net zero ready city	Electrification
	Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure
	Active and Renewable Transport
Goal 3. A city where nature thrives	Caring for Country
	Urban Biodiversity
	Preservation and Enhancement of the Adelaide Park Lands
Goal 4. Transition to a decarbonised economy	Circular Economy
	Zero Waste
	Sustainable Supply Chains, Procurement and Operations

11. The Greening category is proposed for 2026/27 in direct response to the Motion on Notice which included a focusing on street tree planting, and because it:
 - 11.1. Is a strategic priority with associated tree canopy and urban heat mitigation targets.
 - 11.2. Addresses the City of Adelaide's primary exposure to climate change, being urban heat.
 - 11.3. Provides a strong alignment with an existing funded body of work.
 - 11.4. Is an area where Council is experiencing cost pressures due to the nature of urban street tree planting in a contested city environment.
 - 11.5. Has the potential to build on existing partnerships with the Adelaide University, Environment Institute and partners.
12. Subject to the success or otherwise of the program once established, there is the potential to establish a rolling Sustainability Design Prize program addressing a different category each round.

Delivery Options

13. This report presents three options for consideration which have been formulated from research into existing external programs:
 - 13.1. Option 1: Innovation in Sustainability Design Award (refer [Link 2](#) for draft program design)
 - 13.2. Option 2: Sustainability Innovation Design Competition (refer [Link 4](#) for draft program design)
 - 13.3. Option 3: Sustainability Design Innovation Living Lab (refer [Link 5](#) for draft program design).
14. The options are informed by:
 - 14.1. Preliminary review of ICS aligned projects and processes including review against Sustainability Design Prize objectives of innovation and cost efficiencies to understand potential outcomes.
 - 14.2. Research into existing sustainability design awards, competitions, and Living Labs to identify themes and gaps, challenges and recommendations, engagement opportunities, processes, eligibility criteria, funding applications, governance structures, timelines and outcomes.
15. Each option differs in its capacity to achieve the intended objectives and carries different implications for design implementation, timeframes, budget allocations and administrative resourcing.

Option 1: Innovation in Sustainability Design Award

Overview

16. Sustainability Design Awards typically recognise and promote completed innovative projects, commonly in the built environment sector where entries are from relevant built environment practitioners (which could include individuals or groups).

17. Entries are assessed by a jury of experts against defined objectives, categories and eligibility criteria, with winners receiving recognition through trophies, cash prizes, certificates and/or media promotion.
18. Council currently delivers the annual City of Adelaide Prize for Design Excellence as a sponsored category in the South Australian Architecture Awards Program and Presentation ([Link 3](#)).
19. The eligibility criteria for the City of Adelaide's Prize for Design Excellence includes a range of social, environmental, economic and First Nations criteria (explicit climate adaptation and emissions criteria are not included).
20. A new Innovation in Sustainability Design Award could be delivered independently by the City of Adelaide, or as a sponsorship of an existing Sustainability Design Award such as The Urban Developer Awards for Industry Excellence – Excellence in Sustainability; Banksia National Sustainability Awards; or other.

Timeline

21. The indicative timeline for the Innovation in Sustainability Design Award process is as follows across a 12-month period throughout the 2026/2027 financial year.

Delivery Stage	Timeline - 2026/27
Year One Program Design	Quarter 1
Award Program Launch	Quarter 2
Submission Period	Quarter 3
Assessment	Quarter 4
Announcement and Event	End of Quarter 4

22. Subject to successful implementation, the Innovation in Sustainability Design Award could be presented annually as part of a rolling program.

Resourcing and Application of Funding

23. Resourcing is within the existing Low Carbon and Circular Economy team and is envisioned to be spread across team's capabilities as necessary over the initial 12-month delivery cycle.
24. \$20,000 is allocated for prize money distributed across two tiers as follows:
 - 24.1. \$15,000 is awarded to the overall winner.
 - 24.2. \$5,000 is awarded to the first commendation.
25. The remaining \$20,000 is allocated for external costs including, but not limited to, remuneration for Jury members, marketing, media promotions, events and physical trophies and/or certificates.

Assessment of Option 1

26. Option 1: Innovation in Sustainability Design Award is not proposed for the following reasons:
 - 26.1. Design Awards primarily recognise completed projects and therefore have limited capacity to drive the development and implementation of new innovative solutions by the City of Adelaide.
 - 26.2. The research has identified 17 existing local, state, national and international Sustainability Design Awards ([Link 6](#)).
 - 26.3. The existing eligibility criteria for the City of Adelaide Prize for Design Excellence could be amended in 2026/27 to include an explicit reference to climate adaptation and emissions reduction providing direct recognition of sustainability in the built environment (noting the 2026 Award went to Adelaide Aquatic Centre (Kauwinka) by JPE Design Studio with Warren and Mahoney and Karl Winda Telfer which is an all-electric building).
 - 26.4. There are known challenges in attracting suitable entries as experienced through administration of the City of Adelaide Prize for Design Excellence.
 - 26.5. Potential limitations in translating awarded solutions into broader Council projects, processes and operations.

Option 2: Sustainability Innovation Design Competition

Overview

27. Design Competitions provide a platform for generating and testing design ideas, while supporting design quality, diversity and innovation through an alternative procurement pathway.
28. A jury comprising balanced public and private sector representation would assess submissions against feasibility and suitability for implementation within the City of Adelaide with entries, shortlisted concepts and winners recognised through media promotion, City of Adelaide communications and other marketing initiatives.
29. A Sustainability Innovation Design Competition could seek feasible concepts from emerging and established practitioners that incorporate sustainability measures, respond to ICS goals and can be implemented in the City of Adelaide.
30. The City of Melbourne's Design Excellence Program provides a precedent which can inform the final program design.
31. At the current level of funding, it is anticipated that the Sustainability Innovation Design Competition would support a small-scale project.

Timeline

32. The timeline for the Sustainability Innovation Design Competition is as follows across the 2026/27 financial year.

Delivery Stage	Timeline - 2026/27
Year One Program Design	Quarter 1
Competition Program Initiation and Launch	Quarter 2
Stage One: Sustainability Innovation Design Competition Concepts Submission Period	Late Quarter 2 – early Quarter 3
Assessment and Announcement of Shortlist	Quarter 3
Stage Two: Shortlisted Concepts Design Development	Late Quarter 3
Assessment and Announcement of Winner	End Quarter 3 – Quarter 4
Stage Three: Winning Design Implementation	End Quarter 4

33. Subject to successful implementation, the Sustainability Innovation Design Competition could be presented biennially as part of a rolling program.

Resourcing and Application of Funding

34. Resourcing is within existing teams and is envisioned to be spread across the team's capabilities as necessary over the 12-month delivery cycle.
35. \$15,000 is allocated for external costs including, but not limited to, the development of the brief, remuneration for Jury members, marketing and media promotions and events.
36. \$25,000 is allocated for prize money allocated across Competition stages including:
 - 36.1. \$5,000 is allocated for remuneration for two shortlisted teams to further develop their concept design in collaboration with local industry (\$10,000 total).
 - 36.2. \$15,000 is awarded to one overall winner who is also awarded the opportunity to implement the design in collaboration with the City of Adelaide and industry partners.
37. Further funding would be required in the event the innovation could be rolled out for implementation, which would likely be timed for Quarter 1 2027/2028 pending budget deliberations.

Assessment of Option 2

38. Option 2: Sustainability Innovation Design Competition is proposed for the following reasons:
 - 38.1. A Design Competition can generate new ideas, innovation and platform emerging talent consistent with the intent of the Sustainability Design Prize Framework described in this report.

- 38.2. Potential for partnerships with relevant industry and governing bodies to support Competition development, delivery and sponsorship, with a focus on multi-disciplinary emerging design teams to encourage diverse perspectives.
- 38.3. Potential for additional outcomes include promoting emerging practitioners, generating research and site investigations, and exploring alternative procurement approaches that support innovative design outcomes.
- 38.4. There is potential to align a Competition with an existing event such as Adelaide Design Week in October 2027.
- 38.5. Challenges to be managed include speculative or unfeasible proposals, limited collaboration and knowledge sharing, and the considerable time commitment required from applicants.

Option 3: Sustainability Design Innovation Living Lab

Overview

- 39. Living Labs are established internationally by local governments, universities and agencies to co-design and trial innovative solutions in real-world settings.
- 40. This option supports creativity, collaboration, experimentation, evaluation and knowledge sharing, aligned with strategic priorities and long-term implementation outcomes.
- 41. Community, industry and academic participation is recognised through diverse, accessible and inclusive engagement, transparent processes and public sharing of outcomes.
- 42. The City of Adelaide is currently participating in the International Human Smart Living Lab Network facilitated by the International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC), which includes the opportunity to consider small 'pilot projects' under the Living Lab format.

Timeline

- 43. The timeline for the Sustainability Design Innovation Living Lab process is as follows across a two-year period throughout the 2026/2027 and 2027/2028 financial years.

Delivery Stage	Timeline
Year One Program Design	Quarter 1 2026/2027
Living Lab Program Initiation	Quarter 2 2026/2027
Project Plan Development	
Project Co-Design	Quarter 3 2026/2027
Project Implementation	Quarter 4 2026/2027
Project Evaluation	Quarter 1 2027/2028
Project Refinement	Quarter 2 2027/2028
Project Dissemination	Quarter 3 2027/2028
Project Replication	Quarter 4 2027/2028

- 44. Subject to successful implementation, the Living Lab could be presented biennially as part of a rolling program.

Resourcing and Application of Funding

- 45. Resourcing is estimated at a time commitment of 0.5 FTE over the two-year delivery cycle. Resourcing is within the existing Low Carbon and Circular Economy team and is envisioned to be spread across the team's capabilities, as necessary.
- 46. A project team of external stakeholders would be established with co-design sessions occurring throughout the two-year delivery cycle, with greater time commitments required during initiation and evaluation stages.
- 47. \$40,000 is allocated for project initiation and planning, research, data collation, communications and participant remuneration.
- 48. Further funding would be required for the implementation, which would be subject to budget deliberations.

Assessment of Option 3

49. Option 3: Sustainability Design Innovation Living Lab is not proposed for the following reasons:
- 49.1. The Sustainability Design Innovation Living Lab need not replicate a format being investigated by the City of Adelaide through its participation in the IURC over the next two financial years.
 - 49.2. The Sustainability Design Innovation Living Lab format requires investment over a minimum two-year timeframe and has a longer establishment period due to additional governance structures, partnerships and stakeholder relationships.

Options Assessment

50. Of the options presented in this report the Sustainability Design Prize could be delivered through existing approaches per Option 1 and Option 3:
- 50.1. Option 1: Innovation in Sustainability Design Award could be achieved through simple amendments to the existing City of Adelaide Prize for Design Excellence.
 - 50.2. Option 3: Sustainability Design Innovation Living Lab is considered a longer-term ambition which is being investigated by the City of Adelaide with the support of an existing multi-year international partnership.
51. Noting Council's decision on 28 April 2026 to introduce a new Sustainability Design Prize, and for the reasons set out in paragraph 37, the options assessment supports the delivery of Option 2: Sustainability Innovation Design Competition, as an option that can be established in 2026/27 with design implementation in 2027/28.

Next Steps and Future Considerations

52. Pending Council decision, Administration will prepare and deliver the Sustainability Innovation Design Competition in 2026/27.
53. Intellectual Property considerations will need to be addressed for any of the options presented as it relates to ownership and ongoing use of design solutions.
54. Implementation of design solutions by the City of Adelaide have not been costed and are not included in the timeframes reported for each option.
55. The outcomes of the Sustainability Innovation Design Competition will be presented to Council in early 2027/28, including potential consideration of a rolling annual or biennial program pending the outcomes of the program.

DATA AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Link 1 – [Councillor Siebentritt – Motion on Notice – Sustainability Design Prize](#)

Link 2 – [Framework Option 1 – Innovation in Sustainability Design Award](#)

Link 3 – [South Australian Architecture Awards Program](#)

Link 4 – [Framework Option 2 – Sustainability Innovation Design Competition](#)

Link 5 – [Framework Option 3 – Sustainability Design Innovation Living Lab](#)

Link 6 – [Existing local, state, national and international Sustainability Design Awards](#)

ATTACHMENTS

Nil

- END OF REPORT -