

**02.03**20/05/2021  
C95malx**02.03-1**20/05/2021  
C95malx**STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS****Settlement****Townships, settlement and growth**

**Castlemaine** (including Campbell's Creek and Diamond Gully) is the main population centre in Mount Alexander Shire, accounting for about 50 per cent of the Shire's total population. It is the key administrative and commercial centre for the Shire.

**Diamond Gully** situated three kilometres to the south west of the Castlemaine town centre will be Castlemaine's primary urban growth area. There is also potential for urban expansion in the McKenzie Hill area.

Subdivision and residential development in Diamond Gully needs to be balanced against the protection of significant vegetation and prioritising the protection of human life in areas at risk from bushfire.

**Maldon** is the second largest township. The town has been recognised for its heritage significance. The retail centre in High Street, Maldon, is the second largest retail centre in the Shire. It provides local shopping needs for the township and the rural district in the north western part of the Shire and serves an important tourism role.

**Newstead** is a local community centre, on the Loddon River. It provides services to residents of the township itself and surrounding rural area.

**Harcourt** is a local community centre, identified as a place for population growth in the Loddon Mallee South Regional Growth Plan. Harcourt is located next to Mount Alexander and is well placed to take advantage of tourism opportunities. The area is well known for its apple and pear orchards, providing a significant contribution to the State's apple supply.

**Taradale** is a small village at the southern edge of the Shire along the Calder corridor. The town is located along Back Creek which feeds into the Coliban River. A significant landmark of the town is the Taradale Viaduct along the Melbourne to Bendigo railway line, which reaches a height of approximately 36 metres.

**Elphinstone** is a small village along the Calder Corridor. The town has good road transport connections, being located where the Pyrenees Highway intersects with the Calder Highway. The railway line also runs through the centre of the town, creating a physical separation.

There are also small rural communities at **Baringhup, Fryerstown, Guildford, Metcalfe, Sutton Grange, Vaughan** and **Yapeen**.

The settlement pattern and Crown Allotment structure of the Shire is diverse, with small townships and farming areas that were developed in response to the demands of the gold rush era. This development has left a legacy of dispersed small allotments, which have proven popular for hobby farming and rural lifestyle activities.

The Shire has at least 15 years' supply of zoned residential land, and an additional 15 years of 'future' or unzoned land stocks. In recent years, most of the new residential lots created in the Shire have been from small, infill subdivisions. Accommodating the forecast population growth is likely to require a shift towards larger subdivisions and increased urban densities, particularly in Castlemaine.

Council is encouraging balanced development that builds on the Shire's existing settlement pattern with a regional urban focus on Castlemaine. As a result, growth is encouraged in serviced towns with transport connections between them reinforced to facilitate movement and access.

Harcourt also has potential for growth because it is fully serviced and strategically located close to the Calder Freeway and railway line.

Council's strategic directions on townships their settlement and growth are:

- Discouraging the rezoning of land for urban purposes outside the urban/township boundaries.

- Discouraging the rezoning or development of land for low density residential development if the land is likely to be required for future urban development.
- Encouraging infill and higher density development in the Shire's towns, particularly in Castlemaine.
- Limiting residential densities in unsewered small settlements and townships with effluent disposal limitations.
- Supporting urban consolidation and expansion at Castlemaine.
- Concentrating growth in Diamond Gully as Castlemaine's primary urban growth area.
- Encouraging growth in townships such as Harcourt, Newstead, Elphinstone and Taradale.
- Limiting urban expansion in Maldon.

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### **Environmental and landscape values**

#### **Biodiversity**

From the time of European settlement until the late 1940s, much of the original native vegetation of the Shire was cleared, initially for mining and later for agriculture. Since the 1940s, there has been almost no net loss in total area of tree cover, although native grasslands and understory vegetation have suffered through the introduction of exotic species and nutrients in the soil.

Native vegetation now covers 51 per cent of the Shire, including large areas designated for forestry, farming and other land-uses.

The Shire contains 23 Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs), of which 15 are endangered. Of all the area covered by native vegetation in the Shire, 11 percent has a Bioregional Conservation Status of 'endangered'. Endangered EVCs are located along the Muckleford Valley, around Mount Alexander and to the south of Newstead.

High densities of threatened flora species exist in the areas around Castlemaine and Harcourt. There are also 11 nationally threatened fauna species found within the Shire. High densities of threatened fauna species exist in the Yandoit Hills and Gower areas.

The road reserves throughout the Shire contain vegetation of important conservation value, providing habitat and acting as linear reserves.

Council's strategic directions for biodiversity are:

- Minimising the impact of development at the urban-forest interface that pose a threat to native flora and fauna .
- Protecting biodiversity values on public land, including road reserves.
- Protecting remnant native vegetation particularly in and around Castlemaine, Moonlight Flat and Lady Gully.
- Protecting wildlife corridors from rural living development.

#### **Landscapes**

Areas of high landscape and environmental value have been identified at Mount Alexander and Barfold Gorge, in the areas immediately surrounding the townships of Castlemaine and Maldon, and in Vaughan and Glenluce.

Hilltops and ridgelines are an important element of the Shire's rural character. Development along these natural features and the Shire's other significant landscapes need to be carefully managed to minimise any visual and environmental impacts.

Strategic directions for landscapes are:

- Discouraging development that is on or close to prominent ridges and hilltops to protect views and areas of remnant vegetation.

## Environmental risks and amenity

### Floodplains

Floodplains exist around the Loddon River and major watercourses in the Shire, including Muckleford Creek, Forest Creek and Barkers Creek. Newstead has historically been vulnerable to flooding from the Loddon River and is currently protected by levee banks.

Significant flood events occurred in the Shire in 2010, 2011 and 2012, including in the townships of Castlemaine, Campbells Creek and Chewton, which were affected by riverine flooding.

Council's strategic directions for floodplains are:

- Protecting life, property and infrastructure from the risk of flooding.
- Supporting land use and development initiatives for flood mitigation works.
- Discouraging intensive forms of development or incompatible uses on flood prone land.

### Soil contamination

The Shire's gold mining and industrial heritage has left a legacy of contaminated soils in some parts of the Shire, although most areas that are potentially contaminated have not been formally identified or assessed.

Council's strategic directions on contaminated land are:

- Seeking the rehabilitation of degraded land, including former mining and industrial sites.
- Seeking the remediation of contaminated land if it could be used for a sensitive use.

### Erosion and salinity

The intensive gold mining of the 19th century resulted in significant clearing and soil disturbance around waterways, creek flats and hilltops, making these areas more susceptible to erosion. Much of this land is unsuitable for further development.

Parts of the Shire are affected by salinity, reflecting the poor condition of the Loddon and Campaspe water catchments. Salinity is an issue in the catchment of the Cairn Curran Reservoir. The salinity has been caused by vegetation clearing, which has resulted in rising water tables, waterlogging and high salt concentrations.

Council's strategic directions in relation to salinity and erosion are to:

- Encourage the revegetation of areas that contribute to salinity by planting deep rooted perennial species and indigenous vegetation.
- Minimise the drainage of saline and nutrient rich water from irrigated and urban areas.
- Minimise salinity and the loss of topsoil to protect agricultural productivity and biodiversity.

### Bushfire

The Shire faces significant urban bushfire risk at the fringes of all of its main townships, namely Castlemaine, Maldon, Newstead and Harcourt. The highest bushfire risks to Castlemaine are to the north, west, south and south east. There is some vacant land that is zoned for residential development close to these areas. There are also areas of high bushfire risk in smaller settlements such as Chewton, Fryerstown and Taradale, and the rural areas of the Shire.

Council's strategic directions to address bushfire risk are:

- Directing urban development to the lowest risk locations.
- Avoiding development in areas of high bushfire risk where defensible space cannot be provided.
- Minimising biodiversity impacts when creating areas of defensible space around new dwellings.

### **Amenity impacts**

Most of the Shire's industrial areas either abut or are located close to residential areas, potentially causing conflict between industry and sensitive uses. This includes avoiding or limiting the effects of spray drift of chemicals.

Council's strategic directions for managing amenity impacts are:

- Avoiding locating new sensitive uses where the impact of agricultural chemical spray drift on amenity and health cannot be minimised.
- Protecting the horticultural industry from other agricultural production activities in the surrounding areas.

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### **Natural resource management**

#### **Agriculture**

Agriculture is the main rural land use by area across most rural areas of the Shire. The dominant agricultural use is broad acre grazing of cattle and sheep. Extensive cereal cropping occurs on large holdings of alluvial land and gently sloping sedimentary land in the north-west of the Shire.

Harcourt is Victoria's 'apple centre' and produces around 40 per cent of Victoria's apples, as well as pears and stone fruit, wine grapes, olives and quinces. Some large vineyards exist in the general area of Welshman's Reef and Cairn Curran Reservoir. Manufacturing activities that add value to horticultural produce are also present in the region.

There is a concern that productive agricultural land is being lost to non-agricultural uses, especially to rural living and low density residential development. Dwellings in rural areas can also lead to amenity conflicts with existing agricultural activities and potentially impede their operation.

Council's strategic directions to protect agriculture are:

- Protecting agricultural land of local and regional strategic significance.
- Promoting agriculture and horticulture as the primary land uses in the Shire.
- Avoiding the fragmentation of productive agricultural land through the development of dwellings and subdivision (including dwelling excisions) to maintain the productive capacity of the land.
- Discouraging the use and development of land that could create conflict with existing agricultural activities.
- Controlling the unplanned loss of agricultural land to rural living and residential uses.
- Protecting the irrigation and groundwater resources that support intensive agriculture and horticulture.
- Restructuring old and inappropriate subdivisions.
- Discouraging new dwellings and subdivisions that excise a dwelling that adversely impact the agricultural activities carried out on the land and neighbouring sites.

#### **Animal husbandry**

Many animal husbandry facilities are located in the Shire. They represent an important local industry. The proper siting and design of this form of use and development is needed to ensure residential amenity and environmental quality is protected.

Council's strategic directions for animal husbandry are to:

- Ensure animal husbandry is located, sited and designed to protect the amenity of residential areas and minimise impacts on the environment.

## **Water**

The Shire is located in the catchments of both the Loddon and Campaspe Rivers. The condition of the Loddon catchment is poor due to significant land degradation and poor water quality. The degradation of the environment affects land, agriculture and community amenity, with resulting flow on effects to the economy and residents.

Approximately 90 per cent of the Shire's land area is located in declared potable water supply catchment areas.

Water availability is a key driver of intensive agriculture. The Coliban supply system has been integral to sustaining the horticultural industries in the Harcourt area and is undergoing major improvements. Groundwater in the Mid Loddon Groundwater Management Area is a valuable agricultural resource of regional significance.

The potential of the agricultural industry is dependent on the health of the environment and Loddon - Campaspe catchment.

Water management and proper siting and design of dams is important in the Shire, considering the extensive rural areas and the continued development of rural living and low density residential areas.

Council's strategic directions to protect water quality are:

- Minimising deteriorating water quality from public access to waterways, overgrazing, fertilisers, intensive animal industries, salinity, weeds and dams.
- Managing the effects on water quality from land clearing, industrial discharges and sedimentation associated with urban development.
- Discouraging the development of dams to maintain environmental flows to waterways.
- Discouraging the development of dams that are not essential to the conduct of agricultural or horticultural enterprises.
- Preventing the construction of dams in environmentally sensitive areas, such as bush gullies.

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## **Built environment and heritage**

### **Heritage and character**

There is extensive evidence of Aboriginal occupation and activity throughout the Shire. These sites include traditional and cultural places, ceremonial and camping sites, mining sites, rock wells, middens and ovens.

Today remnant gold diggings are of major cultural heritage significance. The Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park is on the state and national heritage lists.

Castlemaine was the centre of government administration on the goldfields and became a hub for social activity, including commerce, transport, education, health services and religious observance. It has a high degree of intact and authentic 19th century buildings that reflect those functions.. There are also historic buildings in many of the smaller towns in the Shire, with Maldon being one of the most intact 19th century towns in Australia.

The residential areas typically have a spacious feel, derived from the generous lot sizes, building setbacks and wide road reserves. Urban areas often lack formal road and footpath treatments, which give these areas an informal character.

There are well defined strip shopping centres in Castlemaine and Maldon. These centres have a traditional compact form, with buildings that have direct frontage to streets and laneways.

The rural appearance and character of the Shire is a strong element of its appeal for residents and visitors. It is the combination of many physical elements that contribute to this character.

Strategic directions for heritage and character are:

- Protecting and conserving the historic fabric and maintain the integrity of places of heritage and cultural heritage significance.
- Supporting the development of rural land that does not detract from the appearance and character of the area.
- Conserving and enhancing the existing scale, density, character and appearance of Maldon's earlier residential areas.
- Encouraging residential and commercial development that respects the existing form and character of streetscapes and allows for contemporary architectural expression.
- Encouraging industrial development that makes a positive contribution to the form and character of streetscapes and allows for contemporary architectural expression.
- Managing the form and appearance of medium density and infill housing to protect the heritage and residential character of the Shire's towns.
- Encouraging development at highway entrances that respect township character and heritage values.
- Encouraging development along the entrances to all towns to be landscaped with species consistent with the existing and planned landscape for each town.

### **Sustainable development**

The type, location and form of housing has a major influence on sustainability outcomes in terms of energy use and other resources. The consolidation of development into existing urban areas is usually the most sustainable form of development from an economic, social and environmental perspective.

Council's strategic directions for sustainable development are:

- Encouraging energy efficiency in the planning and design of urban communities and development to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Maximising opportunities for passive heating and cooling in subdivision design, such as lot orientation.
- Encouraging whole-of-water cycle solutions that may allow re-use of treated effluent or re-use of stormwater to minimise total water use.
- Supporting developments that incorporate systems for filtering stormwater run-off, including stormwater management options that retain water and vegetation.

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### **Housing**

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (Victoria in Future 2019) estimates that the population of Mount Alexander Shire will reach 21,810 by 2036. In addition, the Shire's population is ageing, and household sizes are getting smaller. The Shire's towns have a range of transport, economic and social infrastructure to support an increase in population and a diversity in housing types.

Adequate, appropriate and affordable housing are basic factors affecting quality of life. Recent trends indicate that housing is becoming less affordable and that there is a mismatch between the needs of the existing community and the provision of housing within the municipality.

Single detached dwellings are expected to make the greatest contribution to the Shire's new housing stock in the foreseeable future, although Castlemaine is ideally placed to create different housing stock within the existing urban area.

Council's strategic directions for housing are:

- Encouraging increased residential densities within 20 minutes walking distance from town centres or close to retail, health and community facilities.

- Encouraging the adaptation of existing building stock for varying forms of accommodation, including shop top living or warehouse-style living.
- Encouraging large developments to include a proportion of social housing within the development.
- Encouraging alternative residential design concepts such as cluster housing.
- Encouraging new subdivisions to have a diversity of lot sizes, including smaller lots to promote affordability.
- Supporting the development of smaller dwellings to respond to the changing housing needs of the community.
- Encouraging larger developments to provide a mix of housing types and sizes, including one- and two-bedroom accommodation that are suitable for smaller households.

### **Rural residential development**

Opportunities to provide for new rural living development in the Shire are limited. The only areas specifically designated for rural living are in the central part of the Shire around Castlemaine. Some low density residential land exists in Maldon. Small Crown allotments make a substantial contribution to the supply of land that is potentially available for rural living purposes, although the development of these lots can undermine the potential of the land for agriculture and can impact on environmental qualities and the natural resource base.

Council's strategic directions for rural residential development are:

- Discouraging rural living areas where isolated from services and infrastructure.

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### **Economic development**

#### **Business**

The Castlemaine Commercial Centre is the main activity centre in the Shire and provides a range of retail, office and government services. The retail core is focused around Mostyn Street and Barker Street. Most of the Shire's smaller towns have pockets of commercial development that date from the mid-19th and early 20th centuries and have potential for infill commercial development.

Council's strategic directions for business are:

- Promoting the role of the Castlemaine Commercial Centre as the Shire's primary local service centre.
- Encouraging the redevelopment of under-utilised sites in the retail core of Castlemaine and under-utilised commercial buildings in the Shire's small towns.
- Maintaining the commercial viability of the Maldon town centre by accommodating a range of retail, commercial and public utility land uses.
- Discouraging out-of-centre development that would undermine the viability of existing retail areas and entrench car-based travel.

#### **Industry**

Industrial land in the Shire is concentrated in Castlemaine. There is limited land available for expansion, although additional land has recently been released in Wesley Hill. Industrial areas are also located in Harcourt and Maldon. Harcourt and Elphinstone have potential for industrial development due to their strategic location near the Calder Highway. However, Elphinstone requires servicing upgrades before long-term opportunities can be opened up. New industrial locations at Harcourt and Elphinstone will reduce the amount of industry related traffic travelling through Castlemaine, which is creating amenity issues in some residential areas and the town centre.

Council's strategic directions for industry are:

- Preserving existing industrial land and buffers to safeguard opportunities for the expansion of existing industries or establishment of new industries.
- Encouraging the diversification of the agricultural base of the Shire to increase resilience to change.
- Providing locations for industrial development adjacent to a highway or major road, and away from existing or proposed residential areas.
- Encouraging industry to locate within existing and planned industrial estates where all physical infrastructure is available and which are readily accessible to transport networks.
- Discouraging the establishment of industry that may have offsite amenity impacts on land outside of existing and planned industrial estates.
- Supporting the provision of sewerage and other infrastructure to Elphinstone to allow for the development of an industrial precinct in the town.

### **Tourism**

The tourism industry is built around the heritage of the Shire's goldfields, including the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park. Key drawcards to the Shire include nature-based tourism, wineries and cideries in the Harcourt Valley, local produce events culinary, arts and cultural attractions, and the 'village' offerings of Maldon, Guildford and Newstead.

Tourism activity is also influenced by visitation to adjoining municipalities such as Greater Bendigo and tourism initiatives that relate to the broader Goldfields' region.

Council's strategic directions for tourism are:

- Encouraging tourist facilities and services that are compatible with and add value to the existing built and natural attractions of the municipality.
- Encouraging tourist development to be sited and designed to minimise impact on the natural environment, landscapes or productive agricultural land.

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### **Transport**

The Shire has extensive road and rail transport links to Melbourne and Bendigo via the Calder Highway and the Melbourne-Swan Hill railway line. Other major centres linked to Mount Alexander include Ballarat (Midland Highway) and Maryborough (Pyrenees Highway).

Transport and movement are important issues for the Shire due to its low density settlement patterns, high levels of commuting, and connections with larger regional centres such as Bendigo, and the Melbourne metropolitan area.

Walking and cycling are popular forms of transport and recreation.

Council's strategic directions for transport are:

- Connecting smaller towns and settlements with Castlemaine.
- Supporting opportunities for expanding public transport in the future.
- Supporting off-road trails and rail trails that serve both recreational and transport purposes for walkers and cyclists by providing off-road access to towns in the Shire.

## Infrastructure

### Development infrastructure

Most of the Shire's urban areas are serviced with reticulated water, sewerage, gas, electricity and telecommunications infrastructure. Some existing drainage infrastructure has heritage significance. It is anticipated that existing water supply infrastructure will be able to meet most of the water supply needs for the projected population growth of the Shire.

Some augmentation of existing sewerage infrastructure will be required in Castlemaine, Campbells Creek and Harcourt to accommodate future growth. Elphinstone, Taradale and Guildford are currently unsewered towns.

The Shire has community infrastructure assets, including public health facilities, schools and cultural and recreation facilities.

Council's strategic direction for infrastructure are:

- Supporting wastewater management in Taradale, Elphinstone and Guildford to accommodate projected growth.
- Preventing residential development in rural areas, that can significantly increase costs of infrastructure maintenance and service provision.
- Encouraging the expansion of regional health, educational and cultural facilities.
- Providing new physical or community infrastructure in new residential communities by way of developer contributions.
- Encouraging development in the General Residential Zone to be connected to reticulated sewerage.

### Open space

The Shire is well endowed with formal and informal open spaces that provide opportunities for sporting activities, passive recreation, events and relaxation. Barkers Creek, Forest Creek and the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens are important open spaces in Castlemaine.

Council's strategic directions on open spaces are:

- Linking open spaces and movement networks.
- Providing open space links along drainage corridors and creeks through residential subdivision.
- Require contributions for open space for new residential subdivisions.