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KEY ISSUES INFLUENCING THE SHIRE'S FUTURE LAND USE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The key issues, which are of importance to the Shire's future land use planning and development:

Population Growth

The Mount Alexander Urban Living Strategy estimates that the Shire will grow at an average annual rate of 1.4 % to the year 2021. The Shire's population is estimated to grow at a faster rate than it has in the past, due to factors such as reduced travel times to Melbourne and Bendigo and the increasing appeal of the Shire as a place to live.

Ageing community

It is predicted that the population of the Shire will continue to age, and by the year 2021 will have almost 32% of the population over 60 years. This change will require an increase in housing choice and in community health care and welfare services. Suitable housing and accommodation, including retirement homes and medium density developments will need to be located near commercial and community facilities and public transport.

Calder Corridor – Road and Rail Improvements

The Shire is strategically positioned along the Calder Highway, just over an hour's drive from Melbourne and also within close proximity to the regional centres of Bendigo and Ballarat. This location provides substantial advantages in terms of developing partnerships within the region and beyond in transport, employment, tourism and marketing.

The planned upgrading of the Calder Highway and its location could have substantial impacts on access to both Melbourne and Bendigo. The upgrade is anticipated to encourage further growth in the Shire's population as travel time to Bendigo and Melbourne will be reduced, providing an attractive opportunity for people wanting to commute to these cities. An increase in the number of tourists visiting the Shire can also be expected, including an increasing number of people seeking weekend retreats, staying either in houses they own or in tourist accommodation facilities such as bed and breakfasts.

Cultural and Natural Heritage

The Shire has significant and diverse natural landscapes including the Box Ironbark forests, now greatly diminished in Victoria, and home to a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna, some rare or threatened. Cultural heritage is apparent in landscapes, townships and outlying areas. Its significance is recognised at the local, state and national levels, and is a defining aspect of the area's character and identity. The extent and diversity of the heritage assets is such that it affects most aspects of planning. Good heritage management and protection practices, in accordance with the Burra Charter, are required to prevent incremental loss or degradation of these assets

Settlement and Infrastructure

Population within the Shire is, in the long term, anticipated to experience a net gain. One essential element associated with such growth is the extension of reticulated water and sewerage services to urban communities and townships within the Shire. Coliban Water have advised that the existing water supply infrastructure will be able to meet most of the water supply needs for the projected population growth of the Shire, however there will be a need for upgrade of the system at some towns in the future.

In terms of wastewater collection and treatment, in the currently sewerred towns of Castlemaine, Chewton, Campbells Creek, Maldon and Newstead, the existing infrastructure (with some augmentation in Castlemaine) will be capable of meeting projected population growth. In Harcourt, a major upgrade of the wastewater transfer main will be required in order to cope with the projected population growth. For the currently unsewerred towns of Elphinstone, Taradale and Guildford an innovative wastewater management system will be necessary to accommodate the projected growth, as the cost to connect the towns to sewer is likely to be very high.

Environment and Agriculture

The improvement in the condition of the Loddon-Campaspe catchment is imperative for both the natural environment and the economy of the municipality. Diversification of current agricultural practices and the expansion of the recognised Harcourt horticulture area are required to strengthen the agricultural economy.

Potential environmental and amenity impacts between horticulture and dwellings in rural areas needs to be minimised. Land use planning decisions should not reduce the potential for agricultural production.

There is also a need to identify areas appropriate for rural living so that:

- Agricultural areas are not restricted by incompatible uses,
- Demand for this form of development can be focused into areas, which will not conflict with established agricultural land uses.
- The “rural feel” of the Shire is not eroded.
- Sustainability of water supply and other resources is established.
- Threatened species and vegetation communities are identified, and the three-step approach to achieving net gain is used in development.
- The amenity of the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park (CDNHP), the Maldon Historic Reserve and other Parks are not adversely affected.