

21.02 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: -

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.

Realignment of the Calder Highway

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 and possible realignment away from Castlemaine 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.

Built and Natural Heritage

The Shire has a unique collection of cultural and built heritage within the Castlemaine and Maldon urban areas. There is also a vast collection of heritage buildings and places within the smaller rural towns and outlying areas. The Shire also has significant natural landscapes resources. The combination of the built and natural heritage assets gives the Shire a comprehensive and diverse tourist product.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Population within the Shire is, in the long term, anticipated to experience a net gain with growth especially in the residential and rural living zones. One essential element associated with such growth is the introduction of reticulated water and sewerage services to the numerous urban communities and townships within the Shire. Presently, Castlemaine is the only fully serviced area of the Shire. This leaves approximately 5500 people located within various townships, which are un-sewered. This poses significant environmental problems for the Loddon River catchment. The Coliban Region Water Authority is to extend sewerage infrastructure to the majority of small towns. This infrastructure improvement is to take place over the next 5 years. The Castlemaine sewerage system is currently being upgraded to cater for future residential and industrial growth.

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.

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

- agricultural areas are not restricted by incompatible uses and,
- demand for this form of development can be focused into areas, which will not conflict with established agricultural land uses.