

## 21 MUNICIPAL STRATEGIC STATEMENT

### 21.01 OVERVIEW OF MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE

Mount Alexander Shire is located in the historic goldfields of central Victoria approximately 110 kilometres north of Melbourne. The Shire is home to a total population of 16,970 people (estimated population at 1996). Approximately 7,600 people live in Castlemaine, the largest town in the Shire. A further 5,500 people are distributed in smaller towns including Maldon, Campbells Creek, Harcourt, Newstead, Chewton and Guildford.

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 population of Mount Alexander Shire is expected to increase by approximately 6,000 people to reach 22,960 by 2021. This represents an average annual increase of 1.4%, which is greater than the 0.85% predicted for Regional Victoria (Victoria in Future, Department of Infrastructure, 1996). By 2011, it is projected that an additional 1,830 households will need to be accommodated in the Shire.

The Shire is well known for its heritage assets, which have local, state and national value. Significant historic features include Maldon, which was recognised as Australia's first Notable Town in 1966. The natural beauty of the Shire's landscapes extend from the highpoints of Mount Tarrengower, Mount Alexander, Mount Consultation to the Barfold and Muckleford gorges and Vaughan Springs to Lake Cairn Curran in the west of the Shire.

The Shire is ideally located within Central Victoria and has extensive road and rail transport links to Melbourne and Bendigo via the Calder Highway and the Melbourne-Swan Hill railway line. A commuter sprinter train that travels to Melbourne on a daily basis also services this railway line. Other major centres linked to Mount Alexander include Ballarat (Midland Highway) and Maryborough (Pyrenees Highway)

Mount Alexander Shire has a strong manufacturing, engineering and food processing base including Castle Bacon and the steel fabrication and design engineering at Thompson-Kelly Lewis Foundry.

The main employment sectors within the Shire are agriculture (including horticulture) manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, community services and tourism. Tourism is a growing industry, which is built around heritage, gardens, festivals and events. Agricultural production contributes about \$25 million to the local economy with the Harcourt horticultural area (apples & pears) generating 37% of this income.

Comprehensive sewerage systems are needed in a number of townships throughout the Shire. The lack of infrastructure presents major problems for the environment and constrains the further development of towns. Coliban Region Water Authority has plans to provide sewerage schemes for Maldon, Campbells Creek, Harcourt, Chewton, Newstead, Elphinstone, Taradale and Guildford in the near future.

The whole of the Shire is within the Murray Darling basin catchment with the Campaspe River catchment generally east of Mount Alexander supplying Lake Eppalock. The western two-thirds of the municipality is in the Loddon River catchment with the Cairn Curran Reservoir on the Shire's western boundary.

The Loddon Campaspe catchment is ranked as one of the nations four most degraded catchments; Dryland salinity, poor soil structure and erosion are prevalent throughout the Shire while the catchment has the highest incidence of algal blooms in the State.

The catchment has poor water quality which threatens a range of activities (aquatic and riparian ecology, recreation, tourism, aesthetic values, urban water supply, domestic and stock and irrigation uses) throughout the catchment.

There has been a 40% reduction in the extent of wetlands, including freshwater meadows and shallow and deep water marshes, since settlement, while 61% of all rivers and streams are in poor to very poor condition.