

GROWING PLACES STRATEGY - FAQs

May 2023

Does Golden Plains Shire have to grow?

Yes. The Victorian Government requires that every Council plans for population growth to help ensure there are enough homes for Victoria's growing population.

Councils are legally required to have plans in place to provide enough land for the housing we need for the next 15 years, based on the State Government's Victorian in Future (ViF) projections.

Where are Geelong and Ballarat going to grow?

Over the next 15 years, whole new suburbs will develop west of Geelong right up to our border from Batesford North to the Barwon River near Stonehaven. You can find out more in the City of Greater Geelong webpage here: <https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/futuregrowth/default.aspx>

Similarly, Ballarat's suburbs and townships will extend south to our borders from Cherry Flat Road to Colac-Ballararat Road. You can find out more on the City of Ballarat website here: <https://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/property/ballararat-west-growth-area>

How much will Golden Plains grow?

The State Government's projections (Victorian in Future) say we can expect an extra 2.0% growth per year, or 9,950 people between 2021 and 2036. That's around 3,430 new homes.

However, an Independent Housing Needs Assessment conducted in 2022, found that growth pressure is likely to be higher, around 3.1% per year.

This is because we are located between Geelong and Ballarat, and are a 'peri-urban' shire, meaning we are on the fringe of metropolitan Melbourne and within 100km to the CBD.

Based on these factors, the Housing Needs Assessment says we could grow by up to 15,000 people and need around 5,170 new homes between 2021 and 2036.

How could growth benefit Golden Plains?

If planned carefully, additional population could help:

- Attract investment in new and upgraded community services and facilities like health, education and recreation.
- Provide more local workers so our regional industries can grow.
- Inspire new businesses and entertainment options to open and sustain our local sports clubs and community groups.
- Strengthen our local economy so there are more local jobs and career pathways.
- Broaden our small rate-base - or joint pool of funding – so there is more to invest in the services, facilities and upgrades our community wants right across the Shire.
- Build a stronger case to advocate for State and Federal Government investment into our Shire (such as passenger rail).

Is Council considering the negative impacts of growth?

Yes. Growth has its challenges, especially if it happens in the wrong places or in an unplanned and unsupported way.

Our Community Vision 2040 for Golden Plains is very clear. You want to protect our historic townships, natural landscapes and the country lifestyle we enjoy.

We know we must preserve important cultural, environmental and agricultural land and features, and make sure growth is appropriate for a changing climate.

That's why we think it's important to get on the front foot and plan for potential growth now, so we're not caught out, which can lead to negative impacts.

Why is Council planning to 2050?

Developing the Growing Places Strategy will take time and involves many different steps, and implementing it is a long-term process. See our fact sheet: [Growth in Our Region](#) for more information.

We need to think about the high-level, long-term plan now to give us time to do the more detailed planning that is needed before any new land would actually be available for housing.

What research has been undertaken to inform the draft growth scenario?

Since late 2021, independent research and advice has been sought on many important local considerations that have helped inform the draft. This includes:

- Future housing needs
- Natural environment conditions and hazards (such as flood, mining, landfill etc)
- Bushfire risk
- Industrial land supply
- Town character
- Agricultural needs
- Biodiversity protection
- First Nations cultural heritage and values

This is all summarised in the [Informing Document: Growing Places 2051](#), or you can view the technical reports in full on the [Strategic Planning Projects](#) page of our website

As we progress the development of the GPS, further research will also be undertaken to understand:

- Any service and critical infrastructure limitations in nominated growth areas
- The community infrastructure that may be needed to support growth
- Future impacts and opportunities in the local economy

Why is Meredith identified for Growth?

There are five key reasons Meredith is identified for growth:

1. It is slightly out of commuter distance to Geelong and Ballarat, so growth and investment here can help it transition to a fully self-sufficient centre and hub for much-needed services, community facilities, education and business.
2. The location has the opportunity for reticulated sewerage, which is an essential element to support higher density residential development

3. It will have flow on benefits for the surrounding communities by providing an alternate option to Bannockburn for day-to-day needs.
4. It can provide an increased and secure local workforce to support critical industry in the nearby Food Production Precinct and local major businesses like Meredith Dairy
5. It's location between Geelong and Ballarat would support advocacy for road and public transport improvements along this important corridor (including passenger rail).

How much will Meredith grow?

Our draft future growth scenario shows that Meredith could have capacity to be home between 3,000 and 5,000 people by 2050 (subject to town sewerage being available to support housing growth). This would make it a comparable size to the current Buninyong or Ballan.

Will Meredith be sewered and will there be a cost to residents?

Reticulated sewerage (or town sewerage) would be required in Meredith to support infill and a more diverse range of housing such as unit, townhouse, aged care and suburban sized properties. This mix would be needed to provide affordable and suitable homes for the level of population growth proposed to establish Meredith as a stand-alone hub.

Barwon Water has a policy of sewerage one town every five years. Towns are selected on a range of criteria. If Meredith was selected, residents would only be required to pay for a connection to the system. Sewering separate to this process would require a higher community contribution. This is why it is important to highlight this opportunity early, through a long-term future plan, so that discussions and applications to Barwon Water can commence as early as possible. No decisions about sewerage would be made without comprehensive consultation with residents and property owners.

Isn't there a future plan for a bypass around Meredith?

The designation of a road bypass around Meredith has been identified in planning scheme maps for many decades. since the 1990's. Any future planning will be conscious of it, however there is currently no discussion of bypassing the town as part of our plans.

Why isn't my town identified for Growth?

There are many reasons why your town may not have been identified for growth, including:

- It could be in an area that has been deemed unsuitable for growth through the range of independent studies and research undertaken (such as factors like important township character, flood or bushfire risk, or because its among critical agricultural land or natural habitat). See the 'challenges and opportunities' section of the [Informing Document: Growing Places 2051](#) for more information and visual maps.
- It may not have the required critical infrastructure needed to support required levels of population growth (for example, the potential for reticulated sewerage to support high density housing)
- It may simply be a less beneficial option than other locations at this point in time.

Regardless of which areas have been identified for future growth, every township across the Shire may still experience some incremental change in population to differing levels over the next 10-30 years as part of normal population movement.

For specific feedback about your town, come along and talk to us at one of our information sessions (online or in-person), submit a question through this project webpage or give us a call.

Is Council just after more rates?

No, but it is one of many different benefits to be considered.

Our Shire is big geographically, but compared to our neighbouring cities, we have a much smaller population. This means we have a smaller rate-base – or fewer properties that contribute to our joint pool of funding used to invest in the services, facilities and upgrades our community wants.

More homes and businesses would increase our rate-base, meaning there would be more properties contributing to our joint pool of funding, potentially making it bigger. There would be some additional costs to support the needs of our changing and growing community, but the balance could help deliver additional benefits across the whole Shire, and in the end, it equals greater investment and benefits for our community.

It might be unpopular to talk about, but it's one of many factors to consider, and important for a Shire like ours which has limited income and struggles to attract the funding from other levels of government that our neighbours can draw upon.

Will this growth affect my rates?

Individual property rates are impacted by a broad range of factors. It is not anticipated that this growth will have any substantial impact on an individual property's rates.

However, more homes and businesses would increase the Shire's overall rate-base, meaning there would be more properties contributing to the joint pool of funding, potentially making it bigger. At the same time, the cost to provide the services, programs, infrastructure and maintenance to support the needs of our changing and growing community may also increase.

Our draft plan seeks to control these additional costs by directing a lot of population growth where there will already be access to existing services and infrastructure. This means future Councils could invest potential extra rate income to deliver benefits across the whole Shire, working towards the Community Vision 2040.

How fast will new housing happen?

There are many different stakeholders involved in getting the new housing built.

First, Council needs to develop the Growing Places Strategy (GPS) and the Minister for Planning needs to approve it. See the fact sheet: [Growth in Our Region](#) for more about how the GPS is developed.

Once the GPS is in place, implementing it is a long-term process and will not happen for some years.

Council may need to prepare more detailed township-based implementation plans, called Structure Plans, that show 'how' growth will be accommodated in the town.

Land may need to be re-zoned so it can be used for a new purpose to support growth, such as for housing, public space or commercial.

Other types of plans and guidelines may also be required like bushfire resilience, environmentally sustainable design, landscape and vegetation or protections for cultural places of significance.

The **State Government** (Minister for Planning) has to approve these too.

Once these are in place, **land owners** and the **development sector** will design, seek permits for and build the new homes.

And Council, other levels of government, private and community organisations will need to invest in the new services, businesses, facilities, transport networks and spaces that are needed too.

My property is in a Bushfire risk area, what does this mean for me?

If your property is in a Landscape Type 3 or 4 area (as identified in the independent [Strategic Bushfire Risk Assessment](#)), this means that compared to other areas of the Shire, it has a higher risk of bushfire, particularly Landscape Type 4 areas. The areas of higher-risk are mainly in the north of the Shire, some of which have experienced bushfires in recent years.

This Assessment is simply reinforcing the bushfire risk level that already exists – one that the community, fire authorities, land managers and Council must continue to manage through a range of programs and actions

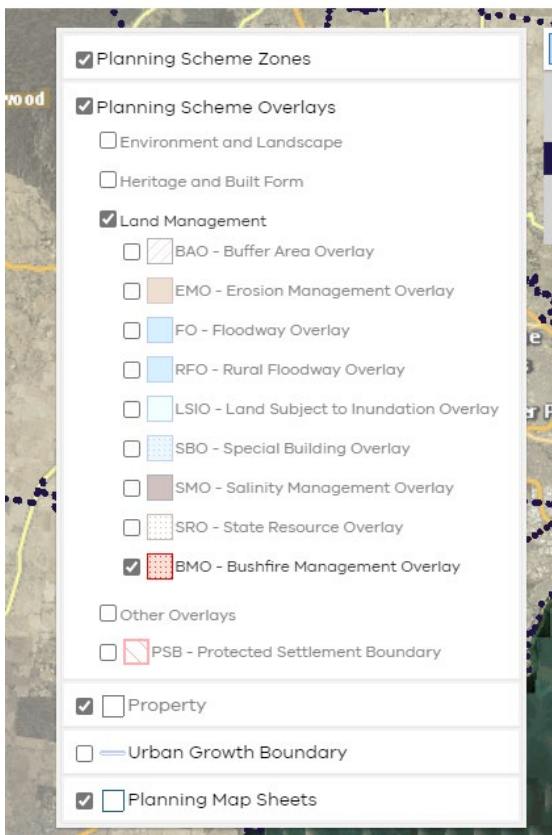
From a planning perspective, Council will not propose future housing growth to those areas of highest risk. But there is no change to the current planning rules that apply to existing properties, so if you are in a Landscape Type 3 or 4 area, you can continue to use your property as you have been into the future. This assessment also does not impact your insurance.

Is the Bushfire Risk Assessment different from the Bushfire Management Overlay?

Yes, but the two are related.

The Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO) is a tool used in the Planning Scheme (or ‘rulebook’ about how land can be used) to make sure development in high risk bushfire areas is appropriate. If a property is covered by a BMO there are additional considerations given to development applications. This could include things like more detailed site considerations and the building materials proposed. These applications are also referred to the CFA for review and feedback as part of the assessment process. Use the property search tool on our planning scheme website [Golden Plains Planning Scheme - Maps](#) or [Geocortex Viewer for HTML5 \(mapshare.vic.gov.au\)](#) to find out if your property is covered by a BMO.

You can search for your address by clicking on the magnifying glass on the left of the screen and selecting the BMO under Planning Scheme Overlays > Land Management > BMO



The independent [Strategic Bushfire Risk Assessment](#) undertaken in 2022 is a high level proactive review of the whole Shire to assess the level of bushfire risk. Following the Black Saturday bushfires, the Victorian planning

policy requires human life to be prioritised over all other planning considerations, so this report applies this new approach and helps us determine where it is appropriate and not appropriate to direct housing growth.

Council will now consider the findings of the Strategic Bushfire Risk Assessment to inform the Growing Places Strategy and consider how the recommendations should be incorporated into the Planning Scheme.

How much will my feedback influence the final growth scenario and GPS?

The draft future growth scenario is based on significant and comprehensive technical research and evidence, and is strongly informed by our Community Vision 2040. This is outlined in the [Informing Document: Growing Places 2051](#).

On this basis, there are key elements that are already a given, reality or certainty and are unable to be influenced or changed. These include:

- That Golden Plains Shire will grow
- Land already identified for growth through existing approved strategic plans (eg Bannockburn Growth Plan)
- Land deemed unsuitable for future growth through the background research

At this stage we want to talk with our community to explain the high-level plan and how it has been developed. We also want to know if, in addition to the comprehensive research and evidence base we have already established, there are any other important factors we should consider or investigate. If there was a compelling case, some elements of the draft growth may be revised.

However, it is too early to talk about and take feedback on details like exactly how much new housing there will be and where in a town it might go, how the housing might look, or what infrastructure is needed. But there will be opportunities for the community to provide input into all of these things after the GPS is developed and more detailed planning work is undertaken (eg when Structure Plans are developed).

Why is Council is spending money on this when it should be focusing on fixing the roads?

The Victorian Government legally requires every Council to plan for a minimum of 15 years of projected population growth. Council was able to secure significant funding to deliver this project from the Victorian Planning Authority under their Streamlining for Growth Program.

Future road and transport requirements form part of this Strategy.