

Golden Plains Shire

Background Issues Paper North West Area Study For Community Consultation

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Prepared By:

Research Planning Design Group

(TBA Planners Pty Ltd)

36 Wattle Street (PO Box 2750), Bendigo, Vic, 3554

Telephone (03) 5441 6552, Fax 5441 6694

Email: rpdgroup@netcon.net.au

in association with

John Randles & Associates Pty Ltd

For:

Golden Plains Shire

2 Pope Street, Bannockburn, 3311

Telephone 5220 7111

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1. Introduction

Golden Plains Shire has appointed the Research Planning Design (RPD) Group in association with Planning Australia Consultants and John Randles & Associates, to undertake further work on refining the zoning and planning strategy in the north west area of the Shire. This work was a key recommendation from the Panel and Advisory Committee's report on the new Golden Plains Planning Scheme. The north west area of the Shire acts as a mixture of rural and rural residential living area as well as providing an extended commuter area for Ballarat.

The North West Study Area is made up of a number of communities including Haddon, Ross Creek, Cambrian Hill, Napoleons and land to the north of Smythesdale. The land use pattern however is not clearly defined, with a spread of rural residential development contained on a range of lot sizes. Nevertheless, potential and existing development nodes need to be identified in the Study Area to effectively manage future growth and development over the longer term.

In addition it is important for the Shire to clarify the urban and rural interface between the Study Area and the potential future direction of urban growth from Ballarat. A key outcome of the Study will be to enable the Council to assess these matters in more detail and provide for land use planning strategies that more accurately reflect the constraints and opportunities of the Study Area.

The study area boundaries are the Shire boundary from Snake Valley-Smythesdale Road in the west to Napoleons in the east. The southern boundary follows areas of Crown land and roads including Stonier and Thorpes Roads.

2. Purpose of Study

The North West Area Study will assess the relevance and application of current planning controls and make appropriate recommendations to Council for further consideration. This will also include recommendations on the provision and funding of infrastructure.

1. Identify suitable zoning that reflects the current and proposed land uses, the land capabilities and strategic considerations such as residential supply/demand and infrastructure provision.
2. Prepare policies to assist Council's decision making in the assessment of land use and subdivision applications.
3. Prepare a Structure Plan to guide the future development of the area.

3. Study Area Characteristics

The study area is characterised by rural residential development with some broadacre farming, along with more intensive agriculture and other rural industries. The area has a large number of small lots, with most recent housing growth occurring on lots smaller than four hectares.

3.1 Demographic Structure

The community in the study area has characteristics that are similar to many other rural residential areas; the population is younger than traditional rural areas, with a higher proportion of families with children (54% of all households), and the employment structure of the area is similar to many urban areas. The population of the area is estimated to now be about 3,300 persons. At the 1996 Census, only 7.7% of this population was aged over 60 years, compared to almost 11% of the population of the whole municipality. Over 36% of the population of the study area were aged below 20 years at the 1996 Census.

The workforce characteristics of the area reflect the links between the study area and Ballarat. Over 55% of the workforce of the north-western area of Golden Plains Shire were recorded as travelling to Ballarat for work at the 1996 Census. The most significant employment sectors included manufacturing, retail trade and health services. Only 3% of the population of the study area were employed in the agricultural sector compared to 14% of the population of the entire municipality. Over 22% of all households in the study area had a weekly income of over \$1000 in 1996, a higher proportion than for Golden Plains as a whole. These patterns of employment and income are similar to urban areas including the City of Ballarat.

3.2 Land Use Patterns

Extensive areas of rural residential development dominate land use in the study area. Only 11% of all properties in the area are considered to be small or large farms by the Council, with the remainder of properties being rated as residential or commercial land.

Over 66% of all properties in the Study Area are smaller than four hectares, and 88% of all properties as distinct from separate lots already have a dwelling on them. Very few large farms remain in the area. There are over 1,000 vacant lots already in the Study Area. In other words if every existing lot were developed with a house there would be more than another 1,000 houses in the area even without any further subdivision. This is a lot supply of about 50 years based on current development rates. The majority of new houses are on properties smaller than four hectares. Most vacant lots are also comparatively small. The following table provides a distribution of lot and property sizes in the study area, including those properties that are occupied by houses.

Development and Lot Size Distribution, 1999

Size	Lots	Properties	Vacant Properties	Houses	New Houses (98-99)
Under 2ha	35.9%	33.2%	30.1%	34.3%	31.4%
2-4ha	27.1%	33.3%	29.4%	34.7%	31.4%
4-8ha	16.7%	14.1%	12.3%	14.8%	20.0%
8-20ha	16.6%	12.6%	17.9%	10.7%	17.1%
20-40ha	2.6%	3.3%	5.4%	2.6%	0.0%
40-100ha	0.9%	2.5%	4.9%	1.6%	0.0%
Over 100ha	0.2%	1.0%	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%
Total	2,343	1,567	408	1,159	35

Source: Golden Plains Shire

The remaining agricultural properties are located along and to the west of the Yarrowee River, and to the north and west of Haddon. These areas are also identified as having better agricultural attributes than the land along the Glenelg Highway where small lots are predominant.

3.3 Infrastructure and Community Services

3.3.1 Water

Reticulated water in the northwest Study Area is provided by Central Highlands Water. All key towns within Central Highlands Water's jurisdiction are supplied with an interconnected, disinfected water supply. The Authority plans to fully treat this supply over the next few years. The Authority has advised it can supply water across the most of the Study Area taking into account anticipated growth rates and land use patterns. The Authority has a policy to supply water to rural living lots up to 4ha in area. Higher land south east of Scarsdale extending to the area south of Ross Creek may be constrained in terms of receiving water supply from the Authority because of pressure difficulties.

3.3.2 Household Wastes and Drainage

No areas within the study are connected to a reticulated sewerage system. Central Highlands Water has plans to ultimately service Smythesdale located to the south-west of the Study Area. However, a slowing in growth rates has raised questions that the population threshold may be insufficient to provide cost effective reticulation within the immediate future.

The Shire's adopted Land Use Strategy identifies that some parts of the Shire including areas around Haddon and Ross Creek in particular, are unsuitable for the use of conventional septic tanks on small lot sizes. This was largely due to a combination of soil structures, waterlogging and poor drainage. The Strategy recommended that further rural residential development should be assessed against land capability to ensure effective effluent disposal systems could be provided to new development. Some waste water constraints have also been identified at Napoleons.

3.3.3 Power & Telecommunications

There do not appear to be any major obstacles in the provision of power and telecommunications within the Study Area. New infrastructure is generally provided underground by the respective servicing authorities, often using shared trenching. Some difficulties have been encountered when supply easements have been needed over private land holdings.

3.3.4 Roads

Like most rural based Shires, Golden Plains has a range of sealed and gravel roads. The Study Area has a number of major access roads including the Glenelg Highway that traverses in a south west direction across the Study Area from Ballarat through to Smythesdale. The Colac Ballarat Main Road traverses the western part of the Study Area. Some concerns have been expressed that local road access to and within the Study Area is limited.

Council has undertaken a Local Roads Strategy that has identified a number of roads within the Study Area that carry in excess of 200 vehicles per day including the Sebastopol-Smythesdale Road and Lacey's Road. The Strategy sets in place the parameters for ongoing road improvements based on a selected set of performance criteria and includes a capital works program to facilitate priority road improvements. The Strategy also identifies a number of strategic points within the Study Area where trucks need to be restricted and bridge load limits are required due to the condition of the bridge and standard and width of the road. Truck limitations are applied to the Sebastopol-Smythesdale Road and the Buninyong-Napoleons Road. Subject to the findings of this Planning Study, the Local Roads Strategy may need to be reviewed in respect to potential road carrying capacity and developer contributions for new road infrastructure improvements if further subdivisions are proposed.

3.3.5 Recreation and Community Services.

Many residents are employed outside the Shire and often use facilities and services offered in other centres, particularly Ballarat. Recreation and community facilities are therefore targeted to more localised community needs.

In the north west Study Area, the town of Smythesdale and to a lesser extent the community centres of Haddon, Ross Creek and Napoleons, operate in a servicing capacity for the local community. Smythesdale has a range of services and facilities including established shops, community hall, recreation reserve with a range of active sports including horse riding area, tennis and netball courts. Haddon provides local facilities and a recreation reserve including an indoor centre, tennis courts, hall, community house and common. Napoleons and Ross Creek both have appropriate recreation facilities. The Shire has adopted a Recreation Strategy that highlights community needs and establishes a priority program to meet these needs over time and according to budget constraints.

4. Current Policies Affecting the Study Area

4.1 Council's Land Use Strategy

Council's Land Use Strategy has established a distinct planning vision across the Shire. This vision has been carried over into the Municipal Strategic Statement of the Golden Plains Planning Scheme. The planning vision requires the Council to work for the sustainable development of the Shire based on:

- planning for the strategic growth of towns and focusing urban development into existing townships;
- sustainable management and protection of natural resources of soil, water, flora, fauna and eco-systems;
- facilitating productive agricultural, forestry and mining activities and protecting rural areas;
- protection and enhancement of items, places and areas of natural and cultural heritage;
- supporting sustainable economic development;
- supporting quality tourism development; and
- efficient and environmentally sensitive provision of essential infrastructure.

Given the dominant rural residential land use pattern and character of the north west Study Area, it is important to understand the Council's policy approach to this type of development. The Council has adopted the following rural residential development land use strategies across the Shire.

Rural residential development is to be located according to the following criteria:

- At locations at the edge or within existing townships where development will not prejudice the future growth of the township;
- The environmental constraints to the use and development of land;
- Land capability and the ability to contain and dispose of all effluent within the site;
- The availability of reticulated services such as, water, suitable stormwater drainage systems, electricity, and possibly in some areas the future provision of sewerage.
- In accordance with State Government Policy which provides for rural residential use and development where it is not within a designated urban growth area and does not impact on land capability, productive agricultural uses and environmental sustainability.

4.2 Current Planning Provisions

The Study Area is zoned to provide for various forms of rural residential living. Under the new Golden Plains Planning Scheme, parts of the Study Area are zoned Rural, large areas have been placed under a 'holding control' to assist this current Study to be undertaken. Current zoning includes the application of a Rural Living zone with subdivision minimums ranging from 2.0ha to 8.0ha and some Low Density Residential and Township zoning.

New format Planning Schemes also provide for Local Policies to be included within the Local Policy Planning Framework (LPPF). The local policies are meant to reflect planning matters that address specific areas and issues within that municipality. A Local Policy titled 'Management of Rural Residential Development – North West Area' has been applied over part of the Study Area. This policy has provided a basis for the assessment of land

use and development proposals pending this planning review. The policy requires that subdivisions must be designed to ensure they take into account existing amenity, future possible urban expansion of Ballarat, land and environmental management including the disposal of effluent and drainage within the site, and the servicing of sites with relevant infrastructure and services.

The Golden Plains Planning Scheme and Municipal Strategic Statement also address important issues such as environmental features, drainage, salinity and erosion management, vegetation protection, wildfire and heritage matters. These matters have been addressed through the use of Scheme Overlays. The Overlays usually control buildings and works through planning permit provisions. Each Overlay is mapped and placed over the area of concern. The number and use of scheme Overlays within the North West Study Area generally reflects the environmental characteristic that exists in this part of the municipality.

The north-west Study Area adjoins the City of Ballarat. The planning strategy for any land must be consistent across municipal boundaries. Most of the area within the City of Ballarat that abuts the North West Study Area is zoned Rural on the initial premise that it may be needed in the future for urban development. Planning strategies for the further growth direction of Ballarat need to be clarified. This will help ensure that the future land use pattern of the Study Area can be more accurately defined by planning policy and zoning controls in the new Golden Plains Shire Planning Scheme. Discussions with officers from the City of Ballarat have identified that the City is assessing future growth potential against four key considerations set out in the Ballarat Strategy Plan 1998 and are:

- Use of the Rural Zone as a holding mechanism over land to the west of the City that is viewed for long term potential for urban expansion.
- Number of inappropriate subdivisions in the past that have caused subsequent planning concerns (effluent disposal).
- Existing supply of rural residential zoned land (10 year supply base).
- Ballarat has around 16 years supply of zoned land for rural residential development.

The City's current policies for future urban and rural residential development are being reviewed in the light of growth rates and the supply of suitable land. It is now unlikely that land within Golden Plains Shire will be part of an urban growth corridor extending from the City of Ballarat. Rather, land within the City adjoining the Golden Plains Shire is most likely to be set aside for future rural residential development.

5. Consultation Process for the Study

An important part of this Study is consultation with landowners and residents in the study area. Council has endorsed a consultation program for this Study that includes:

- Ongoing consultation with government departments and agencies.
- Land owners and resident Community Information and Input meetings and an invitation for submissions. (Three initial meetings organised by Council in Haddon Recreation Centre, Napoleons Recreation Reserve Building and Smythesdale Hall.) Council has forwarded invitations to all landowners in the Study Area to attend one of these meetings.

Council is also seeking written submissions on this Background Issues Paper. The consultants will then review submissions and the issues raised during the consultation program and provide a further report to the Council's steering committee in early December. A final report with recommendations is expected from the consultants and will be considered by full Council in January 2000.

Should any zoning or planning scheme changes be considered necessary by the Council as a result of this Study, Council will place an amendment to the planning scheme on formal exhibition in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Planning & Environment Act. This process will enable any affected landowners and interested parties to make detailed submissions on any proposed scheme changes and if necessary, have these concerns considered before an independent panel appointed by the Minister for Planning. Council would then formally consider and adopt any changes to the Scheme and forward it to the Minister for Planning for approval.

As a result of meetings held on the 10th and 11th November at Haddon, Napoleons and Smythesdale some 65 persons presented various views and ideas about the future planning of the area.

The three most consistent messages were:

- *5 acres (2 hectares) is the most appropriate lot size;*
- *the gorse is a major environmental problem that must be addressed;*
- *there are concerns about a number of areas within the Study Area where drainage is poor and septic tanks do not work.*

Other issues raised at the meetings include (not in any priority order):

- *improved garbage collection including recycling facilities;*
- *improved public transport;*
- *need a letterbox at Haddon;*
- *retain vegetation;*
- *quality of creeks to be improved;*
- *need more consultation on planning permit applications;*
- *do not want suburbia;*
- *traffic speed needs to be controlled;*

- *gorse control on DRNE land must be improved;*
- *control dog kennels;*
- *keep rural appearance*
- *traffic improvements needed at dangerous intersections;*
- *other lot sizes nominated: 1ha, 5ha, 10ha;*
- *encourage more tree planting;*
- *salinity areas are getting worse – action needed;*
- *protect roadside vegetation;*
- *community facilities are good.*

6. Key Issues for Consideration

6.1 Rural Residential Development

The Council's land use strategy for urban centres and townships is based on the consolidation of development in existing centres in order to maximise existing infrastructure capacity and reinforce community and commercial facilities. The emphasis is on efficient service provision and the attractive design and presentation of urban centres and townships and communities. The creation of safe living environments, the provision of housing choices and active and viable commercial and cultural centres are key objectives. Structure Plans for townships throughout the Shire identify those areas where further expansion of residential expansion is to be encouraged. Residential expansion and low density development is to be accommodated primarily in Bannockburn, Haddon, Inverleigh, Meredith and Teesdale. Consolidation or residential development is to be encouraged in Napoleons, Ross Creek and Smythesdale. Plans seek to identify areas where expansion and infill will be encouraged.

Growth areas for the next fifteen years are generally based around existing townships where services can be provided and where areas of environmental significance or agricultural production are not compromised. Many rural residential developments have resulted in substantial environmental improvement with extensive tree planting and improved land management. To achieve this planning approach within the Study Area, clear delineation is needed between Low Density Residential areas (generally small lots, as small as 0.4 ha (1 acre)) and Rural Living opportunities. The community is often observed as having two conflicting expectations when moving into such areas. The first expectation is that they are moving into a residential area – with all the standards, amenities and facilities found in a residential area. Secondly they see the area as 'rural' where there are few restrictions on uses and developments. The reality is often different to these expectations. Firstly, rural residential development does not automatically involve the right or provision of urban type services and facilities. Often the provision of infrastructure to these areas is in fact cost prohibitive due to the low density and financial constraints for Councils and servicing authorities. Secondly, these rural environments often require greater land management and resources than serviced urban areas and many uses still conflict with neighbour's enjoyment of their property. Zoning, subdivision sizes and local policies that have established performance criteria to consider and direct future development in the Study Area are needed to address these problems.

Determining the long term demand and supply of land at various lot sizes to cater for rural residential development in the Study Area is a critical planning matter. It is important to note that planning for residential development under State guidelines outlined in the Victoria Planning Provisions, is usually based on meeting a ten year lot supply.

6.2 Environment and Resource Management

At a local and catchment level a number issues have been identified that are relevant in considering future land management in the area. For instance, large areas of land to the south of Ross Creek and Cambrian Hill and north west of Haddon are potentially affected by salinity. Wildfire threatens open grass lands and wooded forest/bush areas including the Haddon and Ross Creek areas and land to the south east of Napoleons. Areas to the north west of Haddon are also affected by inundation and localised flooding. Providing for future rural living development within the Study Area must take these matters into consideration. Well planned rural living development undertaken in association with a range of environmental improvements can result in better land management.

Rural residential development should not compromise the ongoing use and management of agricultural land or the maintenance of environmental features, biodiversity and flora and fauna habitat. Poorly managed rural residential development can lead to the spread of pest plants and animals, impact on soil and water quality through erosion, salinity, inadequate effluent disposal, land clearing, flooding and poor drainage.

6.3 Infrastructure Provision

An important planning principle that needs to be addressed in the Study is the identification of adequate infrastructure and services. The Study Area is characterised by a dispersed form of rural residential development that can present Council and servicing authorities with difficulties in managing and providing for infrastructure to meet existing and future residents needs.

Council's Land Use Strategy in relation to sewerage disposal for rural living development is to:

- Provide for the development and installation of improved septic tank systems and alternative waste treatment systems in areas where sewerage systems are not yet available, particularly where reticulated systems are not planned in the near to long term future, including Haddon and Ross Creek area.
- Recognise that poor soil quality and the potential for inundation/poor drainage and maintenance problems with septic systems will continue to prevent small lot residential development of some areas within the Study Area. Soil testing should be carried out by developers to Australian Standards as a first step procedure to identify soil capacity to absorb effluent. Further consideration should be given to delineating the minimum lot sizes by zone schedules, particularly in areas clearly identified by the servicing authorities as having poor soil absorption capacity, drainage or inundation concerns.

In summary Council standards will require those undertaking subdivisions and installing septic tanks to demonstrate that septic tanks will operate properly.

The Council's Local Roads Strategy identifies the standards of road construction and minimum pavement required for new development. Well planned staged development can be accommodated within Council's road strategy and maintenance/construction program. However, where new subdivision proposals will substantially increase the demands on the road network, consideration will need to be given for developers to contribute to road upgrading from the development to a major road outlet. Upgrading requirements for bridges and culverts will also be considered. A development contribution based on the increase in traffic volume can apply to the general road upgrading. Council's Road Strategy will need to be amended to state the standard of road construction and unit costs for contributions. This information would then need to be translated into an appropriate Development Contributions Plan Overlay across respective parts of the Study Area under the new Golden Plains Planning Scheme.

Unplanned rural residential development will also place greater demands on existing services and the need to expand infrastructure. For instance a water supply that is readily accessible in reliable quantities is necessary for fire fighting and domestic purposes. Central Highlands Water is not able to guarantee that there will be sufficient volumes of water for fire fighting in the reticulated system. It will be necessary for static volumes of water to be available on properties. The static volumes may be in tanks or dams on individual properties or one large dam in an equivalent volume for a subdivision. Some areas cannot be supplied with reticulated services due to costs associated with extending infrastructure. Central Highlands will be providing a map for the Study showing areas that they are unable to service under the existing infrastructure system.

Central Highlands Water has a commitment and requirement that lots up to four hectares will be provided with reticulated water. Some parts of the Study Area are also subject to poor drainage, salinity and effluent disposal. Some of these localities are shown on the planning scheme maps. Some of these same areas are also potentially affected by rising water tables and subsequent salinity concerns. The provision of additional water to these areas may in fact exacerbate the salinity problem. Proper integrated land management is required under these types of circumstances. Areas should be defined where improvements are needed to rehabilitate drainage and erosion which may include the construction of retarding basins, defining water courses and tree planting programs.

7. Options for the Future Planning and Development of the Study Area

The options for the future planning and development of the Study Area need to address four fundamental issues:

- What provision should be made for further subdivision and provision for lots? Where should there be provision for those lots and what size should those lots be?
- What should be the relevant zoning of land? The options are to use the Low Density Residential Zone which emphasises the residential aspects of the area, or the Rural Living Zone which provides for residential uses in a rural setting.
- What should be the criteria against which applications for various forms of land use and development should be assessed?
- How should the upgrading of infrastructure, particularly lots, be tied into new development?

The options available for community and Council consideration include:

- The 'status quo option'. This option would leave the north west area under the current mixture of Rural and Rural Living, Low Density and Township zoning and a Local Policy that effectively limits some further subdivision potential. This approach would not identify those areas that have further potential for development according to environmental and demand/supply projections. It does not address nor adequately plan for the future. It is a 'blanket' planning approach with each development application being considered by the Council on its merits. This type of planning approach can lead to inconsistent planning decisions.
- The 'Rural Living and Low Density Residential zoning option'. This option would see extensive tracts of land zoned Rural Living with a minimum lot size of 2ha. Other more intensely developed areas including existing rural residential lots would be zoned to Low Density Residential. This latter zoning would enable subdivision of existing lots down to 0.4ha. However, local policies would provide that minimum lot sizes would be set at least at 1ha with a density of 2ha. Local policies and overlays would also be applied under this option to delineate areas of environmental or other land management significance such as wildfire, salinity and inundation. This option could significantly increase the expectation and potential development opportunities in the Study Area. An over supply of rural living lots may result. Infrastructure costs would also increase as existing infrastructure undergoes upgrading or extension. Other areas may have difficulty in managing environmental constraints that exist in the Study Area. Central Highlands Water have also identified that in some parts of the Study Area, even 2.0ha sized lots have had difficulty in meeting septic tank code of practice requirements, particularly where regular maintenance of the system has not occurred. Local policies could be used to establish performance criteria for the installation and maintenance of septs under this option.
- The 'Rural Living zoning option'. This option would include zoning the Study Area as Rural Living with a range of minimum subdivision sizes nominated in schedules to reflect either existing lot patterns or other environmental or servicing constraints. The zone would more accurately define the existing nature of subdivision patterns in the area, but would include performance criteria through local policies to control inappropriate subdivisions. Overlays would again be used to define specific environmental or servicing issues across the Study Area.

In all options a Structure Plan would be included for the area under a Local Policy to define the major development strategies.

The overall directions and strategies for the area should establish a clear *vision* for the area: A statement of how the community collectively sees how the area is developing in terms of residential, commercial and community uses, environmental management, infrastructure and scale and quality of development.

8. Making a Contribution to the Study

Council is keen to consider all issues and options in respect to the future planning direction of the Study Area. The consultants would like to hear opinions on the amount of development and the size of lots residents may want in the Area. Environmental issues are important within the Study Area. The long term protection of the environmental features and general amenity should be a key objective in any further planning strategy for the Area. These values provide the general living environment and amenity for existing and future residents in the area. Local road access and/or the condition of roads may be a problem in the Area. Council has the ability to establish a Development Contributions Plan over the north west area that could assist in the future development of road infrastructure to specified standards. Development contributions from developers can also be applied on new subdivisions to provide for necessary community facilities in the Area. Landowner and resident comments on these matters would be very helpful in establishing a long term planning strategy for the Study Area.

Written submissions to the issues raised in this Paper (or others) can be forwarded to the:

Chief Executive Officer

Golden Plains Shire

2 Pope Street

Bannockburn 3331

Submissions will be received by the Council up to and including Friday 3 December 1999.