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C37**RURAL LAND USE & AGRICULTURE****Overview**

Agriculture is the traditional economic base of Hepburn Shire. Significant areas of high and very high quality agricultural land exist in the Shire and need to be protected from further encroachment through unplanned urban expansion and other non agricultural based land uses. These areas, which are shown on the Economic Development Plan, have been identified as part of a regional study and indicate areas capable for continuing sustained agricultural production. In recent years a range of newer agricultural activities has emerged in the Shire and needs to be encouraged. However some areas of the Shire have also become broadly rural-residential in nature. Some of this development has encroached upon high quality agricultural land. Fragmentation of large rural holdings through land subdivision into smaller lots can diminish opportunities to maintain rural areas in agricultural production.

The capacity also exists for land use conflict between traditional rural land uses and newer developments including rural living development. Some development also has the capacity to limit the operation and diversification of traditional type agriculture into the newer enterprises such as horticulture, viticulture and private forestry.

Key Issues

- Rural land provides an attractive landscape and environmental setting in many parts of the Shire.
- Protection of high quality agricultural land from encroachment of urban land uses.
- Maintenance of rural land holdings with a potential for productive agricultural uses, including new and emerging rural enterprises.
- Lifestyle preferences including rural living opportunities changing the traditional agricultural potential of large rural areas of the Shire and leading to fragmentation of productive agricultural land.
- Scattered and unplanned rural living development needs to be managed and an adequate supply of 'rural residential' land provided, according to demand and supply projections, to avoid loss of productive agricultural land to non-productive land use.

Objective 1

To protect areas of high–very high quality agricultural land and areas with demonstrated potential for productive agricultural activity from non-complementary land uses.

Strategies

- Maintain areas of high and very high agricultural land quality for agricultural production.
- Promote the potential for new and innovative rural enterprises, including appropriate local value-adding activity.
- Provide for a range of minimum subdivision sizes in rural areas to reflect appropriate and viable farm enterprise sizes.
- Protect clusters of agricultural activity and other rural related enterprises.
- Protect resource and environmental values that support rural enterprise.

- Encourage innovative forms of agricultural diversification, focussed on high value activities in areas with existing or planned capacity.
- Encourage consolidation of allotments capable of agricultural production where appropriate and discourage the fragmentation of productive rural land.

Objective 2

To ensure that development in rural areas address important local environmental and landscape issues.

Strategies

- Encourage development proposals that comprehensively address significant land and water management and resource needs.
- Discourage development in areas where environmental values, rural resource values and infrastructure requirements present limitations to development potential.
- Recognise existing scope for development according to land capability and limit ongoing fragmentation of rural land.
- Recognise the need to protect important landscapes, landscape features and cultural features from unplanned development in rural areas.

Implementation

Through the application of Zones and Overlays

- Applying the Farming Zone to areas where a range of rural enterprises are appropriate and by applying different subdivision sizes across the Shire to reflect patterns of development and enterprise type.
- Applying the Rural Living Zone to areas where the character of the locality is fragmented by lower density rural residential development or focussed on lifestyle opportunities.
- Applying the Road Zones, utilising advice from VicRoads regarding road status.
- Applying the Vegetation Protection Overlay on roadsides with identified significant vegetation.
- Applying the Industrial Zone to encourage industrial development in areas with infrastructure capacity.
- Applying the Development Plan Overlay to guide development within and surrounding specific infrastructure facilities.
- Applying the Development Plan Overlay to identify sensitive industrial type uses in rural areas and establish development standards for these land uses.
- Applying the Environmental Significance Overlay to broader catchment areas to protect water quality and quantity throughout the region.

Through the use of policies and discretion in decision-making

- Using the Catchment and Land Protection Policy to provide a decision-making framework that recognises the need to protect land and water quality.
- Using the structure plans to provide guidance regarding rural land uses, and to mitigate rural land use conflicts.

- Using the Rural Land Policy to identify and maintain the rural character of localities and avoid the fragmentation of productive agricultural land in decision making.
- Using the Rural Land Policy to maintain existing clusters of agricultural activity and to promote and maintain the potential for new rural enterprise.
- Refined delineation of productivity classes of low, moderate, high and very high agricultural land.
- Undertaking land capability assessments for the Shire to complement the Eppalock Catchment Land Capability Information

Further strategic work and other actions

- Ongoing monitoring of rural land demand and supply and the development of trend forecasting and projections.
- The development of an industry strategy that recognises the role of rural industry in the economy of Hepburn Shire.
- The development of a tourism strategy that addresses the importance of maintaining the integrity of important natural environmental features and assets such as mineral springs.

Reference Documents

Hepburn Shire Land Use Strategy: Rural Land Use Review, RPD Group, January 1999

Hepburn Shire Land Use Strategy: Strategic Directions, RPD Group, March 1999

Land Capability Assessment of the Creswick Water Supply catchments, 1979