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C22**KEY INFLUENCES**

There are a number of significant issues and influences that will have an impact on future land use and development in Horsham Rural City:

21.02-111/01/2007
C22**Settlement****Horsham**

- Horsham is the capital of the Wimmera; the provider of a wide range of retail, government, community, industrial and agricultural services.
- While the population of Horsham has increased over the past five years, the population of the rural areas and smaller settlements has decreased.
- During the last decade an average of 100 new house starts per year have taken place in the regional centre of Horsham. In 2002, 113 dwellings were started in Horsham. Residential expansion in Horsham has extended to the south of the regional centre, across the river, offering an attractive living environment and providing public access to the river. The number of households in the Horsham urban area is predicted to increase.
- There is sufficient land set aside for new residential development. Based on current development rates there is about 7-8 years supply of land zoned for residential development at urban densities. Further residential development needs to respect servicing constraints, the floodplains of the Wimmera River and Burnt Creek, and adjacent productive agricultural land. The presence of the water ways however provide the opportunity to enhance the city. There are opportunities for infill development within Horsham and these should be utilised so maximise infrastructure useage and minimise sprawl into surrounding rural areas.
- In some areas, urban development is located on the floodplain and needs to be managed to minimise flood risk and maintain floodplain values. Land in the town of Horsham is affected by inundation from flooding from watercourses such as the Wimmera River, and Burnt Creek. The presence of the waterways however provides the opportunity to enhance the city.
- Some land within Horsham is affected by overland flow associated with storm water flooding. New development in this area needs to be managed to ensure that flood risk is minimised and any new development does not exacerbate storm water flooding of adjacent land.
- Medium density housing development has consistently accounted for 30% of new dwelling starts during the last decade. A substantial proportion of this development has involved the redevelopment of sites adjacent to the Central Activities District, providing additional housing with excellent access to a wide range of services. This form of housing in a central location is particularly attractive to older members of the community. The proportion of persons aged over 60 years is expected to increase from 20% of the population at present, to 30% of the population within the next 25 years, creating ongoing demand for medium density housing. The former saleyards, adjacent to the CBD, are presently being redeveloped as a medium density housing development and these properties have proven popular.
- Low density residential development is a popular housing option in Horsham. A significant supply of low density and rural living land is provided to the south of the regional centre. This supply is in excess of medium term demand and does not necessarily reflect opportunities for sustainable low density residential development and protection of existing rural residential environments. The ad hoc development of rural residential areas creates servicing difficulties, is an inefficient land use and may interfere with farming practices on adjacent land. The designation of many rural

residential and rural living areas does not appear to have given consideration to floodplains, protection of remnant vegetation, drainage constraints, efficient supply of services, particularly sewerage, or potential impact upon surrounding farm land. Urban Development in floodplain areas needs to be managed to ensure flood risk is minimised and floodplain values are maintained. A significant proportion of potential lots are located in the Haven area where substantial drainage problems are evident.

- The regional centre contains a good collection of the distinctive Western Victorian style housing of the inter-war years, typically displaying wide verandahs and high pitched roofs. Two notable heritage housing precincts are located on the main road entrances to the city.
- The Central Activities District consists of the traditional grid pattern commercial area supplemented by the Horsham Plaza development. Various government and agency offices are located through the CAD. A steady rate of commercial development has taken place in the city during the last decade. The increase of the city's population and the reduction of services in other nearby towns in the Wimmera have resulted in gains for local businesses. The strategic location of the centre on an interstate freight route and two other state highways is a consistent contributor to the retail trading levels. The vacancy rate of commercial premises is low, unlike many other rural centres. The preservation of a number of heritage buildings will further assist to enhance the appearance of the Central Activities District.
- The key transport routes in and out of Horsham are attractive places for certain retailers to locate. These areas are eminently suited to uses which require constant vehicle access for customers, large outdoor display areas, are trade related businesses or similar. Council must manage the types of uses establishing in these areas to ensure they do not undermine the role of the central commercial area.
- A medical services precinct has developed around the Horsham Base Hospital and this clustering of activities will continue to substantiate the role of the centre as the regional health provider. The expected increase in the aged population of the region is likely to result in the further establishment of both public and private health services.
- There are a number of industrial areas established around the regional centre catering for a range of industrial type uses. Immediately to the south-east of the CAD provision is made for small scale light industrial and service premises, and south of the Wimmera River is an established industrial estate for larger operations which is located within close proximity of wastewater treatment facilities. A new industrial estate has been created between the north side of Plumpton Road and the Wimmera River. Industrial development has taken place on several highway entrances to the city where good access is available to heavy vehicles. The connection of reticulated natural gas to the region centre will be advantageous to many local industries.
- Horsham Rural City Council has facilitated the relocation of the saleyards from the Central Activities District to a green fields site beyond the periphery of the regional centre. The land is sufficiently distanced from residential areas to ensure amenity impacts are minimized and has ease of access to a major interstate highway. It is envisaged a cluster of agro-processing and industrial activities will establish in this location.
- The Horsham Airfield is located a short distance north of the city, providing easy access to important air freight opportunities for local businesses. The airspace of the facility requires that height restrictions be imposed upon development in the regional centre and surrounding areas.
- Horsham is also the centre of agricultural research and development, with government and private agencies leading the way in innovative agriculture and agro-processing.
- Horsham includes one of the best country golf courses in Australia. It attracts many visitors to Horsham, although accommodation facilities in its vicinity are limited.

- VicRoads have proposed a Western Highway Bypass for Horsham. The location of the Bypass is yet to be decided. Council must ensure it is part of the debate so that the location of the Bypass supports its Vision for Horsham. The Bypass could improve the amenity and function of the central commercial area, appropriately located it could also improve opportunities for industrial activity in Horsham.
- The municipality has a rich aboriginal heritage, with many significant places and artefacts remaining.

Natimuk

- Twenty five percent of the residents of the municipality live beyond the regional centre in the small settlements and across the rural areas. Natimuk is the largest of these townships containing a population of approximately 400 people, whilst most other settlements contain a scattering of houses and very few services.
- The population of Natimuk has declined slightly over the past five years. The township benefits from the influx of visitors to Mt Arapiles-Tooan State Park, which is regarded as Australia's rock climbing Mecca. It is estimated that more than 70,000 tourists each year. The influx of visitors has assisted to support some local businesses and encouraged the establishment of tourist accommodation and other services, as well as attracting additional permanent residents to the township.
- The Natimuk Creek forms an attractive landscape feature skirting the northern fringe of the township, but its floodplain imposes some restriction on urban development as some parts of the town are affected by inundation from flooding from Natimuk Creek. Regardless, it is considered that there is sufficient residential land provided in the town. The town is surrounded by productive agricultural land and ad hoc expansion of residential, low density residential or rural residential development into adjacent farmland should be prevented. There are substantial areas set aside for Rural Living purposes in the area of Quantong, west of Natimuk.
- It is anticipated that there will be further growth in tourist facilities namely accommodation, to service Mt Arapiles. These facilities are most appropriately located within Natimuk, to provide continued economic support to the township and where effluent can be treated in an appropriate manner.
- The Natimuk township contains a number of significant heritage buildings, notably the court house, former school and post office, which are worthy of preservation. Many other buildings, particularly along the main street, contribute to the historical character and attraction of the township.

Other Settlements

- Demographic data is not available to calculate the number of persons living in the smaller settlements within the municipality, although it is considered that Pimpinio and Jung are the largest of these settlements accommodating thirty to forty households. Many of the other settlements contain only a scattering of dwellings. The district of Laharum and Wartook whilst not forming a township has experienced an increase in population in recent years related to the liberalisation of the subdivision controls and attraction of living in the vicinity of the Grampians National Park.
- Many of the smaller settlements have declined in population during this century following mechanisation of farming activities, advent of the motor vehicle, closure of railways, and removal of other services to the larger centres. Some of these centres have maintained a baseline population to support a local school, community facilities including sports grounds and the occasional general store, although all are dependant upon transport links to Horsham or other centres.
- Whilst it is considered that most small settlements are in decline, residents may continue to be attracted to these localities as an alternative to living in the regional

centre, cheap property prices or rental opportunities, or by natural attractions such as nearby parks or lakes. The highway location of several towns may also attract businesses or persons employed in the transport industry.

- Many of the settlements contain buildings of local historical and cultural importance that contribute to the character of the locality.
- The settlement of Dadswells Bridge on the Western Highway south-west of Horsham is known to be located within a floodplain. Further development in this locality adjacent to the National Park should be prevented until detailed flood level information can be provided by the Catchment Management Authority.
- Substantial areas of land have been set aside for rural residential development at Quantong and Toolondo. Parts of Quantong are subject to inundation whilst the Toolondo area is within the catchment of the Toolondo Reservoir. Development activity in these areas over recent years has been low.

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Environment

- The 4340 square kilometres of Horsham Rural City Council forms part of the complex natural system of the open plains of the Wimmera and Glenelg River catchments. Agriculture is the predominant land use.
- Waterways and wetlands are among the municipality's most valuable natural assets. The Wimmera River is the largest water course in the municipality and north of the Polkemmet Bridge is classified as a heritage river under the *Heritage Rivers Act 1992*. This section of the river is very important environmentally but much of the remaining length of the river is in poor condition and the river generally has poor water quality in times of low flow.
- Land in the municipality is affected by inundation from flooding from watercourses such as the Wimmera River, MacKenzie River, Glenelg River, Burnt Creek, Natimuk Creek, as well as from inundation of wetlands, especially in the western portion of the Shire. Flood events have been a regular feature of the region. The floodplains of the river affect substantial areas of the municipality including Horsham township. Urban development located on the floodplain needs to be managed to minimise flood risk and maintain floodplain values. The construction of dams and other works need to be given careful consideration on the plains and catchment areas, as local drainage patterns can easily be affected.
- The Grampians National Park is of great environmental and scenic value (classified by the National Trust), as well as containing many sites of Aboriginal cultural importance. The adjacent Black Range forms part of the significant landscape, remnant habitat and water supply catchment in the southern area of the municipality.
- Mt Arapiles is a renowned rock climbing venue attracting 70,000 visitors each year, assisting to sustain the nearby town of Natimuk. The Mount is an important landscape feature visible across the plains from many areas within the municipality.
- The Natimuk-Douglas Wetlands are considered to be of international significance as a nesting site for many thousand migratory birds each year. The wetlands consist of more than thirty natural saline and fresh water lakes in both public and private ownership. The Little Desert National Park, to the north of the municipality, is another important repository of indigenous vegetation, flora and fauna, attracting many tourists each year.
- The soils of the Shire underpin the local economy. The Shire's soils must be protected from erosion, salinity and sodicity so that the viability and sustainability of cropping and grazing is not compromised.
- The Shire has been extensively cleared as a result of its agricultural heritage. As such remnant vegetation is very valuable in terms of biodiversity, habitat, water table management and soil stabilisation. The municipality has 77 of Victoria's rare and threatened plants of which 20 are listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988,

and 46 species of threatened fauna of which 29 are listed under the Act. Many of these species are contained within public land but some also occur on private land. Road and railway reserves frequently contain important remnant vegetation and habitat.

- Risk from wild fire exists in some parts of the municipality, especially in the more heavily vegetated areas near the Grampians National Park.
- The Wimmera and Glenelg Catchment Management Strategies prepared by the respective Catchment Management Authorities establish the land and water management priorities within the region. These priorities are as follows, and should be given consideration as part of the land use planning process:
 - Wetlands and streams of the Millicent Coast Basin
 - Wetlands and streams of the Wimmera River Basin
 - To establish a flow regime that is sufficient for recreation, stock and domestic purposes while sustaining viable populations of native flora and fauna. Stream courses should not erode at accelerated rates and floodplain management should be sympathetic to natural processes.

Groundwater

To maintain sustainable supplies of quality groundwater for current and future domestic, stock and irrigation uses; and ensure that watertable levels do not have negative effects on agricultural activities or on natural systems.

Agricultural land

To manage agricultural land within its capability so as to maintain and enhance the regions soils, whilst improving and sustaining the provability of the agricultural sector.

Heritage sites

- To maintain and enhance heritage sites throughout the region and allow for appropriate visitation and use.

Parks and reserves

- To protect and enhance native flora and fauna habitats, maintain ecological communities and provide for appropriate recreational and tourism uses in the region's parks and reserves

State forests

- To protect and sustain forest resources and values, in particular biodiversity; timber for sawlogs, posts and poles; firewood and recreational opportunities.

Remnant vegetation

- To reverse the long term decline in remnant vegetation and produce a net gain in the area of native vegetation across the region

21.02-319/01/2006
VC37**Economic Development**

- The combination of soils, landform and climate provide a rural environment that is inherently suitable to broad acre agricultural production. The rural environment supports a rich agricultural economy, significant to the well being of the regional centre of Horsham, the local population, as well as to state and national exports. Wheat is the predominant cereal crop, followed by barley. Grain legumes are growing in importance and lentil production has rapidly increased in recent years. Sheep are principally grown in the region for wool production, namely merinos, producing a medium to strong wool fibre. Prime lamb production, particularly to the north of the municipality is also of significance. Discrete irrigation districts supply most of the region's milk and some horticultural products.
- Productive agricultural land is located to the north and west of the existing regional centre. The soil types of these areas are particularly suited to wheat cropping, unlike the soils to the south which have substantially less productive potential.
- Agricultural diversification and value adding to primary production is taking place in the region, which will lead to strengthening of the local economy. Sensible and innovative farming practices are necessary to ensure long term productivity and economic well being.
- Farmers and government authorities in Horsham are actively addressing many environmental issues and taking the lead in conservation farming techniques. The health of the environment is critical to the future of the local economy.
- Horsham has been promoted as a centre for agricultural and industrial development. The Victorian Institute for Dryland Agriculture and Melbourne University's Longerenong College provide a significant focus for agricultural research in the region.
- Horsham is located amidst a number of popular tourist attractions including the Grampians National Park, Mt Arapiles-Tooan State Park, Little Desert National Park, Black Range State Park and various lakes. A total of 1.5 million tourists are estimated to visit the region each year. The protection of these significant natural features is in the national interest and will further enhance opportunities for the local tourist industry. Tourist developments associated with these features must be sensitively designed and sited to protect the integrity of these places. Significant development associated with the Grampians has been occurring in the Wartook area. Mt Arapiles is located in a productive farming area and it is considered appropriate that development associated with this outstanding feature should be located in nearby Natimuk to protect agricultural activity and the local environment.
- Mineral sand resources lie in abundance near Drung, south of Horsham. Interest from multi-national mineral companies indicate that mining of the sands could create more than 200 direct employment opportunities, and would have major economic spin-offs for the municipality.
- The MacKenzie Creek Quarry which is an important local resource, is located on the Henty Highway, south of the Haven area.
- There are presently discussions about piping the Wimmera Mallee Channel. Piping the channel would be a major infrastructure development project but would result in the saving of a considerable amount of water. This saved water offers many economic and environmental opportunities. The impact of piping the channel needs to be fully assessed to ensure any negative impacts are managed.

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Infrastructure

- Horsham is strategically positioned on the national route between Adelaide and Melbourne, and several other state highways. Rail, road and air freight opportunities exist and will continue to be of importance to local industries including primary producers.
- Horsham has recently been connected to the Natural Gas supply system to the advantage of local industries.
- Extensive water supply infrastructure sustains agricultural production and the population of towns and rural areas.
- Horsham offers significant recreational infrastructure that serves the region.

The Strategic Framework Plans Horsham Rural City and Horsham Regional Centre on the following pages identify the various land use components of the municipality.



