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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SHIRE'S FUTURE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

There are a number of key factors which are important in shaping the Shire's future land use and development. These include:

- The strength of the Shire's economic base which is essential for continued prosperity of the Shire lies in its high grain productivity. The condition of natural resources, including the capacity of soil and water to support agricultural production is an associated factor which will determine the profitability of agriculture;
- The Shire's continued importance as the centre of grain production and handling for the Wimmera/Mallee region;
- The servicing of the Shire by a network of highways and secondary roads which present both location opportunities and threats. The travel convenience facilitated by the highway network and the proximity to larger regional centres with multi-national retailers, such as Horsham, Mildura and Swan Hill impact on the retailing of the Shire's small towns, causing decreased local retail services;
- Opportunities for increased productivity, new products and investments based around local processing, value adding, and servicing the agricultural industry in farm machinery and equipment manufacturing and maintenance;
- An ageing and declining population which will affect the level of services and the high level of volunteerism in maintaining community and recreational facilities;
- The lack of provision of physical infrastructure services, such as reticulated sewerage, causing major environmental problems for the catchment as a result of ineffectual on-site treatment of effluent;
- Declining provision and access to community facilities and deteriorating infrastructure provision associated with declining population base. The withdrawal of community, health and commercial services in local townships are posing problems of equity to the elderly and disadvantaged groups in the community from accessing community, commercial and health facilities;
- The continuing restructuring of the local economy, particularly agriculture and service industries. Employment opportunities will be affected by changing workforce requirements of many industries, and the rationalisation of, and new methods of delivery of services;
- The expansion of tourism based on the unique natural resources and landscapes and the opportunities for innovative use of resources within the numerous townships in the Shire, including sporting, recreational facilities, and housing stock;
- The presence of high groundwater tables causing dryland salinity problems;
- The need to maintain biodiversity values;
- The development and subsequent adoption of new technologies relating to agricultural production; and
- Parts of the Shire are subject to threats to public safety, including flooding, and wildfire.

These issues require consideration in planning and managing development. Some of the identified factors influencing future land use and development do not project future scenarios which are sustainable and fall short of meeting some of the objectives of the National Strategy for Sustainability. Sustainable futures in the Shire are not capable of being supported given the following present trends:

- towns in decline,
- withdrawal of services posing equity problems for the aged and disadvantaged, and

- the change of roles and functions of existing townships affecting the quality and the level of capability to service the urban and farming community from the rural hinterland.

The strategy then, is to arrest population decline through a number of strategic land use related initiatives which will guide future development and planning decisions, servicing of townships and districts within the Yarriambiack Shire, and allocation of resources.