



HUME CITY COUNCIL  
**DRAFT RURAL STRATEGY**

March 2020



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# Acknowledgement

Hume City Council recognises the rich Aboriginal heritage within the municipality and acknowledges the Gunung-Willam-Balluk of the Wurundjeri as the Traditional Custodians of this land. Council embraces Aboriginal living culture as a vital part of Australia's identity and recognises, celebrates and pays respects to the existing family members of the Gunung-Willam-Balluk and to Elders past and present.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Strategy

Hume's rural areas make up around half of the total area of the municipality. Whilst the urban areas have faced rapid and extensive growth over the last couple of decades, the rural areas have largely remained the same despite experiencing a range of pressures. It is a role that is moving away from its agricultural heritage to an area appreciated for its proximity to urban jobs, education and other facilities along with the space and amenity of a rural location.

State policy supports development in rural and green wedge areas that provides for environmental, economic and social benefits in the context of protecting environmental, landscape and scenic values and mineral resources. In the context of Hume, protection of the Melbourne Airport as major state infrastructure is a priority when considering rural development that may prejudice its operation.

This Strategy focuses on the challenges being experienced in the rural areas. It sets out Council's strategies for how to address these challenges and embrace opportunities for the future. The strategic outcomes are grouped around:

1. Responding to the Role of the Hume Green Wedge.
2. Identifying and embracing future opportunities and enhancements.
3. Managing the anticipated changes from external pressures of climate changes and urban development.

For the most part, Council is committed to strategic outcomes that provide:

- Certainty.
- Support.
- Engagement.

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Note: Inter Urban Break north of Mount Ridley Road in Mickleham is also rural land that contains low density residential development and contributes to the diversity of lots and living options in Hume. Whilst some of the support and engagement programs discussed in this Strategy are relevant to the Inter Urban Break, it's strategic direction has been confirmed in the Hume Corridor HIGAP (Hume Integrated Growth Area Plan), December 2015 and subsequently incorporated in statutory policy at Clause 21 of the Hume Planning Scheme.

The overarching purpose of the Strategy is to ensure the rural community and Council are working towards a shared vision and a positive but realistic future for Hume's rural areas.

## 1.2 The Strategy Area and its Communities

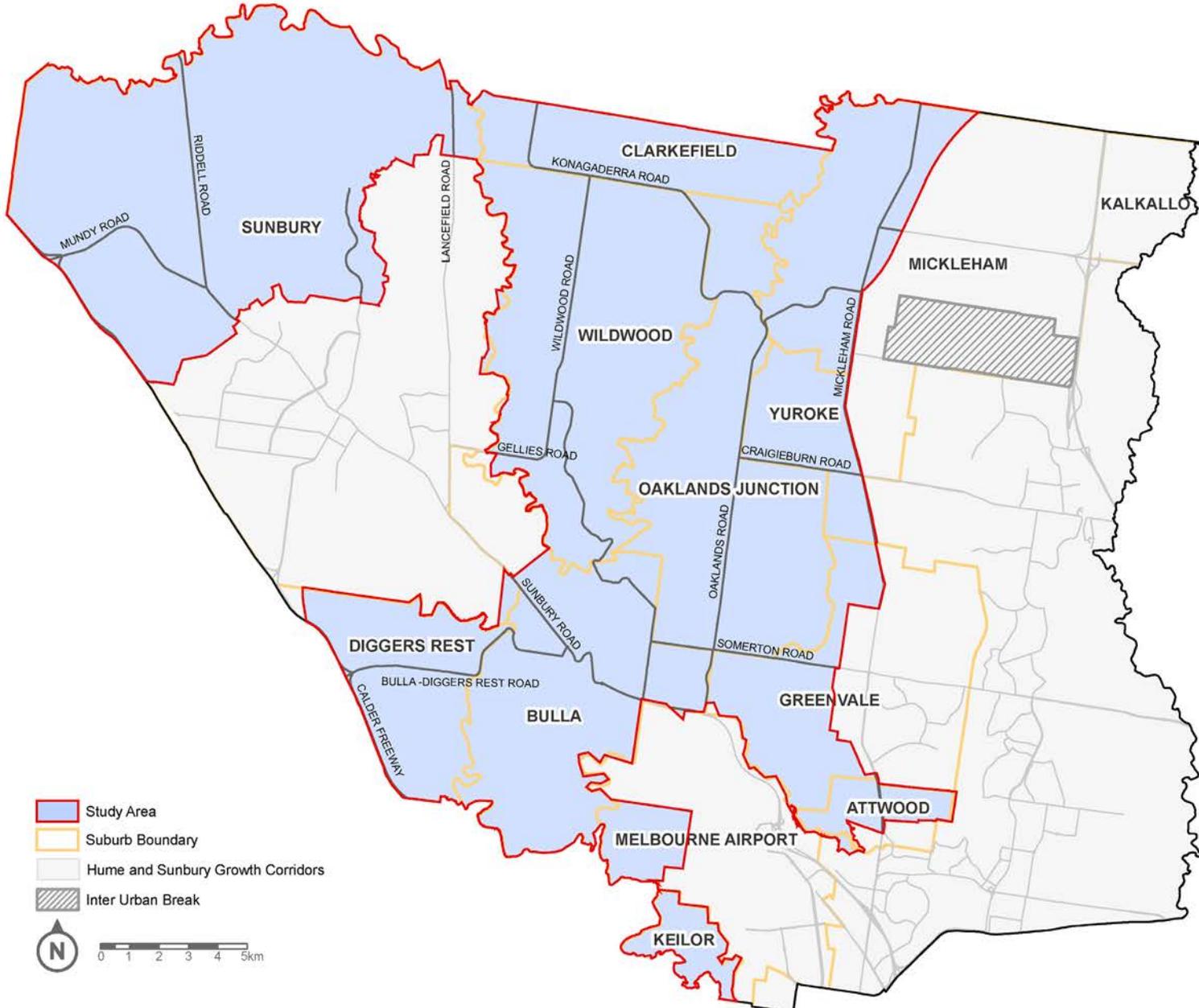
The Strategy area applies to all land outside of the urban growth boundary in Hume, as well as Bulla Township, as shown in Figure 1.

The majority of this area has been designated as the Sunbury Green Wedge under Green Wedge legislation. The area is therefore predominantly zoned Green Wedge, but also includes small areas of Green Wedge A Zone (semi-rural), Special Use Zone (i.e. quarries) and Township Zone (Bulla township).

The township of Bulla represents a small, isolated pocket of existing urban development. Its interface with the rural areas and relationship to the proposed Outer Metropolitan Ring Road, Bulla Bypass and the Melbourne Airport are pertinent issues to be considered by Council. As such, the township has been included within the scope of this project.

A diverse community live, own or work on land within Hume's rural areas. There are farmers with generations of history as well as newer residents. Some live on the land to farm it, pursue hobby farm or horse keeping opportunities while others simply enjoy the space and amenity of the rural areas. Many landowners live on their land while others own land but live outside of the rural areas. These absentee landowners may rent or lease their land to others to manage for agricultural and other economic pursuits or hold on to the land with expectations they seek to realise in the future. All of these players are caretakers of the land with an equal responsibility to manage it.

Figure 1 - Study Area



### 1.3 Consultation and Project Stages

The draft Rural Strategy sets out a vision for the rural areas to guide planning, Council advocacy and priorities over the next 20 years. When complete, it will outline what the future could look like, and what is required to be undertaken over the coming years by the rural community and landowners; Council and State Government; and others.

The project is being delivered in four stages as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2: Rural Strategy Project Stages**



#### **Stage 1 - Community survey and background studies**

To help inform and shape the early stages of the project, Council distributed a survey to landowners, residents and businesses in the rural areas. The survey sought the views of Hume's rural community to better understand the different expectations and aspirations of the rural community. A total of 360 survey responses were received.

Common themes raised by the community concerned issues of limited infrastructure not keeping pace with development; dumping of waste; the future viability of farming in the area; and concerns over development occurring at the expense of the environmental and amenity values.

Respondents were also asked about what they value; what should be given priority; and what opportunities are available for the next 20 years. The key themes that emerged include:

- Strong support for preserving and protecting the rural character, heritage and environment.
- A desire for more support for communities to maintain liveability and assist businesses to remain economically viable.
- Concern with the adequacy of infrastructure and the impacts of surrounding urban growth on infrastructure within the rural areas, in particular, the road network.
- Mixed views on the negatives and some positives that more urban encroachment and more housing could bring.
- Potential for some small subdivision (1 to 5 hectares) to provide rural lifestyle and tourism opportunities and a financial resource for landowners to better manage their land.

Stage 1 involved background work to understand current policy and controls that apply in the rural areas and detailed work on:

- Economic constraints and opportunities for sectors that include agriculture, extractive industries, tourism and commercial activities.
- A visual and landscape assessment to understand the landscape character and aesthetic values of the rural areas.
- An assessment of the Cultural landscape values as they relate to Aboriginal heritage to identify the known and likely areas of cultural heritage value.
- A traffic modelling study to understand current and future road traffic issues and needs.

### ***Stage 2 – Rural Areas Emerging Issues and Options Paper***

A Rural Areas Emerging Issues and Options Paper was shared with Hume’s rural community in August-September 2018 to provide context for a discussion of the issues that would then inform the development of a draft Strategy.

The Paper built on the background studies and community survey of Stage 1 to present the key issues experienced in the rural areas. It included strategic objectives for the project and set out options for each issue based on a sliding scale of change that could occur within the rural areas, beginning with ‘no change/ maintaining the status quo’ option, to options that suggest greater change and diversification within the rural areas.

Community feedback on the Paper has been valuable to confirm the community’s priorities and preferences in the developing this draft Strategy.

Broadly, the key issues highlighted in a large number of submissions are outlined below. On some issues, submissions were polarised with arguments for and against around:

- The urban growth boundary – with submissions both for and against moving the urban growth boundary;

- Challenges with agricultural viability;
- Reducing minimum subdivision sizes to allow further subdivision; and
- Challenges of land management.

These issues are inherently interconnected with the interplay between the challenges of land management and agricultural viability leading the community to prefer solutions around expanding the urban growth boundary or allowing for more small lot subdivision. Whilst the draft Strategy separates the issues, it is acknowledged that measures to improve land management may improve agricultural viability and relieve the pressure to allow subdivision.

Some submissions provided suggestions to assist landowners manage their land such as:

- New grant and rebate programs to help finance land management;
- New incentives and disincentives for good land management, including enforcement;
- Rate reductions for good land management; and
- Environmental and land maintenance education programs.

Following the consultation period, 10 submitters were invited to a Mayor’s Forum in November 2018. Submitters were selected to provide representation from a range of locations and experiences and based on a variety of submission issues. These discussions allowed participants to expand in detail on the challenges faced in the rural areas based on their individual lived experiences.

### ***Agricultural Land Use Rebate Review***

In parallel with work on the Rural Strategy, Council has reviewed the Agricultural Land Use Rebate (ALUR). ALUR was introduced in 2002 and provides rural landowners with financial assistance to manage their property in the form of an annual rate rebate.

Extensive consultation has been carried out in reviewing the Rebate including a survey of rural land owners and establishment of a Stakeholder Consultation Group made up of 13 rural landowners who have been regularly consulted over the last couple of years. The recommendations of the review propose the following changes and new initiatives:

- Replacement of ALUR with a Primary Producer Rate Rebate tying eligibility to landowners who are farming to generate an income. The rebate percentage will increase to 30%.
- Introduction of a 'Rural Land Management Grant' to support land management efforts of non-productive properties (in place of the Conserving our Rural Environments [CoRE] Small grant).
- The CoRE project grant will continue as the primary initiative to support landowners who wish to seek funding for on-ground environmental protection and enhancement works, including landowners within the Inter Urban Break in Mickleham.
- A Weed Compliance Project will be introduced to seek compliance with land management legislation on weed infested properties in order to reduce the spread of noxious weeds across the rural areas.
- Education and capacity building programs will be continuously reviewed and conducted to serve current needs and interests of the community.





## 2. Understanding the constraints, challenges and opportunities

### 2.1 The Constraints – understanding the role of the green wedge

The creation of Green Wedge Legislation and the urban growth boundary by the State Government in 2003 serves two key purposes. Firstly, it is used to manage the urban development and spread of Melbourne (refer to Box 1); and secondly, it serves to protect and conserve rural land (including for agriculture) and important State infrastructure and resources.

The pervasive view is that all of Melbourne's green wedges are conserved exclusively for agricultural purposes. Whilst agricultural uses are common and very important in the green wedges around Melbourne, it is necessary to recognise that agriculture is just one important land use. Therefore, if agriculture is not a common or particularly viable land use, or other uses are more viable, then this does not mean that the green wedge is not appropriate or relevant.

In Hume, a key purpose underpinning our green wedge is to protect the curfew free operation of Melbourne Airport. This is an extremely important and unique role that distinguishes Hume's green wedge areas from other green wedge areas around Melbourne - see Chapter 4.1.

A second important and unique purpose is to maintain a non-urban/rural break around Sunbury and keep it separate from Melbourne to the south and east, and the regional townships to the north and west (refer Chapter 4.3). This physical separation of Sunbury from Melbourne is a critical part of the character and identity of Sunbury that is valued highly by the Sunbury community.

The land required to be non-urban in Hume falls to one or both of these purposes.

In addition, the Hume rural areas perform an important role in:

- protecting areas with significant environmental and biodiversity assets;

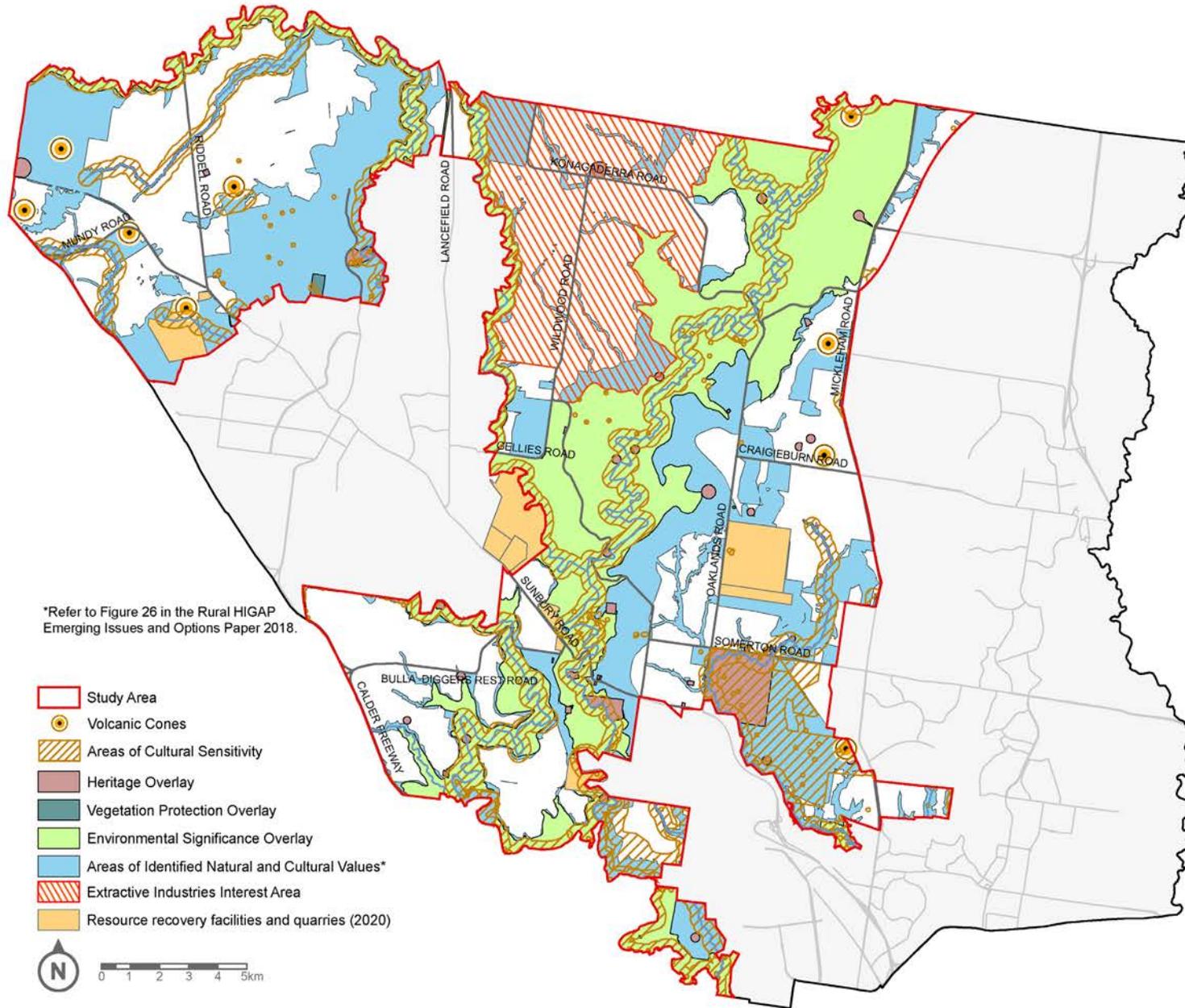
- protecting areas identified with potential future mineral resources and extractive industries;
- protecting areas with valued landscape and open space features, including significant rural views and vistas; and
- protecting aboriginal and post-European cultural heritage.

These are shown in Figure 3.

Council understands the importance of these roles for the State and the local community but also recognises that for many of the landowners in Hume's rural areas, these roles present significant challenges. These challenges are particularly acute for those landowners with land that is not suited to agriculture and for landowners that are trying to manage their properties in their leisure time (refer to Box 2).



Figure 3 – Areas of Protection and Conservation



## Box 1: A History of Urban Expansion

Protections for Melbourne's Green Wedges were first introduced in 1971<sup>1</sup> and were reinforced in planning strategies throughout the 1980s and 1990s<sup>2</sup>.

In 2002, *Melbourne 2030: Planning for Sustainable Growth* recognised the non-urban wedges as 'green wedges' and established the urban growth boundary to manage outward expansion, refer Figure 4. Following from this, the government secured passage of the *Planning and Environment (Metropolitan Green Wedge Protection) Act 2003*. Among the provisions in this Act was a requirement that amendments to the urban growth boundary require ratification by both Houses of Parliament.

Since the urban growth boundary was introduced the rural community have witnessed three changes to the boundary<sup>3</sup>. Coupled with this has been changing policy positions on whether the boundary is 'fixed' or subject to 'biannual reviews'.

This has understandably created widespread loss of faith in any State Government commitment to a fixed urban growth boundary and fuelled speculation that rural land would be 'released' for urban development in the future. This has resulted in a rise in land speculation with a number of properties being sold to land bankers. It has also limited the motivation of other landowners to invest their time and money in managing their land, expanding their operations, or in exploring new land use opportunities on their properties.

Submissions from the community and discussions at the Mayoral Forum, demonstrated eloquently and clearly to Council the impact this uncertainty and speculation has on the rural community's quality of life. It also highlighted the destructive impact that land speculation and absentee landowners can have on those who are still working and managing their land across the rural areas. This includes increased bush fire risk and continual invasion of pest and weed species that spread from poorly managed neighbouring properties.

<sup>1</sup> Planning Policies for Metropolitan Melbourne Region prepared by the MMBW set up urban corridors and wedges of non-urban land which contain "most of the areas of significant landscape, historic and scientific interest ... agricultural areas and the water catchments".

<sup>2</sup> Shaping Melbourne's Future, 1987; Living Suburbs, 1995; Victorian Planning Provisions first introduced in the mid 1990s.

<sup>3</sup> Land from the green wedges was brought into the urban growth boundary in: 2005; 2010 - 43,000 hectares based on Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities strategy; 2012 - 6,000 hectares of green wedge land following recommendations of the Logical Inclusions Review Advisory Committee

Figure 4 – Victoria's Green Wedges



## Box 2: Rural Land Challenges

### Land Management Challenges

Council is very aware of the significant challenge that maintaining rural properties creates for its owners, particularly on land where agriculture (or other land uses that closely enable land management) is not possible and/or where property owners can only maintain their property in the leisure time.

For those who want to practice good land management, maintaining their land can feel like an increasingly uphill battle. A battle that might not be worth fighting if the urban growth boundary might change at any time.

Council heard from a number of landowners who considered that if rural properties were smaller and more geared towards rural living this may reduce the challenge of land management. A number of submitters therefore proposed changes to the minimum subdivision area controls, particularly in areas away from the edge of Melbourne and Sunbury.

### Limited and Declining Viability of Traditional Agriculture

While traditional agriculture and farming in Hume is possible, it is undeniably a tough task. The relatively poor quality of soil and already low levels of rainfall, that in recent decades has worsened, has resulted in a lack of water available for agriculture and an overall decline in agricultural viability. The effects of climate change are anticipated to exacerbate these issues and create further uncertainty to the viability of agriculture throughout the whole of Victoria.

Given how tough it is for traditional agriculture, many landowners believe that it is futile to protect Hume's green wedge. They look at the massive residential growth that is occurring on their door-step in Sunbury and the Hume Growth Corridor as the obvious solution to these problems.

### Urban Edge Challenges

Hume's rural areas have a large and significant urban edge that is still being formalised as new areas of urban development expand to the urban growth boundary. Where urban development is already at the boundary, the rural community have outlined the challenges that this urban development is creating on rural properties on this edge in terms of dumped rubbish, trespassing and damage to property.

The growing urban population is also creating additional traffic on rural roads, in particular impacting on agricultural activities.

A number of landowners are also subject to uncertainty on future infrastructure to service the urban areas, notably the Outer Metropolitan Ring (OMR) where land acquisitions are proposed by State Government. This uncertainty and continuing speculation on the timing of this infrastructure is a cause of stress and a limitation on landowners' capacity to invest in their business activities.

### Ageing and Changing Rural Community

Like most of Australia, the population in Hume's rural areas is ageing. For some this is making the challenge of managing rural properties greater as their physical capacity is reduced and for some the potential of urban development is a financially appealing prospect

The expectations of the community are also changing, particularly in terms of the amount of time they are willing to invest in managing their land. This change is resulting in a decline in the number of generational farming families and a loss in the support networks that an 'on the land' community has.

This change is contributing to the land management challenges and the motivation of some in the community to continue on the land, particularly if urban development is a possibility.

## 2.2 The Challenges – understanding the problem

The community submissions to the Emerging Issues and Options Paper demonstrated to Council that while different parts of the rural areas are impacted by different individual issues, there are interconnected challenges that are felt throughout the rural areas. These are represented in Figure 5 and stem from two important challenges for Hume’s rural areas:

- a recent history of continued expansion of the urban growth boundary by State Government planning policy.
- limited and declining viability for agricultural uses on many properties.

These challenges create a further set of related issues of speculative land banking, absentee landowners, poor land management and uncertain conditions for investment.

These challenges are also compounding and reinforcing broader issues of climate change, ageing rural population and a declining sense of community (refer to Box 2).

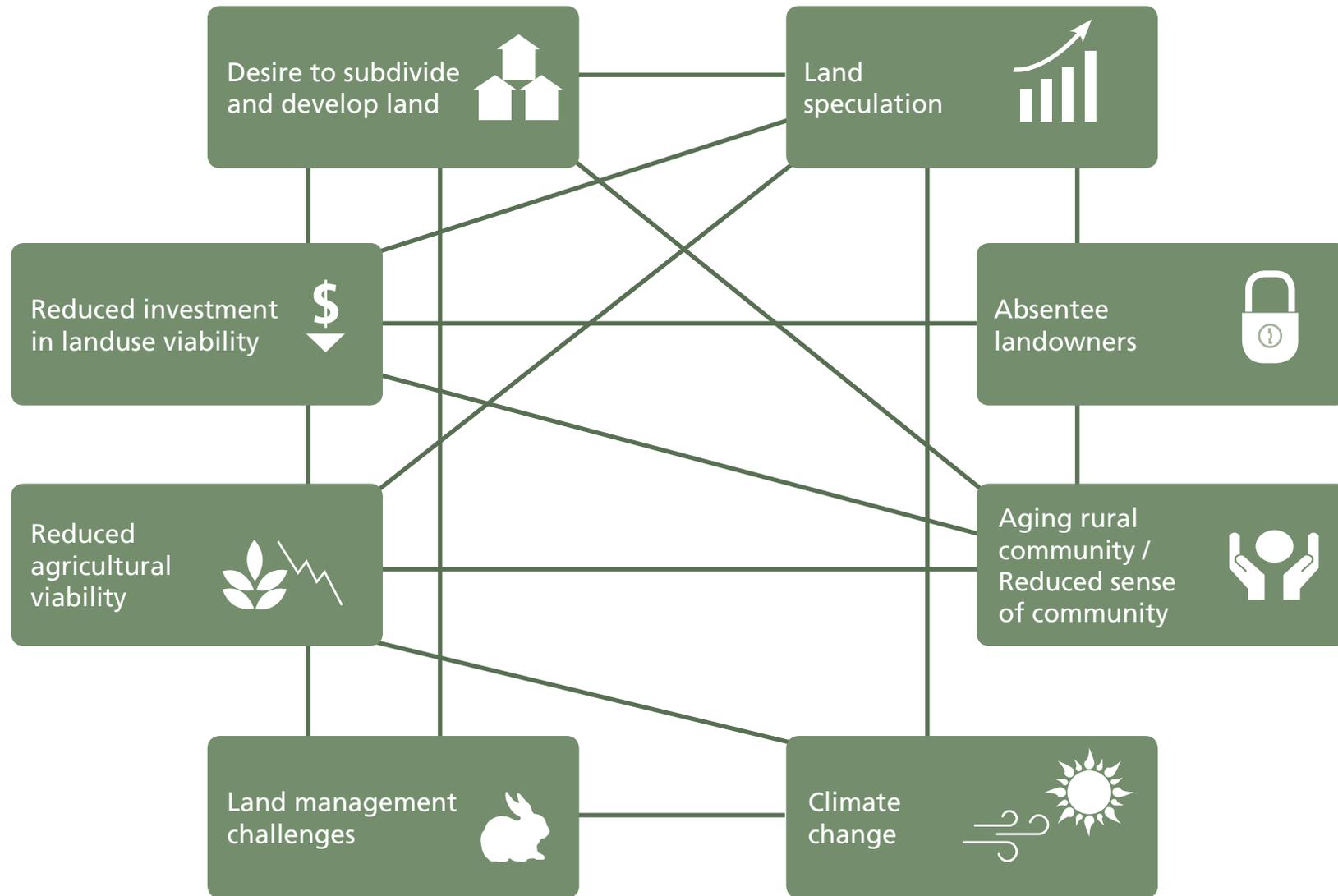
In recognition and in response to these challenges, the submissions to Council proposed differing options for the long term future of Hume’s rural areas including:

1. Enabling further urban development,.
2. Enabling smaller lot sizes and greater subdivision to create rural lifestyle properties.
3. Greater financial and government support for agriculture to maintain it as a viable land use.
4. Greater support for landowners to manage their land, including enforcement against absentee landowners and poor land managers.

The complex and interconnected nature of these challenges require a holistic strategy and coordinated response.



**Figure 5: Interconnected challenges in Hume’s rural areas**



## 2.3 The Opportunities – exploring the possibilities

Despite the challenges Hume’s rural community face, Council has heard from the community about many of the qualities that make the rural areas special:

- A sense of openness and space that you cannot get in an urban area.
- A different character and feel that is distinct from urban development happening in Hume’s growth areas.
- A rural lifestyle that is easily accessible to metropolitan Melbourne for jobs and urban services.
- Living in and among heritage homesteads, bridges and other heritage places.
- The presence and connection to nature by seeing and hearing birds and wildlife.
- The diversity of landscapes, from stunning incised valleys and creeks to vistas punctuated with volcanic cones.
- The ecological significance of woodland and grassland landscapes.
- The unique and deep aboriginal cultural heritage history.

Council has investigated the opportunities that might exist in the rural areas now and into the future to protect these values and to enable current and future rural landowners to stay on the land. They include opportunities to diversify how rural land is used to generate an income, and opportunities to protect and celebrate the values and qualities of the rural areas.

Some of these opportunities are able to be realised now or in the short to medium term (5 to 10 years). Others may not be available until the longer term (10+ years) if at all but it is important to commence planning for them now.

## 2.4 Responding to the Challenges and Opportunities

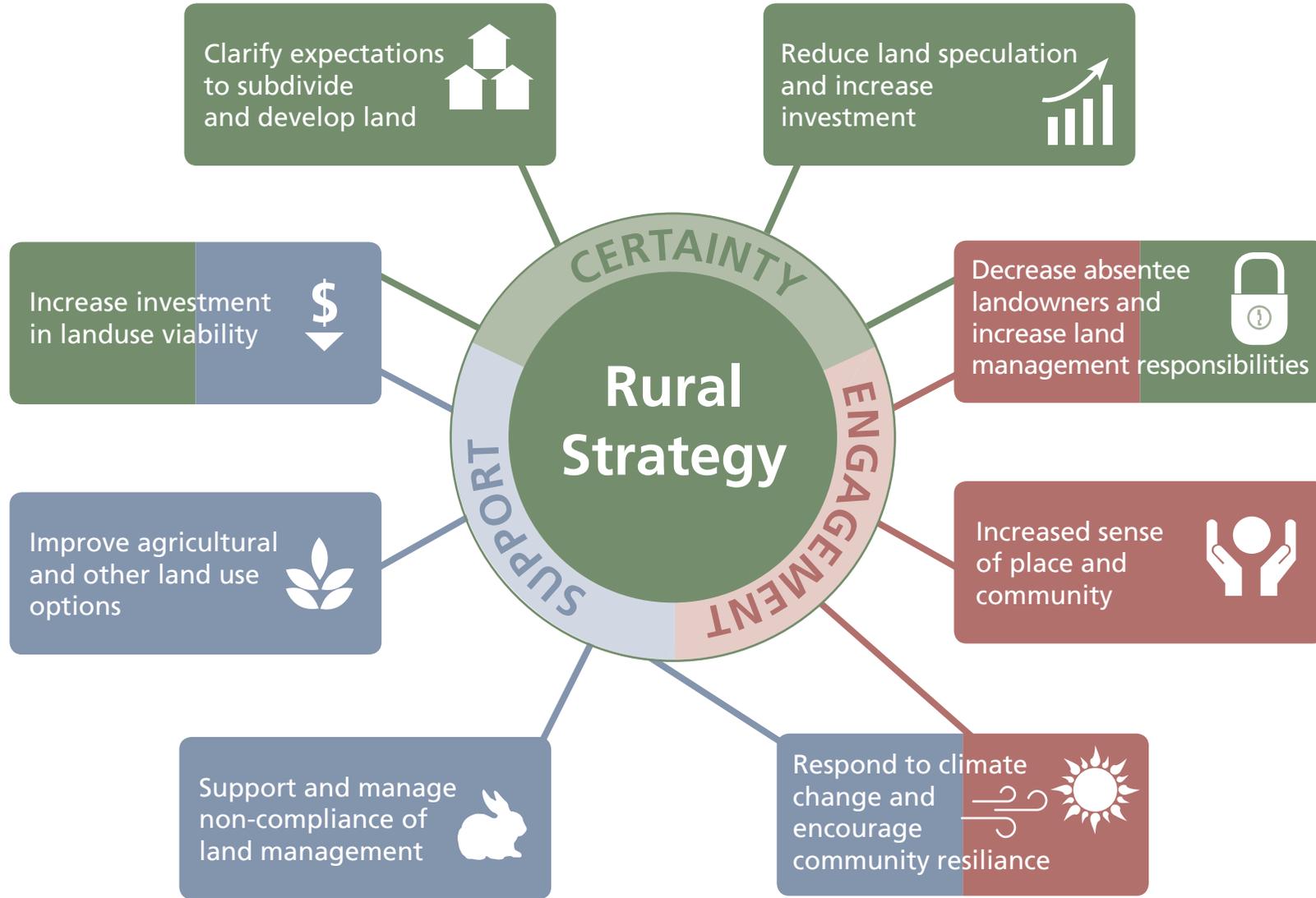
Addressing the interconnected challenges and realising the opportunities requires a holistic and partnership approach across tiers of government and between government and the community. It will also require and depend very heavily on the capacity and the motivation of rural landowners to invest money, time and resources. Council cannot address the challenges or realise the opportunities alone.

This strategy encompasses three themes that reflect this holistic and partnership approach:

1. **Certainty** – on the future planning for the rural areas, particularly future urban development and subdivision, to assist the rural community make investments in their land with a greater level of confidence.
2. **Support** – to help enable landowners to continue to pursue current activities, diversify into new activities, maximise opportunities associated with a growing urban population, and to effectively manage land.
3. **Engagement** – to inform the rural community of potential future changes and to grow community connectedness and capacity to realise future opportunities and manage challenges.

Figure 6 illustrates how these themes address the challenges outlined in chapter 2.2.

**Figure 6: Rural Strategy - Responding to the Challenges**





### 3 Working towards a shared vision

In hearing from the rural community a vision for the next 20 years has been drafted that will be developed into a shared vision for the final Rural Strategy. The role of the community is fundamental to achieving the vision as they manage its unique values and enjoy its unique qualities and potentially develop opportunity to share these with visitors. The vision will underpin policy changes and the support and engagement role of Council.

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Into the future, Hume's rural areas will continue to be enjoyed by residents on large farm holdings, hobby farms, bush blocks and in the Bulla township.

A role for agricultural production will be maintained, increasingly within the context of a changing climate and community expectations. Most primary producers will contribute off-farm income to enable them to remain on their land and continue to enjoy their rural property, be it for a rural vista, appreciating local wildlife, keeping horses or simply for space and quiet.

Environmental and landscape values will be enhanced as landowners and land managers are supported by Council through training, field days, revegetation projects and land management grants. Natural and cultural features will be protected and opportunities for visitor facilities will be fostered to increase the number of visitors accessing the environmental and landscape beauty of the area.

Development of new housing estates bordering the rural areas, major road projects through it and proximity to Melbourne Airport will make the rural areas a convenient escape from the city. Traffic will be redirected out of Bulla township enhancing its living environment, making the streets safer and more attractive for residents and visitors.

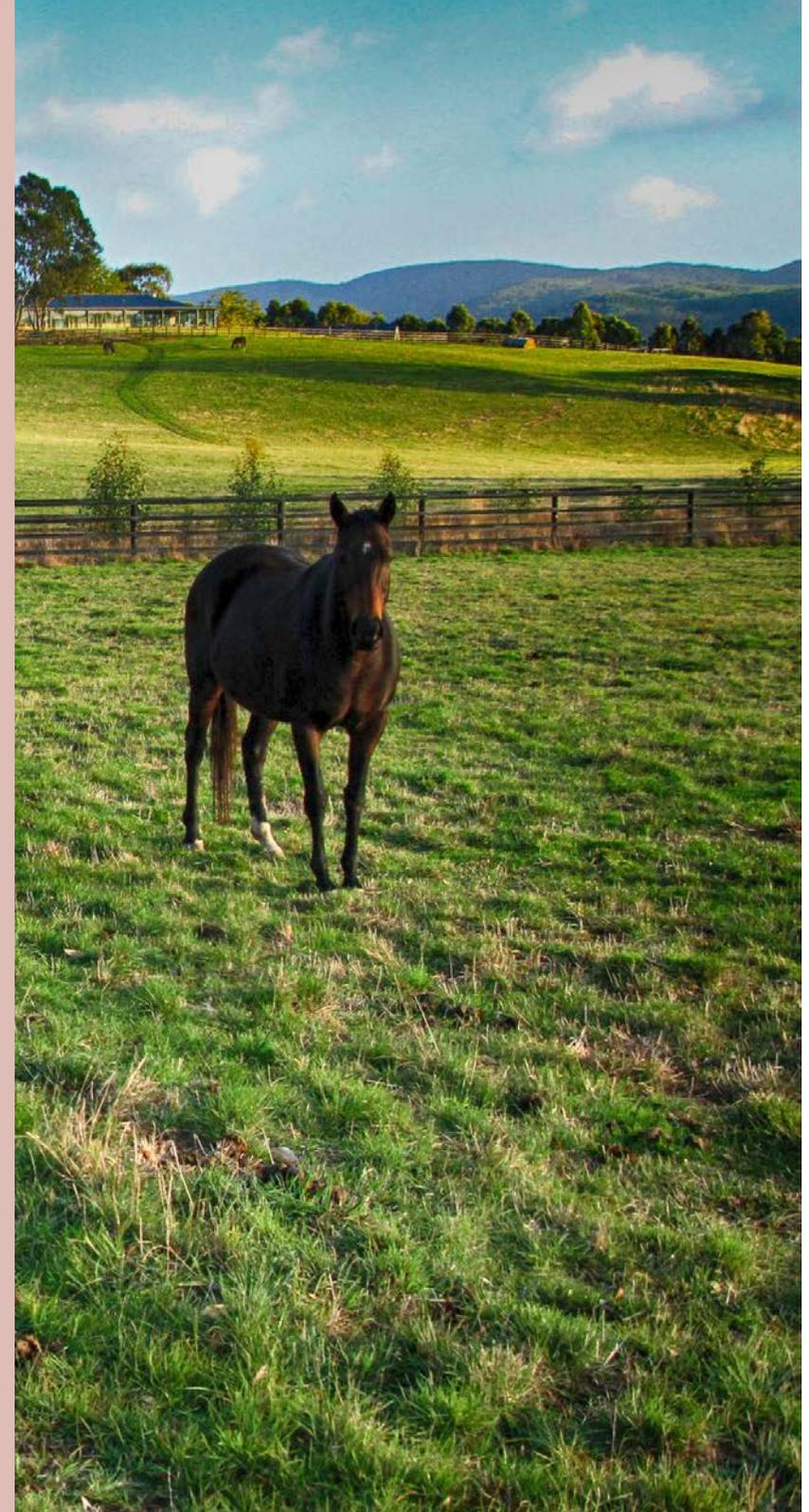
The rural area's importance to the State will be maintained as it protects the curfew free operation of Melbourne Airport, manages waste and provides important stone resources for urban development and major projects.

The wide range of existing property sizes and types available will be protected from urban expansion and subdivision preserving choice for existing and new residents and their various interests, capabilities and commitments.

# Strategic objectives

## *The overarching strategic objectives of the Rural Strategy are:*

- Safeguard the operation of Melbourne Airport and its curfew free status.
- Maintain the rural separation around Sunbury.
- Recognise rural landowners and land managers as the caretakers of the land and support them to sustainably enjoy and manage the land.
- Strengthen and promote unique landscape, natural, cultural and recreational values of Hume's rural areas.
- Support a conservation and recreation open space network accessible to the community.
- Encourage and support a wide range of economic opportunities and activities that complement the rural areas.
- Support transport and infrastructure networks that respond to changes in and around the rural areas.
- Ensure community awareness of issues and projects affecting the rural areas.
- Ensure that the planning framework supports Hume's Rural Strategy.





## 4 The Role of the Green Wedge

### 4.1 Protecting Melbourne Airport

The protection of Melbourne Airport as a State-significant infrastructure asset is recognised by State Government<sup>1</sup> and the Council to be one of the major roles of Hume's rural areas. Protecting the curfew free status of Melbourne Airport is crucial to protecting the Airport's ongoing operation and continual growth. The extent of the rural areas impacted by aircraft noise covers a large proportion of the rural areas as identified in the Melbourne Airport Masterplan 2018<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 7).

Melbourne Airport is the second busiest airport in Australia and makes a significant economic contribution to Victoria's tourism and trade industries. The Airport is also one of the State's largest employment destinations, both within the Airport itself and for related industries. These industries employ a high percentage of Hume residents.

Melbourne Airport is unique compared to other major airports on Australia's eastern seaboard as it does not have a curfew, which means it can operate flights throughout both the day and night. The green wedge protections of Hume's rural areas limit inappropriate land uses and residential development that could compromise the Airport's curfew free status. Flights can be directed over the rural areas where they impact less people and avoid more populated urban areas. It is still important for the rural community that are affected by aircraft noise to be aware of any potential changes to Melbourne Airport or the planning controls that protect the Airport.

The role that Hume's rural areas play in protecting the Airport constrains potential land uses and development that can occur in the rural areas. The proximity of the Airport also presents opportunities for landowners - for rural tourism and recreation operations, the presence of Melbourne Airport on their doorstep provides access to national and international visitors.

#### 4.1.1 Objectives

To protect the curfew free operation of Melbourne Airport.

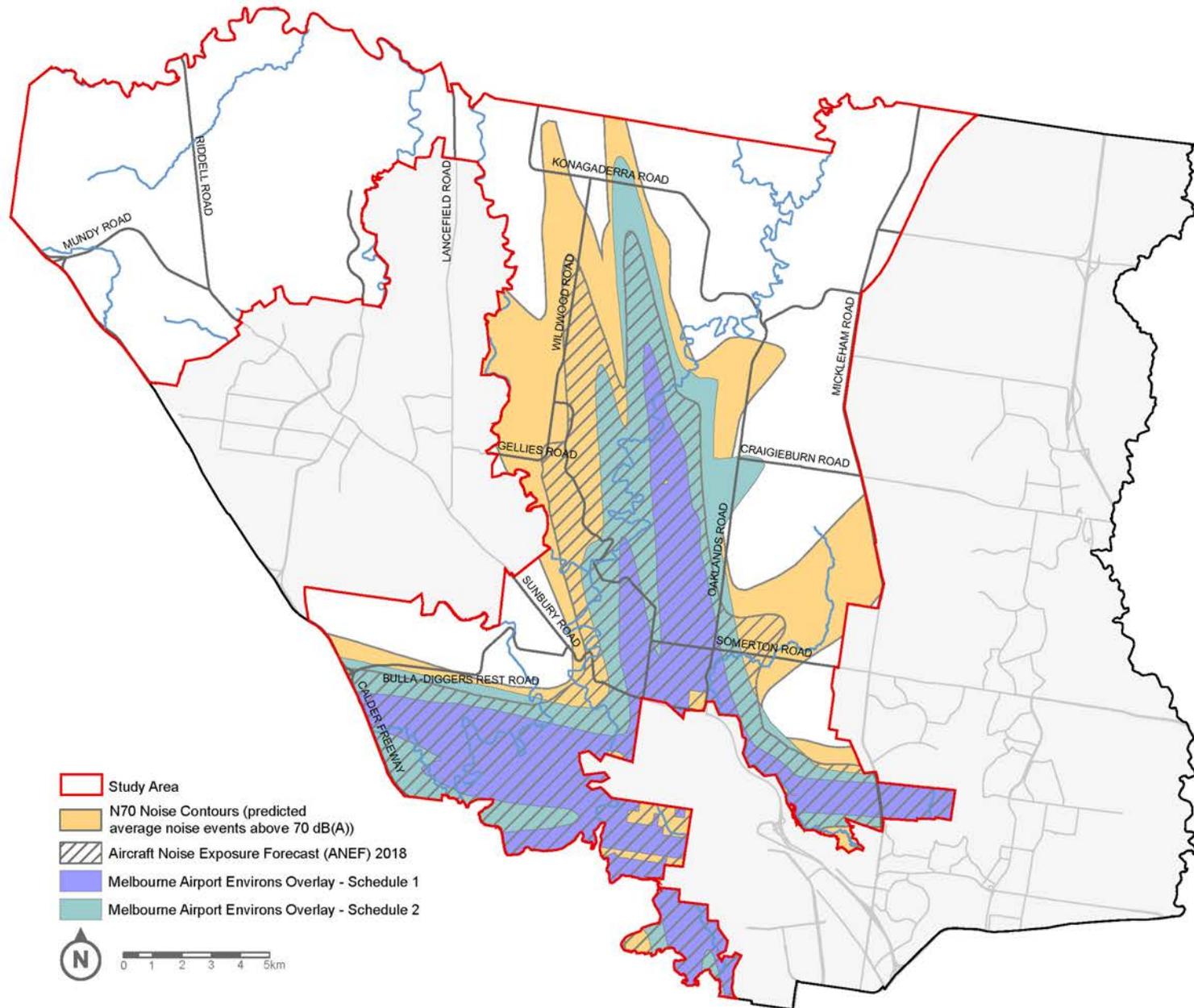
#### 4.1.2 Strategies

- Continue to apply planning controls to land in Hume's rural areas to limit land uses sensitive to aircraft noise.
- Work with Melbourne Airport and State Government to update and improve the planning controls to reflect the National Aviation Safeguarding Framework and Melbourne Airport Masterplan.
- Advocate for affected members of the rural community to be consulted on airport planning, operations and major developments that may impact their properties.

<sup>1</sup> Plan Melbourne 2017-50

<sup>2</sup> The Masterplan will be updated in 2020/21 to reflect a change to the preferred third runway alignment from east-west to north-south.

Figure 7 – Melbourne Airport Protection



## 4.2 A Commitment to a Fixed Urban Growth Boundary

The green wedge controls and the urban growth boundary work together to contain the urban extent of Melbourne. The urban growth boundary limits the expansion of urban development while the green wedge controls manage activities and allowable uses within the rural areas.

It is recognised that land within Hume's rural areas experience considerable pressure to be included within the urban growth boundary to enable urban subdivision and development.

Incremental changes to the urban growth boundary in the last 15 years; the prospective of a significant uplift in land value; and a loss of faith by landowners and developers to any commitment to a fixed urban growth boundary has resulted in increasing land speculation. Given the large extent of urban growth boundary interface with the rural areas, land speculation and land banking are pervasive throughout most of the rural areas, exacerbating existing challenges of land management and agricultural viability and further fuelling the pressure to expand the urban growth boundary.

These challenges are the unfortunate by-product of the incremental urban growth boundary shifts. Past changes to the urban growth boundary should not undermine the important role it plays in containing Melbourne's urban spread. For Hume's green wedge specifically, this also means protecting Melbourne Airport as a state-significant infrastructure asset and maintaining a rural separation around Sunbury.

The need and merit to alter the current urban growth boundary has been considered in preparing this Strategy, particularly, in terms of substantive community benefit, the current urban land supply and the role of Hume's green wedge.

Plan Melbourne 2017-2050 identified that metropolitan Melbourne has at least a 20 year supply of greenfield land available for residential development within the urban growth boundary as well as an abundance of urban renewal areas to meet future housing needs. Employment land for the coming decades is catered for within the urban growth boundary with industrial and commercial opportunities available in existing employment areas and planned greenfield sites.

There is therefore no need or merit in expanding the urban growth boundary to create more urban land.

Council is committed to maintaining the rural areas as rural and maintaining the current urban growth boundary. This provides certainty to landowners and land managers regarding what to expect from Hume's rural areas for the coming decades. Over time this will alleviate challenges associated with maintaining urban containment and the legacy of recent urban growth boundary changes.

Commitment to a fixed urban growth boundary will give landowners and land managers the certainty to invest time and money into the maintenance of their land. They will be confident to explore new land uses allowed within the Green Wedge Zone without concern that this expenditure will be wasted by the sudden change to planning controls.

### 4.2.1 Objective

To confirm Council's position on the long term expectations for the urban growth boundary and provide certainty to the community.

### 4.2.2 Strategies

- Recognise the availability of land within the urban growth boundary to meet the housing and employment needs of Hume and Melbourne for at least the next 15 years.
- Maintain Council's position that:
  - the urban growth boundary is fixed for at least the next 15 years.
  - any State Government review of the urban growth boundary to be isolated to areas in Figure 8.
  - any review of the urban growth boundary address the direction and criteria set out in Box 3.
- Work with the State Government to continue to monitor the need for housing and employment land in Hume and the northern regions of metropolitan Melbourne.

### Box 3: Council's position on State Government Urban Growth Boundary Reviews

Speculative land banking has had a destructive impact on Hume's rural areas. Land banking is often coupled with absentee landowners, which exacerbates the challenges of land management and agricultural viability experienced by the wider rural community.

Council believes that continued certainty for a fixed urban growth boundary is necessary to give landowners and land managers confidence to invest time and money into the maintenance of their land, and to explore land uses allowable within the Green Wedge Zone, without concern that this expenditure will be wasted by changes to the urban growth boundary.

The State Government has given a commitment to maintain a permanent urban growth boundary. Given the incremental changes that have been made by the State Government to the urban growth boundary in the past 15 years however, landowners have understandably lost faith in any certainty regarding the urban growth boundary.

Whilst Council does not support any alterations to the urban growth boundary, given the history of incremental changes, should the State Government seek to review the urban growth boundary in the future, Council would propose confining this review to the three areas identified in Sunbury HIGAP 2012 and the Hume Corridor HIGAP 2015 (refer Figure 8).

For each of these three areas, it is Council's expectation that any investigation undertaken by the State Government must respond to the following criteria identified the Hume Corridor HIGAP 2015 and as a minimum prove:

- *there is a quantitative and qualitative need for additional land for urban development and substantive community benefit arising from changing the urban growth boundary.*
- *that land within the current urban growth boundary could not meet this need and deliver comparable development opportunities and community benefits.*
- *the change would protect and not undermine the integrity of areas of natural and cultural values and the ongoing viability of valued land uses, quarries and rural businesses.*
- *there would be minimal impact on the 24 hour curfew free status of Melbourne Airport.*
- *there is sufficient capacity within the existing arterial road, tertiary health and education infrastructure to appropriately support the full extent of development and/or there is new major infrastructure which is either committed in existing budgets or has an in principle funding commitment from the responsible agency to be delivered in step with development.*
- *the development could access existing local community, education, health and recreation facilities with capacity to support development, as well as local shopping and public transport services or would deliver and viably support new facilities and services in step with development.*
- *the proposed boundary is based on holistic development areas and infrastructure, drainage and servicing catchments.*

The State Government would also need to demonstrate that changes to the urban growth boundary would deliver a development of the highest community benefit within the immediate years of the change that cannot be met within the urban growth boundary and would be fully realised within five years of any boundary change.

### Greenvale West Land

Should the State Government explore changes to the urban growth boundary in the Greenvale West area, in addition to the requirements above, the Hume Corridor HIGAP 2015 outlines they would also need to address the following for the area west of Mickleham Road/urban growth boundary to the alignment of the proposed Outer Metropolitan Ring Road:

- *What land is developable taking account of natural heritage constraints, including but not limited to: the grassy woodlands and scattered trees to the west of Mickleham Road; the Moonee Ponds Creek and its environs; the hilltop north of Craigieburn Road; and other areas of steep topography.*
- *What land is developable taking account of the Melbourne Airport flight paths, the National Airport Safeguarding Framework, a suitable buffer to the quarry on Oaklands Road, and the areas fragmented land ownership adjoining Mickleham Road north of Dunhelen Lane and Craigieburn Road.*
- *What land can be adequately and viably connected by local roads and bus services and serviced by local community facilities and water services infrastructure taking account of topography and required thresholds of development.*
- *What scale of development can be adequately supported based on the existing capacity of Mickleham Road and Somerton Road and large scale community infrastructure.*
- *What scale of development can be adequately supported based on the currently funded and committed major State infrastructure factoring in planned future growth in the Hume Corridor, Mitchell Shire Council and City of Whittlesea.*

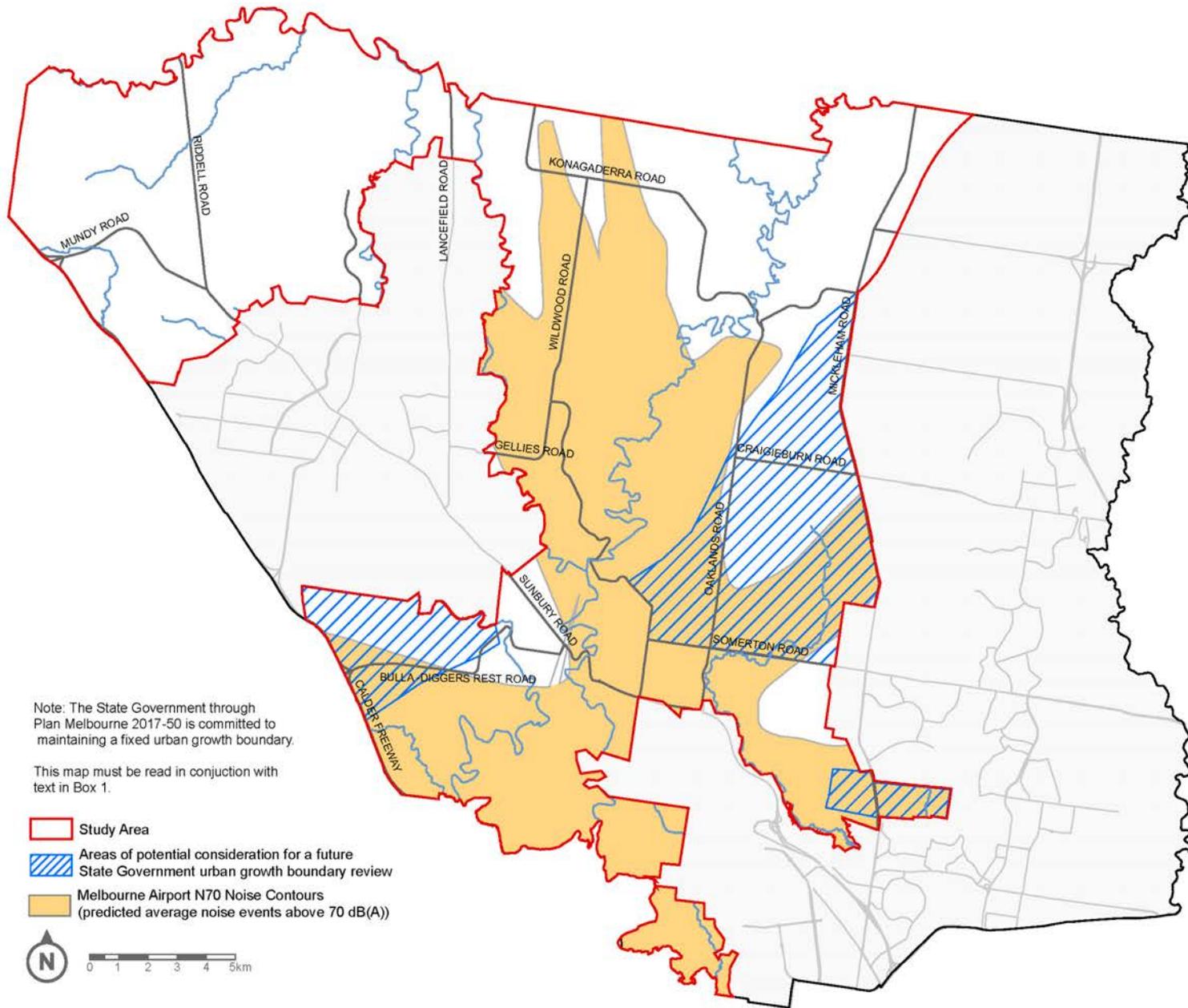
### Attwood Land

In addition to the overarching criteria above, any investigation by the State Government to include the Attwood land into the urban growth boundary should also demonstrate that the proposed development is suitable, viable and deliverable given the topography, and show how it will deliver the Attwood Connector (connecting Sunbury Road north of the airport and Pascoe Vale Road). Hume Corridor HIGAP 2015 identifies that it should also adopt the following controls:

- *minimum 30m setback to buildings from the banks of the Moonee Ponds creek and provision of a continuous road frontage between the creek and development.*
- *include steep land adjoining the Historic Woodlands as an extension of the open space network.*
- *a 10m and 30m residential amenity buffer setback from north and south of the site boundary respectively to frontage road with strong landscape screening.*
- *a maximum building height of 10m within 150m from site boundaries.*
- *all access roads to run parallel to contours with land parcels suitable for a range of businesses with lots for larger businesses located on the gentler slopes.*
- *other controls to manage building heights and minimise visual impacts.*

Due to the proximity of Woodlands Historic Park to the Attwood land, the State Government would also need to ensure conditions for appropriate bushfire management are in place.

Figure 8 – Urban Growth Boundary



### 4.3 Maintaining the Rural Separation of Settlements

Hume's rural areas play an important role in maintaining the rural break between Sunbury and the development that is occurring in the Hume Growth Corridor, metropolitan Melbourne and regional municipalities to the north.

Sunbury Township maintains the experience of a country town that is separated from the metropolitan areas, unlike other Melbourne suburbs. Not only do the rural areas physically separate Sunbury from the surrounding development, their rural character and sense of open, uninterrupted landscape contribute towards maintaining Sunbury as a distinct, satellite township. Given the urban growth that Sunbury will experience in the coming decades, it is important to Council and the Sunbury community that the rural separation and integrity of the Sunbury township is preserved.

The rural separation and sense of unique rural character is largely conserved by the subdivision pattern of the rural areas. This can be experienced as you travel north from the urban township, into the open landscape punctuated with volcanic cones in Hume's rural areas and then back into housing development of smaller, rural living properties in Macedon Ranges.

Council considers that the current subdivision controls are important to achieve this intended purpose by maintaining this rural separation of settlements and preserving this sense of rural character, while also supporting the protection of Melbourne Airport's curfew free status.

Council has heard from the community that there is pressure to lower the current minimum subdivision controls to allow new rural living opportunities. This is often justified by arguments that this will resolve issues of poor land management.

The pressure for changes to the subdivision controls and the opportunities for rural living are discussed further in Box 4. However, it is important to note that there is no evidence of a need for additional rural living properties beyond those currently available in Hume's rural areas and adjoining municipalities. There is also no evidence that smaller lots sizes have merit based on improved land management outcomes.

It is the diversity of lot sizes in Hume's rural areas and Inter Urban Break in Mickleham (refer Figure 9) that is an asset to Hume and creates the varied rural community of owners and residents that includes full time farmers and hobby farmers; lifestyle and Bulla township residents. The different lot sizes offer prospective landowners a range of property sizes to live on and enjoy, or to explore a variety of different land use opportunities.

#### 4.3.1 Objectives

To maintain the role of the rural areas in providing separation between Sunbury and other urban settlements.

To provide a diversity of lot sizes in the rural areas by maintaining the current subdivision controls.

#### 4.3.2 Strategies

- Maintain the current subdivision controls applying to the rural areas.
- Recognise the current availability of rural living opportunities in Hume and beyond.
- Monitor the need and demand for rural living opportunities.
- Advocate for State Government to assess and monitor the viability of different property sizes to identify evidence of any particular land size proving to be particularly unsuitable or unviable.



## Box 4: Sunbury North Case Study: Changes to Subdivision Controls, Rural Living and Other Opportunities

Council has heard from the community that there is a need to reduce the minimum Council has heard from the community that there is a need to reduce the minimum subdivision controls to allow further rural living opportunities.

Common arguments for changing the current subdivision controls include:

- There is a need for additional rural living opportunities.
- Smaller lot sizes will resolve issues of poor land management.
- My neighbour's property is already below the minimum allowable lot size.
- Smaller properties are allowed in Macedon Ranges and Melton municipalities.
- Agriculture is not viable and nothing else can be done with my land.

The potential benefits of reducing the minimum subdivision controls in the rural areas have been considered in preparing this Strategy. Not only do we know that the State Government emphatically resists changes to the subdivision controls based on recent efforts of other councils. These minimum lot sizes have been upheld by various governments for more than two decades (despite significant changes to the urban growth boundary under the same Green Wedge policy). Council also considers that the current subdivision controls are fulfilling their intended purpose and no need or merit has been demonstrated to support smaller lot sizes.

To unpack this issue, the land north of Sunbury is useful as a case study to consider the concerns that have been raised; the merits of changing minimum subdivision sizes; and to explore what opportunities are available for landowners under the green wedge controls. (Sunbury north is not affected by the Melbourne Airport noise controls unlike much of Hume's rural areas.)

### ***There is a need for additional rural living properties***

Over the last 50 years the rural areas have experienced a transition from traditional farming to residents moving in to enjoy the rural amenity and values

of the rural areas while remaining easily accessible to metropolitan Melbourne. Rather than earning a full-time income from their land through farming, residents can enjoy both a convenient commute to the city and the benefits of a rural property.

Throughout Hume's rural areas there is a good diversity of lot sizes available in the rural areas that allow prospective landowners to pursue different land uses options. These include:

- houses on large agricultural properties, including some of the oldest heritage listed homesteads hospitality and tourism related land use opportunities can be explored (such as at Marnong and Arundel Farm Estates).
- smaller properties within Bulla Township and on the edge of the urban growth boundary such as around Diggers Rest and west of Mickleham Road.
- cluster subdivisions from the 1970s and 1980s with a variety of property sizes, such as Oaklands Park.

There is no evidence that there is a need for additional rural lifestyle properties that cannot be catered to by the current availability of rural living opportunities in Hume and beyond.

### ***Smaller lot sizes will resolve issues of poor land management***

Council understands the destructive impact that land speculation has had on those practicing good land management and has investigated the potential smaller lot sizes to help to resolve these challenges. Submitters have suggested that they would have greater capacity to manage a smaller lot and have suggested changes to the minimum lot size on this basis.

While a smaller lot will require less work to manage than a larger lot, good land management is a result of many factors, including ability, motivation commitment and resources of the landowner.

Council's field officers have observed a lower standard of land management occurring on lots that are less than 10 hectares. It is Council's view that there is no perfect lot size that results in good land management that justifies changes to the minimum lot sizes.

Council will support landowners and land managers to practice good land management and enhance their capacity of land managers throughout the rural areas.

***My neighbour's property is already below the subdivision limit***

Owing to different subdivision controls being in place at different times, there are many examples of a large lot at the lower limit of the current control, such as 80 hectares, surrounded by one or more smaller lots of 10 hectares or less. The smaller lots are attractive lifestyle properties and are popular for horse owners. For owners of the large lots they are a reminder of the opportunities further subdivision could provide.

Whilst these extremes in lot size appear to be inequitable, the smaller lots were subdivided off the larger lots under the prevailing rules of the time.

The majority of land in the Green Wedge Zone has a minimum subdivision size of 80 hectares. The existing range of lot sizes is not justification to alter the subdivision controls today.

***Nearby properties in Macedon Ranges and Melton are 5-20 hectares***

Lifestyle properties in Macedon Ranges have a pattern of smaller subdivisions and minimum lot sizes much lower than those allowed under the Green Wedge Zone. These areas are outside of metropolitan Melbourne and the green wedge, therefore the policy and controls guiding subdivision in these areas is different to that in Hume's rural areas where green wedge have been protected under State policies and legislation for almost 50 years.

As discussed in Chapter 5.3, one of the key roles of Hume's rural areas is to preserve the rural separation of Sunbury from neighbouring development.

This includes creating a separation and sense of transition from Sunbury township, through the land north of Sunbury, into the rural living areas of Macedon Ranges. Changes to the minimum subdivision controls would diminish this sense of rural separation, and result in a loss of the sense of open landscapes and vistas that are what makes Hume's rural areas unique from Melton and the Macedon Ranges.

***Agriculture is not viable and nothing else can be done on my land***

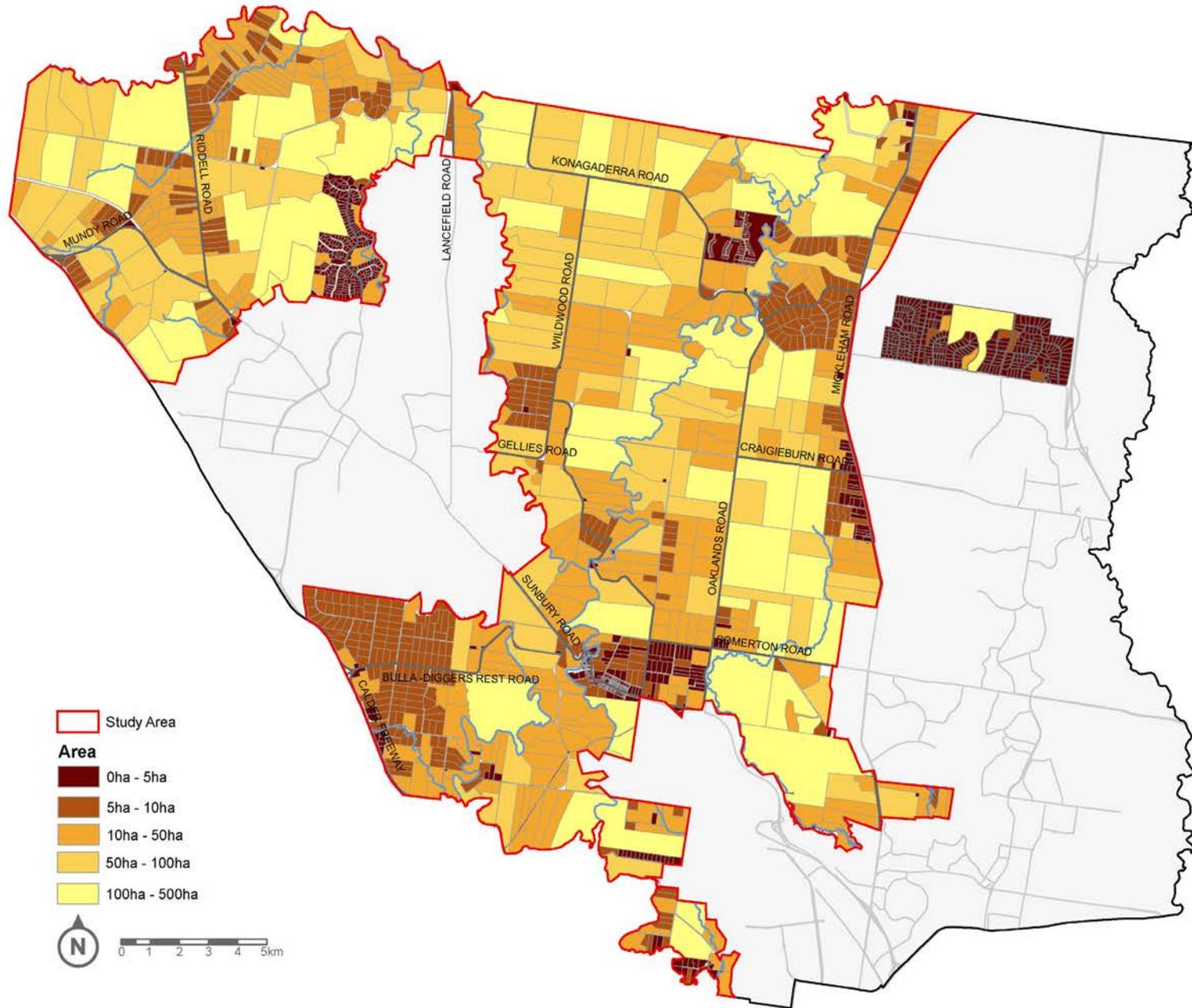
Council recognises that agriculture in Hume's rural areas is challenging and recognises that alternative land uses may provide greater opportunity. The diversity of lot sizes in the rural areas are an asset in allowing a variety of land use opportunities to capitalise on the unique attributes of Hume's rural areas, particularly for the land north of Sunbury

Owners of larger lots have a range of options from pursuing agriculture as an intensive, income generating operation or managing a herd of livestock that assists with land management and may provide a secondary income. Areas north of Sunbury have the advantage of the highest rainfall and best soils in Hume's rural areas.

High aesthetic values and excellent access to the Calder Freeway also offer realistic opportunities for visitor attracting uses. Stunning vistas to volcanic cones, views to Macedon Ranges and the striking creek settings of the area could support function centres and restaurant uses or serve the untapped demand for accommodation in the Sunbury region. The recent development of restaurant/function centres at Marnong and Arundel Farm Estates demonstrate that large lots can effectively capitalise on their space, landscape values and proximity to urban communities. Unlike the eastern parts of the rural areas, the areas to the north of Sunbury do not need to factor in protection of the airport and are less restricted to pursue accommodation uses.

Through the Rural Strategy, Council offers support and guidance for landowners to consider new agriculture, tourism and other non-agricultural uses for their land.

Figure 9 – Lot Sizes and Diversity







# 5 Future Opportunities and Enhancements

## 5.1 Supporting Agriculture, Water Access and Land Management

### Agriculture

It is recognised that opportunities for traditional agriculture are limited on much of Hume's rural land due to the nature of the soil, rainfall, water availability and property size profiles across the rural areas. Traditional agriculture is undergoing dramatic challenges and change across Victoria, Australia and the globe as primary producers confront the effects of climate change, globalisation and associated uncertainty. Whilst Council supports ongoing agricultural operations, including the equine industry, it is acknowledged that financial returns from primary production in Hume can be marginal.

Given the challenges experienced with agriculture, any financial returns from primary production in Hume's rural areas will need to be considered as one factor as to why landholders live in rural areas. There are also many non-financial benefits such as enjoyment of rural vistas; clean air and a quiet environment; proximity of wildlife and nature; opportunity for biodiversity stewardship; and 'country community feel'. Of considerable benefit is that these rural advantages exist in combination with the excellent proximity and access to metropolitan Melbourne for jobs and urban services.

Council will continue to provide support and information suitable for agricultural land users, including workshops, field days and courses to assist agricultural land users on relevant issues such as chemical use, weed management and regenerative agriculture (refer to Box 5). For agricultural businesses, Council offers courses throughout the year on business planning; financial management and tax; marketing; and distribution networking - refer to Box 6.

The greater certainty on the future of urban growth and subdivision provided in this Strategy will assist in managing land speculation that can impact on the financial viability of primary producer enterprises.

### Box 5: Regenerative Farming and Pasture Based Cropping

Regenerative farming is becoming increasingly popular in Australia on all farm sizes in response to land owners struggles with land management and agricultural viability.

The approach seeks to increase native vegetation, including tree cover and native grasses.

Small paddocks are fenced so that stock can be regularly rotated allowing land, soils and pastures, including native pastures, to regenerate. Rather than achieving stock targets, stock rates are adjusted based on what the land can support dependent on seasonal and climatic variability.

Similarly, pasture based cropping practices no-till sowing of cereal crops into perennial pasture during dormant periods. Its intention is to replace annual weeds with alternative cereal annual crops such as oats, barley or canola. This approach eliminates the need for costly herbicides, fertilisers and soil disturbance by utilising direct seed instead of tilling soil with traditional plows. In this approach, animals grazed on pastures are well fed while they fertilise the soil.

Unlike chemical dependent farming of the late 20th century, it seeks to work in partnership with nature to reduce or eliminate the use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers. This brings significant financial benefits through reduced production costs and increased yields.

### **Box 6. Selling Produce Regionally - Direct to Market and Business Connections**

Being close to city and peri-urban consumers, Hume's rural areas offer opportunities for adaptive marketing practices. Restaurants, consumers and farmers' markets all provide opportunities for direct market sales. This is particularly well suited to small producers to cut out the cost of the middleman and increase returns. It also provides opportunities to maintain contact with customers providing potential to experiment and adapt to their feedback.

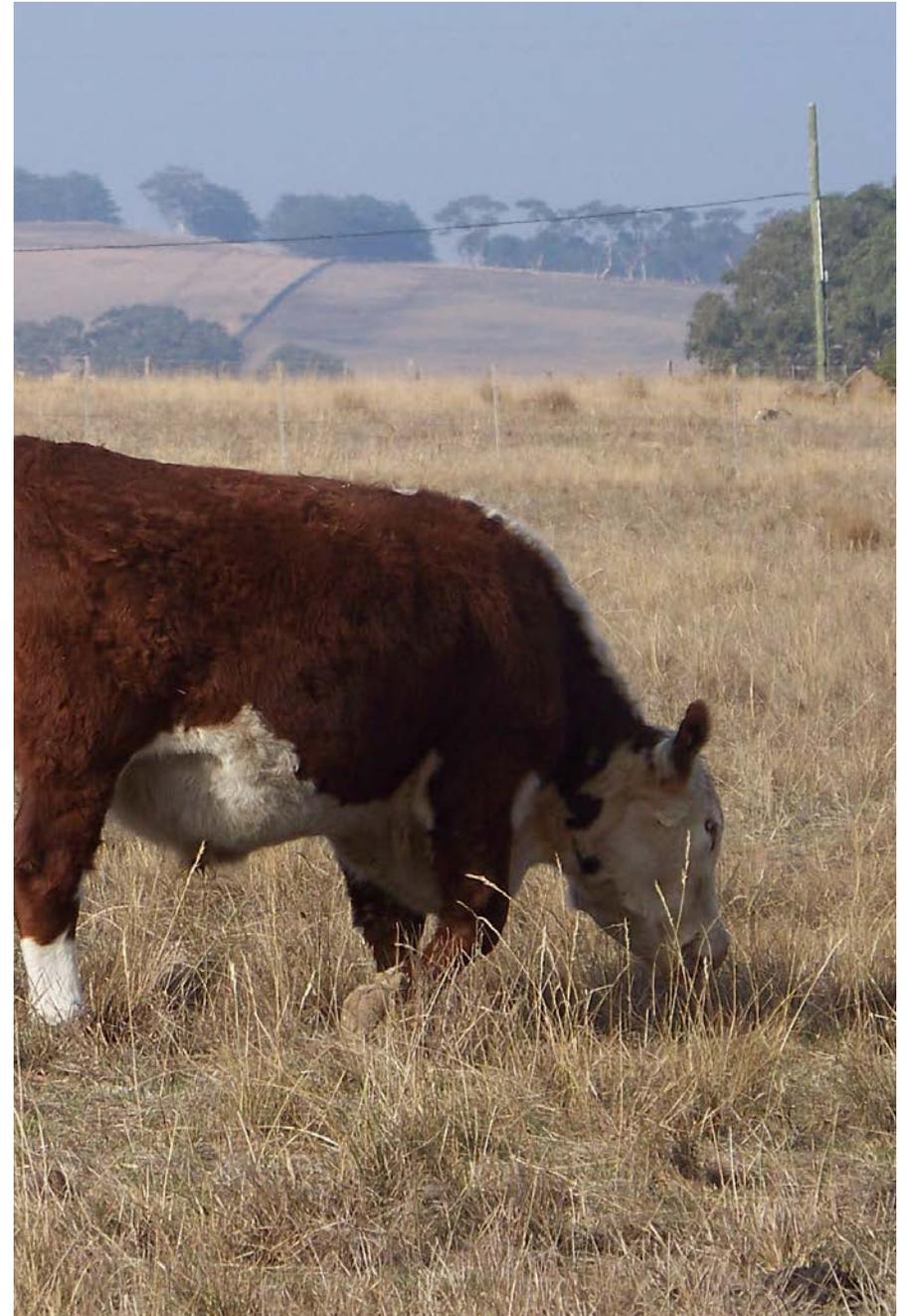
Many of the local roads in the rural area have regular passing traffic providing opportunities for farm gate sales of products grown on site, like eggs, vegetables and other non-perishable products. Pick your own farms have previously operated in the areas and provide both a tourism role and a market.

For perishable items like meat, dairy and wine, cellar door or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives are possibilities. CSA offers consumers shares in the produce over a defined period, usually 6 or 12 months.

During this time consumers receive produce on an agreed basis dependent on the growing season. The producer has a confirmed market for their produce taking some of the risk out of farming and confirming cash flow in advance of production.

For larger producers, the many food, beverage and fibre businesses in Melbourne's North provide opportunities to establish commercial markets. Melbourne's North Food Group is a regional industry body for the food and beverage sector managed by NORTH Link as a not for profit facilitator. It currently represents over 400 businesses across Northern Melbourne.

A joining fee entitles businesses to a wide range of networking and business support services that improve productivity, competitiveness and opportunities, by providing access to business reviews, group buying, best practice systems, export advice, training and trade shows/missions.  
(<https://melbournenorthfoodgroup.com.au/>)





## Land Management

Good land management, including grazing, prevents the escalation of weeds, pest animals and issues of soil erosion; promotes waterway health and biodiversity values; and reduces the risk of bushfires. Good land management also has an economic benefit in promoting livestock health.

Good and poor standards of land management are observed on both small and large lots in Hume and to a large degree depend on the resources, capability, attitude, interest or understanding of landowners and land managers.

Council will continue to support landowners and land managers through grants, rebate schemes and other incentives. Current programs include the Agricultural Land Use Rebate (ALUR) and Conserving our Rural Environments (CoRE) grants, refer to Box 7.

These programs have been set up to support agricultural land uses, encourage sustainable land use and good land management. Council provides both financial support and advice about managing issues such as weeds, pests and environmental values to recipients of the grants. A quarterly newsletter is also distributed to all landowners in the rural areas to provide regular and up to date sustainable land management information and guidance.

## Box 7: Review of Hume's agriculture and land management programs

These schemes have recently been reviewed to explore improvements that better support sustainable agriculture and land management. The review considered the impacts of growth and development, changes in climatic conditions including drought, and increasing land management pressures on landowners using their land for agricultural activities.

Several improvements are recommended for the ALUR and Council's broader rural engagement program to increase participation in land management and better support landscape-scale change. Key principles that underpin these recommendations are:

- Increasing participation / engagement – with only 30% of landowners, comprising 50% of the rural land in Hume, currently engaged in incentive programs, the ability of these programs to support landscape-scale change is limited. Increased participation is critical to encourage landowners to take a more proactive approach to managing their land.
- Broadening Council's array of tools to influence change – while incentive schemes and education and capacity-building are valued by the rural community, they cannot influence unengaged landowners and address the heavily weed-infested properties. In the absence of State government investment, Council will explore the important areas of compliance for weed management and increasing support for rural social and economic development.

The review recognised that the rural landscape across Hume is not uniform, with different areas exhibiting varying characteristics, such as soil type, topography, land use, biodiversity and proximity to urban areas. Each of these areas have their own challenges and opportunities. The revised program is looking to implement a precinct based approach to appropriately target support and education projects to the needs of different rural contexts and communities.

## Water

Sustainable land uses in the rural areas rely on consistent access to water which has become an increasingly critical issue in the last 20 years. Access to recycled water or stormwater harvesting opportunities from nearby urban areas could begin to address challenges of water scarcity and help disperse the wastewater from new urban developments adjoining the rural areas.

Challenges to the delivery of recycled water that were highlighted by the community during the Emerging Issues and Options Paper consultation were the current lack of infrastructure for recycled water; the cost associated with delivering the required infrastructure; and then the cost of the recycled water itself. The corporatisation of the water industry means that recycled water prices are based on user-pays pricing principles. The high costs associated with recycled water mean that even if it became available it may not be viable for some landowners and land managers.

Proximity to growing urban catchments provides potential for recycled water or harvested stormwater to reach some parts of Hume's rural areas. As such, Council will continue to encourage water authorities and Government agencies to explore opportunities to provide affordable recycled water or harvested stormwater to the rural areas. For example, Council will advocate for opportunities for rural landowners to tap into potential recycled water pipeline projects such as:

- a pipeline from Sunbury Recycled Water Plant to Melbourne Airport.
- a pipeline to follow the OMR alignment (when road construction is carried out) either bringing recycled water from eastern urban catchments and/or from Sunbury Recycled Water Plant.
- Stormwater harvesting from Sunbury and the urban areas east of Mickleham Road.

It is acknowledged that there is currently no certainty on whether recycled water or harvested stormwater will become available, nor when this could occur.

### 5.1.1 Objectives

To support the continuation of existing agricultural land uses.

To ensure all rural land is responsibly managed.

To encourage the exploration of opportunities for recycled water, stormwater harvesting and new and innovative agriculture uses and practices.

### 5.1.2 Strategies

- Recognise that many properties within the rural areas are still achieving agricultural output.
- Educate and support rural landowners through agriculture and land management programs.
- Commence a weed compliance program to encourage the control of noxious weeds on properties that have not voluntarily participated in Council's incentive and engagement programs to reduce the spread of these weeds across the rural areas.
- Continue Council's rural landowner engagement activities to support good land management and agricultural knowledge and opportunities.
- Prepare and distribute a new landowner information package specifically for rural land landowners.
- Continue to work with water authorities to increase incentives for sustainable water use from surface water, waterways, recycled water and harvested stormwater to provide secure water supply and maintain and improve the flow rates of natural waterways.



## 5.2 Enhancing Natural and Cultural Values: Biodiversity, Landscape, Erosion, Post and Pre Contact Heritage

Natural and cultural values are important to the sense of place experienced in Hume's rural areas and featured strongly in community feedback. The management and protection of these features will ensure they can continue to be appreciated by residents and visitors.

The dramatic landscape setting of the rural areas includes wide valleys, volcanic cones and scattered woodlands set within a context of open grassland plains. Under existing planning scheme controls many of these areas are protected (under the Environmental Significance Overlay) for their environmental values rather than their landscape significance. Whilst there may be overlap between environmental and landscape values, a review of existing controls will be undertaken to ensure that protection appropriately recognises and manages both environmental and landscape values. This review will provide a logical basis for managing any impacts of use and development on landscape value and environmental significance.

Many of the habitat areas that support biodiversity are fragmented due to past rural and urban development. This can limit the ability of species to move between habitat areas. The potential impact that development could have on habitat connectivity will be a consideration in the planning and delivery of future projects.

As Hume's rural areas have been relatively undisturbed they maintain many natural features that are likely to retain significant surface and subsurface Aboriginal cultural heritage. The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register identifies and manages the protection of over 200 places of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Sensitivity, generally located along creek corridors.

Spatial predictive modelling research has been applied and found additional areas of cultural heritage significance, refer Figure 10. Council will advocate for changes to the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register based on the findings of this work.

Importantly, potential exists to develop tourism and hospitality uses and facilities that provide greater public awareness and access to sites of both pre- and post-contact cultural heritage (refer Box 6). Council's environmental, arts and culture programs will continue to celebrate the heritage of Hume's rural areas.

Land uses that enable the enhancement of heritage properties and their accessibility to a wider audience are also encouraged. In addition, Council will continue to work on identifying and protecting sites of post contact heritage values and invites the community to nominate potential heritage sites for Council to assess.

Land management issues are a challenge for rural landowners and Council will support landowners. Council will also continue to manage environmental reserves and roadsides in rural areas prioritising actions that enhance biodiversity and provide opportunities for recreation. Council will explore the creation of walking trails to provide recreation and link reserves where possible.

It is known that the combination of soil types and topography on land to the north-west of Sunbury has resulted in erosion, including extensive rill and tunnel erosion. This limits access and land use opportunities in this area. Recent changes to the Hume Planning Scheme acknowledge a need to ensure any future planning of land north-west and west of Sunbury recognises erosion and land management issues along with the native vegetation and visual qualities of the area. In implementing this Strategy, Council will identify the extent of land at risk of erosion, landslip and other land degradation processes in the Hume Planning Scheme to manage land disturbance and inappropriate development.

### 5.2.1 Objectives:

To protect and promote aesthetic, natural and culturally significant values.

To identify and manage erosion and potential erosion risk.

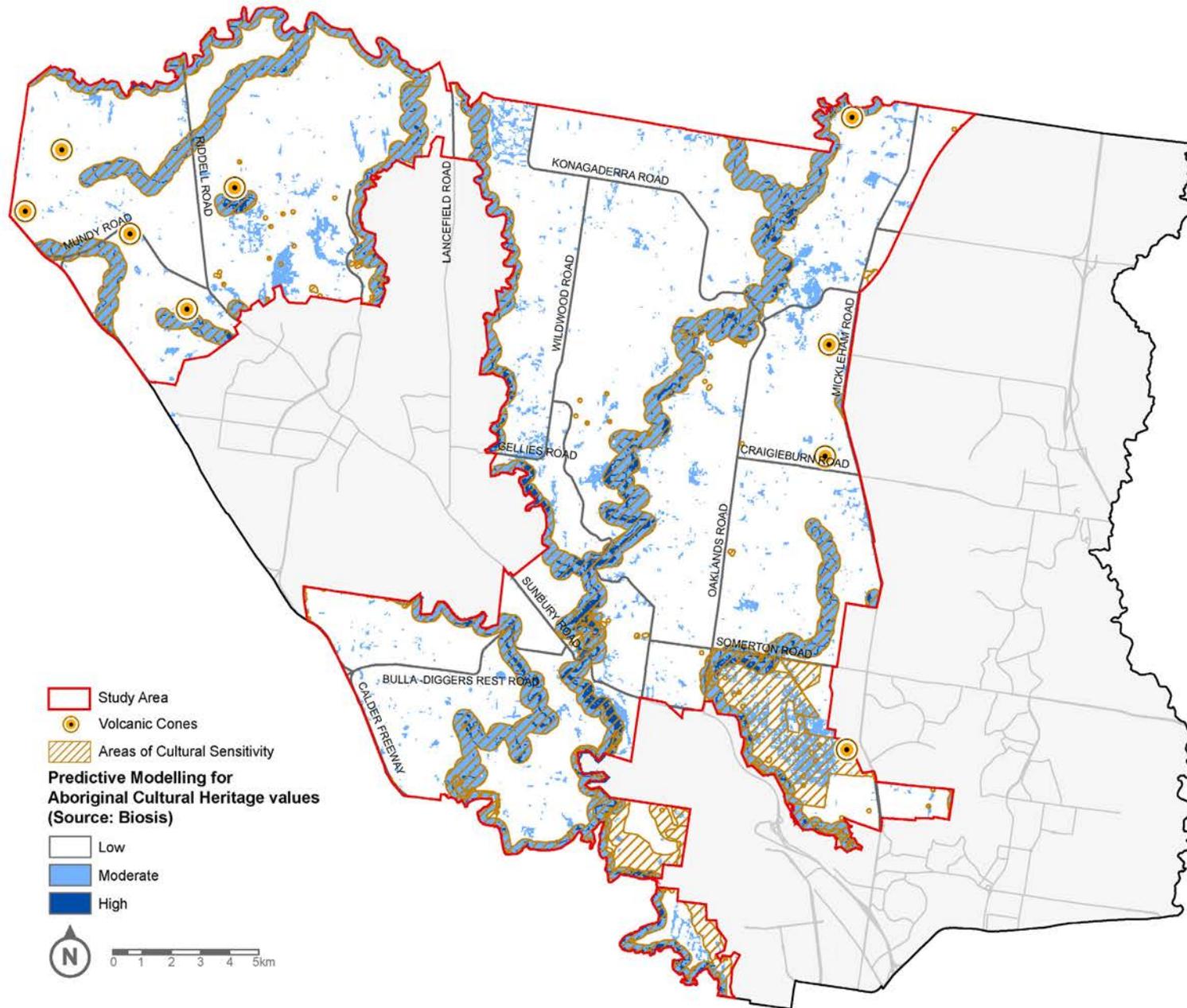
### 5.2.2 Strategies:

- Protection and enhancement of biodiversity values will continue to be a fundamental priority in Council projects and decisions.
- Review and revise overlay controls to appropriately manage the aesthetic, natural and culturally significant values in the rural areas.
- Ensure that landscape scale habitat connectivity is considered through the design and delivery of all infrastructure projects to ensure fauna can move freely around the rural areas.

- Advocate to protect areas with moderate to high archaeological potential under the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act.
- Promote the tourism potential of the aesthetic, natural and culturally significant values of the rural areas including the potential of a mapped and signposted driving trail highlighting heritage and landscape features.
- Introduce the Erosion Management Overlay on land identified as having erosion risk.



Figure 10 – Areas of Modelled Cultural Heritage Significance



## 5.3 Strengthening the Visitor Economy

### Tourism and Hospitality

It is a common misperception that only agricultural land uses are allowed in the Green Wedge Zone. Council believes that Hume's rural areas have the potential for tourism and hospitality opportunities that have yet to be fully realised. Such opportunities could be agricultural tourism, restaurants, function centres and visitor accommodation.

Tourism and hospitality uses in the Green Wedge Zone must operate in conjunction with nominated land uses, specifically Agriculture, Natural systems, Outdoor recreation facility, Rural industry or Winery land uses. These conditions are discussed further in Box 8.

The rural areas are already home to a variety of tourism and hospitality attractions that operate in conjunction with these nominated land uses. However, Council recognises the challenges of tourism and hospitality uses being required to operate in conjunction with the Green Wedge Zone nominated uses, particularly given that agricultural viability is marginal in many parts of Hume. Council will therefore encourage the State Government in any review of the green wedge controls to include additional nominated uses and relax the inconjunction with regulations.

Council will encourage and support landowners to pursue tourism, hospitality, and recreation related land uses that enhance and celebrate the unique character of Hume's rural areas. Hume's rural areas are highly accessible to an increasing number of prospective visitors in the growing urban populations of Sunbury, the Hume Growth Corridor and metropolitan Melbourne who will be attracted to rural tourism, hospitality and recreational uses that are not offered in urban areas (refer to Box 9).

The land north of Sunbury offers particular opportunities for tourism and hospitality uses as it is not constrained by Melbourne Airport protections; it features uninterrupted picturesque views of Jacksons Creek; vistas to several volcanic cones and the Macedon Ranges; and retains the larger lots that enable a range of tourism and hospitality uses that could operate in conjunction with agriculture.

### Recreation

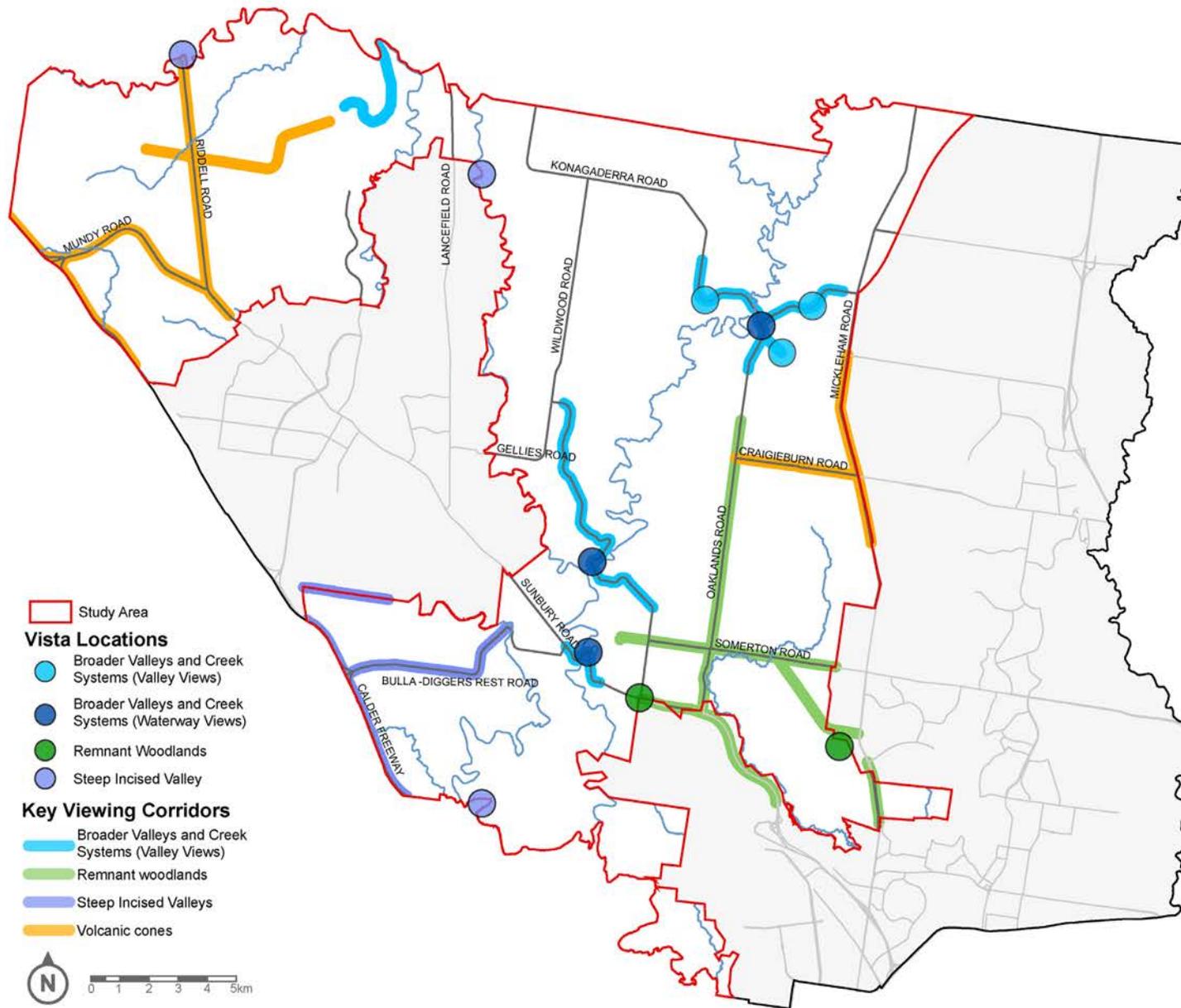
The natural features and landscape views and vistas within the rural areas provide opportunities to attract visitors for short trips and outdoor recreation. The protection and enhancement of natural features, views and vistas of the rural areas is important to preserve existing recreation opportunities and expand their access to community members.

Council will also explore opportunities to promote the tourism values of heritage and landscape features of the rural areas. For example, the development of a scenic and heritage driving trail promotional material, signage and interpretive information, in particularly leveraging existing reserves such as Woodlands Historic Park and Organ Pipes National Park. The viewing corridors and vistas shown in Figure 11 could provide the basis for a scenic trail.

In the longer term the rural areas present opportunities for expanded recreational walking and cycling trails, including in and around Bulla township when the township is bypassed. Council will explore the feasibility of utilising creek frontages and reserves for recreational trails in the longer term following the completion of current recreational trail projects along Jacksons Creek in Sunbury and along the Merri Creek. Council will also ensure road upgrades consider the safety of all road users, including cyclists, to explore their capacity for recreational cycling.



Figure 11 – Viewing Corridors and Vistas for potential trails





### State Government Support

Support from the State Government for tourism through funding, marketing and networking opportunities is based on tourism regions. Hume, including its rural areas, falls within the metropolitan Melbourne region unlike the Mornington Peninsula and Yarra Ranges green wedges that have a dedicated regional tourism board advocating for funding and other tourism development initiatives. Hume's rural areas do not fit the metropolitan classification and are therefore ineligible for State funding. Additionally, the funding for metropolitan Melbourne is focused primarily on inner-city Melbourne as a destination.

To better support the visitor economy in Hume and its rural areas, Council will continue to advocate to the State Government to reassess the structure of their tourism support organisations and address the funding and promotion gaps for Hume.

### 5.3.1 Objectives

- To create a stronger visitor economy in the rural areas.
- To encourage the exploration of tourism, hospitality and recreation opportunities.

### 5.3.2 Strategies

- Provide user friendly guidance on planning controls affecting the rural areas and increase landowner awareness of the potential for tourism and related activities through events and through case study articles in Council documents.
- Support and promote tourism, hospitality and recreation uses where they do not adversely impact on the natural and cultural environment or the visual amenity of the area.
- Direct larger scale tourism, hospitality and recreation uses to locations on major arterial roads.
- Increase landowner awareness of the potential for tourism and related activities through events and through case study articles in Council documents.
- Work with State Government to change the Hume Planning Scheme to enable a broader range of tourism and related business uses in Hume's rural areas, including: Function Centre; Group Accommodation; Residential Building; Restaurant; and Place of Assembly, excluding Place of worship.
- Explore the feasibility of developing small scale recreation, visitor roadside trails and lookout points.
- Explore how public land in rural areas can be enhanced to support public use and access.
- Explore the potential for recreation trails along creeks in the longer term.
- Advocate for a coordinated regional approach for tourism in Hume based on its mix of urban fringe and rural context.

# Indicative Opportunities



Water park



Children's farm



Gallery and sculpture garden



Outdoor maze



Farmers market



Nursery



Mushroom farm



Glamping



Obstacle course / outdoor fitness



Recreational cycling



Scenic driving trails



Horse riding

## Box 8: Tourism and Hospitality Uses in the Green Wedge Zone

Many parts of Hume's rural areas have a great potential to provide tourism and ecotourism facilities. They may have picturesque views of valleys or volcanic cones; be located on a regularly used road; include a hidden valley with dramatic boulders and overhanging gum trees; or have historic or biodiversity importance.

Some rural landowners indicated to us that accommodation or other tourist facilities are not allowed. Whilst, this may be correct in some cases, Council believes there are more opportunities for investment and development of visitor experiences than the community understands.

Under the Hume Planning Scheme, Function Centres, Group Accommodation, Residential Hotel and Restaurant may be allowed where they operate in conjunction with Agriculture, **Natural systems**, Outdoor recreation facility, Rural industry or Winery. The multi-purpose winery, function centre and restaurant operations at the Marnong Estate and Arundel Farm Estate are successful examples of these opportunities. These operations have relied on winery operations to allow their tourism and hospitality uses under the Green Wedge Zone controls.

On non-agricultural properties other opportunities may be available without agriculture or winery uses but where **Natural systems** feature on the land.

**Natural systems** are a land use term that is defined under the Hume Planning Scheme as:

Land in substantially its natural state which is used to maintain ecological systems, or to preserve an area of historic, scientific, aesthetic, or cultural significance (Clause 73.03).

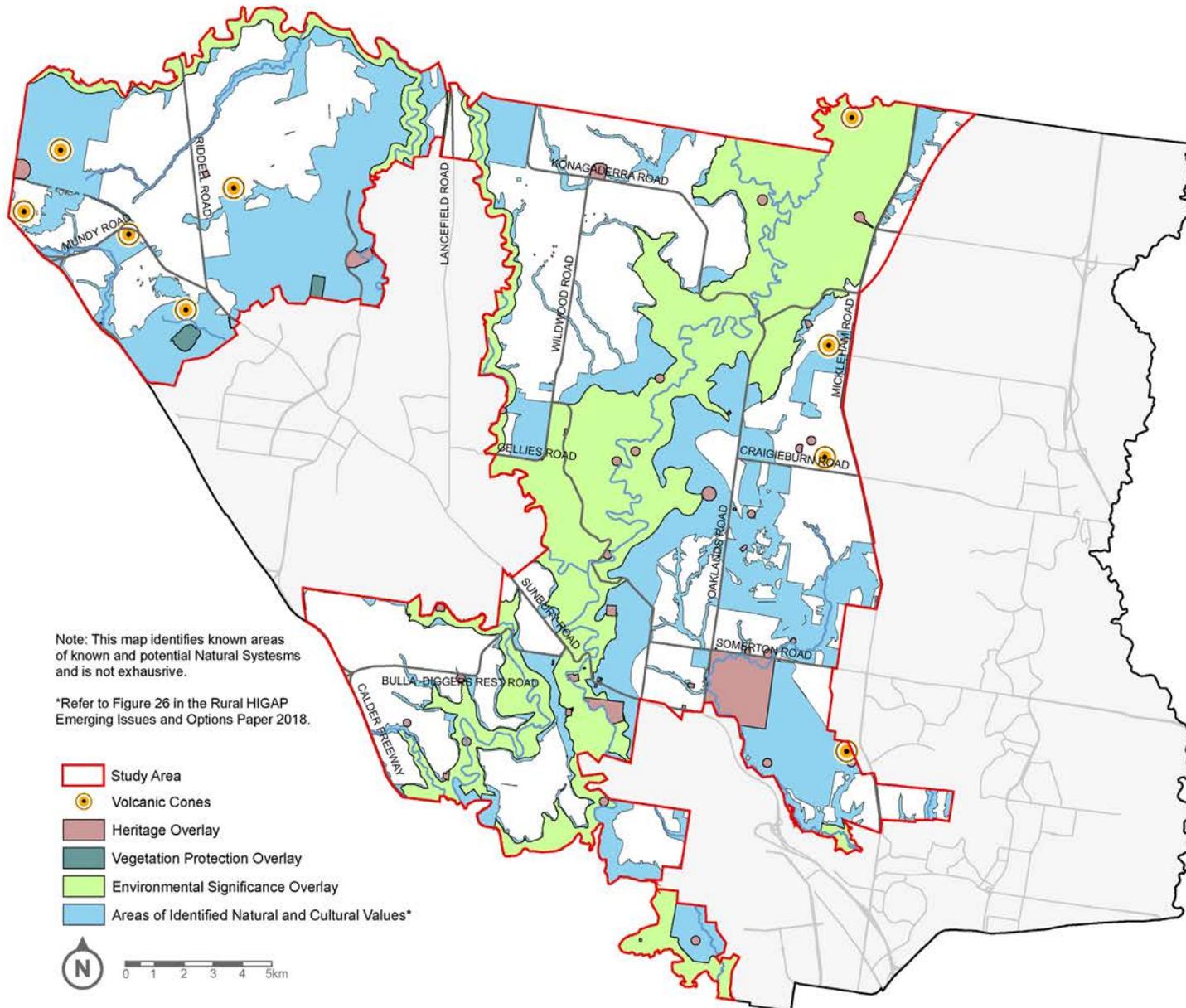
Figure 12 identifies many of the known ecological, historic, aesthetic or cultural values in the rural areas that may provide opportunities for tourist related uses. Importantly, the balance between the values present and the scale and potential impacts of any use will influence what may be possible. A use relying on **Natural Systems** should benefit the **Natural Systems** for example by bringing environmental benefits, protecting cultural features and increasing awareness of aesthetic values.

An application proposing a use in conjunction with Natural Systems must apply implement the purposes and decision guidelines of the Green Wedge Zone, any applicable overlays and any other planning scheme controls that apply to the land (State and Local Policy, Clause 51.02 Metropolitan Green Wedge Land: Core Planning Provisions and 64.02). A land use in conjunction with natural systems will be tested against Clause 64.02 that requires:

- An essential association between the two uses; and
- A genuine, close and continuing functional relationship in its operation with the other use.

Guiding case law on these questions includes *Jinalec Park Pty Ltd v Mornington Peninsula SC* [2007] VCAT 1238; *Dandenong Ranges Steiner School v Cardinia Shire Council (Red Dot)* [2005] VCAT 1152; *Boucher & Anor v Dandenong Ranges Steiner School Inc & Ors* [2005] VSC 400; *Brumbys Road Investments Pty Ltd v Manningham CC* [2018] VCAT 449.

Figure 12 – Areas of Potential Natural Systems



## Box 9: Considerations for Section 2 Use Proposals in the Green Wedge Zone

Hume's rural areas have a range of existing constraints and opportunities that may influence the types of uses that are appropriate and preferred by Council. As very few land uses are prohibited under the Green Wedge Zone most land use proposals will need a planning permit. Land uses that require a planning permit are commonly known as Section 2 uses.

The following provides guidance on the considerations Council will apply in assessing these proposals. Planning permit applications should address the following matters as relevant:

### Location and access

Any use must have continuous access from roads with a minimum seal width of seven metres and the road must be constructed to a standard suitable for the projected traffic volumes. In no case should a use be allowed on a local road that would increase traffic volumes to over 3,000 vehicles per day based on the cumulative traffic projections.

### Visual qualities

Such facilities should be located on sites with the following visual attributes in preference order:

- Sites on the immediate edge of the urban area where established road reserve landscaping and topographical features screen or limit views to the facility from public vantage points (roads and public reserves) and creek environs.
- Sites on the immediate edge of the urban area where property landscaping screens or limits views to the facility from public vantage points (roads and public reserves) and creek environs.
- Sites where road reserve planting, property landscaping and/or topographical features limit views to the facility from public vantage points (roads and public reserves) and creek environs

Such facilities are discouraged from locating on sites where views from public vantage points and creek environs to the facility cannot be limited by existing road reserve or existing property boundary landscaping and/or topographical features.

### Built form

No building or other structure should exceed a height of 8 metres above natural ground level.

The total site coverage of all buildings should not exceed 10%.

### Permeability

The total site area covered by built form, car parking, pathways and other hard surfaces should be no greater than 30%.

Stormwater runoff should be designed and managed to be contained within the boundaries of the application site.

### Setbacks

Buildings, car parking and other infrastructure should be setback to minimise visual impacts in the local context, including from roads, public land and adjoining properties.

Car parking and other infrastructure associated with a Section 2 use (not including landscaping) should be setback a minimum of 40 metres from any road boundary and 10 metres from any side boundary.

### Managing impact on adjoining properties

Any Section 2 use should be located on sites of sufficient scale to mitigate the noise and light spill impacts on adjoining properties through setbacks and buffers within the site.

### Ultimate use

Applications for Section 2 uses or extensions of existing Section 2 use facilities should identify the ultimate intended scale and mix of uses for the site.

### Car parking

All car parking requirements should be met on site for the ultimate intended scale and mix of uses without relying on on-street parking.

All car parking areas, including overflow car parking areas, should not be visible

from public vantage points. Minimising views of car parking should be achieved by generous setbacks from road boundaries and landscaping however should not rely solely on landscape screening. Boundary fencing should be rural in nature with a high degree of visual permeability into the site.

### **Waste management**

An application must provide waste management details that demonstrate the collection and disposal of waste and recyclables associated with the proposed uses on the site. Waste management should provide for the following:

- The collection of waste associated with the uses on the land, including the provision of bulk waste collection bins or approved alternative, recycling bins, the storage of other refuse and solid wastes in bins or receptacles within suitable screened and accessible areas.
- Commercial waste bins being placed or allow to remain not in view of the public, and receptacles not emitting any adverse odours.
- Designation of methods of collection including the need to provide for private services or utilisation of council services.
- Appropriate areas of bin storage on site and areas of waste bin storage on collection days.

## **5.4 Opportunities for Renewable Energy**

Renewable energy generation is a rapidly evolving field as technological innovation can create new opportunities.

The potential for wind and solar energy facilities in the rural areas are currently limited by State Government guidelines due to required separation distances from dwellings. Developments within the renewable energy field, including that of wind, solar, waste to energy and battery storage will therefore be led by the State Government and the private sector. Council will work with investors in renewable energy and will monitor the emergence of renewable energy technologies for their application in the rural areas.

### **5.4.1 Objectives**

To encourage opportunities for renewable energy production.

### **5.4.2 Strategies**

- Monitor renewable energy production opportunities for Council investment on public land.
- Support renewable energy enquiries through the feasibility and planning approval stages.
- Encourage use of alternative energy for residential and business uses in the rural areas.





## 6 Managing Change

### 6.1 Responding to Climate Change

The climate future of Hume will see an increase of hotter and drier weather conditions, less overall rainfall and an increase in frequency and intensity of weather events. Impacts from these changes may include bush fires, heat waves, droughts and floods.

Council will continue to monitor the local impacts of climate change; assist through climate change adaptation support and education; and participate in whole of government climate leadership responses.

Climate change is, and will continue to, exacerbate many of the current challenges confronting the rural community, such as issues of water scarcity contributing to the decline in the viability of conventional agriculture. Some species of flora and fauna are vulnerable to these impacts which is contributing to the loss of biodiversity. Drier conditions and intense rainfall events are exacerbating the deterioration of waterways and areas prone to erosion. (Specific strategies responding to the challenges confronting agriculture, waterways, erosion and biodiversity are outlined in earlier chapters of this Strategy.)

#### 6.1.1 Objectives

To respond to the challenges of climate change.

To support rural landholders to build resilience to the challenges of climate change.

#### 6.1.2 Strategies

- Continue to take action on climate change by reducing Council's greenhouse gas emissions and supporting community emission reductions.
- Monitor and respond to the effects of climate change on the rural areas.
- Support and encourage climate change adaptation measures in the use and management of rural land (such as regenerative agriculture, hydroponic and greenhouse ventures, water retention techniques and carbon sequestration).

### 6.2 Managing Roads and Infrastructure

In the future the character and feel of the rural areas will be changed by major road and infrastructure projects occurring within and around the rural areas resulting from the urban growth of Melbourne.

In the short term and into the future, urban growth will place pressure on the rural road network. This pressure can see the potential for conflict between different road users. Such as drivers who seek to avoid congested urban roads via alternative routes in the rural areas encountering rural road users such as farmers moving stock, farming machinery and vehicles between rural properties. Ensuring that the rural road network remains safe for all road users, including drivers, agricultural operators and cyclists, is a priority for Council.

Traffic modelling has concluded that despite the increase in road users, the existing rural road network has capacity to support the rural and nearby communities. Maintaining appropriate movements along rural roads in the long term will rely on the planned duplication of existing major and arterial roads and proposed major road projects in both the rural and urban areas.

Council will therefore continue to advocate for the timely upgrade and delivery of necessary road infrastructure to manage Melbourne's urban growth and its impact on the rural road network. Two road projects that Council consider to be vital are the duplication of Mickleham Road and Sunbury Road and delivery of the Bulla Bypass.

In the long term the rural road network and the character of the rural areas will be altered by these major road projects, notably: the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road; the Melbourne Airport Link; the Bulla Bypass; and the Attwood Connector (refer Figure13). The delivery of Bulla Bypass for instance, will see a significant reduction in the volume of through traffic experienced in Bulla township, which may provide for a range of positive community and economic opportunities for the township.

While acknowledging the importance of these projects, Hume's rural areas are often seen as the default location for major new road and other infrastructure

projects. The convenience of locating infrastructure that serves the wider metropolitan area in rural areas must come with an awareness of the rural community that is being impacted.

Rural landowners and businesses face considerable uncertainty for the future of their land as their properties become layered with different overlays and easements for major projects. The timing, exact alignment and requirements for compulsorily acquiring land for many of these proposed infrastructure projects are often unknown creating further uncertainty.

Council will continue to advocate for design measures to: manage the impact of these proposed projects on the rural road network; ensure they consider the impact on rural landowners and enterprises; consider how they will transform the character and feel of rural areas; and their impact on biodiversity and habitat connectivity.

It is Council's view that any decision making by the State Government and infrastructure providers for these and future projects must include meaningful consultation and consideration of the community within the rural areas who will be directly and indirectly affected by these projects, as well as ongoing communication throughout the life of the projects.

### 6.2.1 Objectives

- To ensure the safety, amenity and efficiency of local roads for all road users.
- To facilitate and encourage the timely delivery of infrastructure and transport projects and upgrades.
- To manage the impact of major transport and infrastructure projects on rural landowners and businesses.
- To ensure the rural community is consulted throughout the life of major transport and infrastructure projects.
- To ensure community and habitat connectivity is maintained around major transport and infrastructure projects.

### 6.2.2 Strategies

- Advocate for the timely delivery of major road and transport infrastructure in rural areas to minimise traffic on local rural roads.
- Advocate that major transport and infrastructure projects prioritise consultation with affected landowners throughout all identification, approval and detailed design stages.
- Advocate for fauna sensitive road design to mitigate the impact of fragmentation caused by major transport and infrastructure projects.
- Ensure that Council considers the impact and opportunities of major infrastructure projects on the rural landowners and businesses.
- Monitor the safety and operational needs of local rural roads to address increases in traffic and network changes.

## 6.3 Protecting Extractive Industries and Waste Management

### *Extractive Industries and Waste Facilities*

The rural areas are home to extractive industries/quarries and waste facilities that benefit from the protection afforded to the rural areas through their green wedge status, refer Figure 14.

Their establishment in the rural areas allows these industries to service Melbourne's growing urban communities while ensuring that the noise, smell and other amenity impacts necessary for their function affect a minimal number of people.

While this Strategy seeks to promote tourism, recreational and other land uses within the rural areas, ensuring the continued operation of extractive industries and waste facilities are a priority. Therefore, buffers around quarries and waste facilities will be incorporated into the Hume Planning Scheme to manage development in these areas.

This is necessary not only to protect the operation of the quarries and waste facilities, but also to protect the community from exposure to these industries.

Figure 13 – Major State Government Road Projects

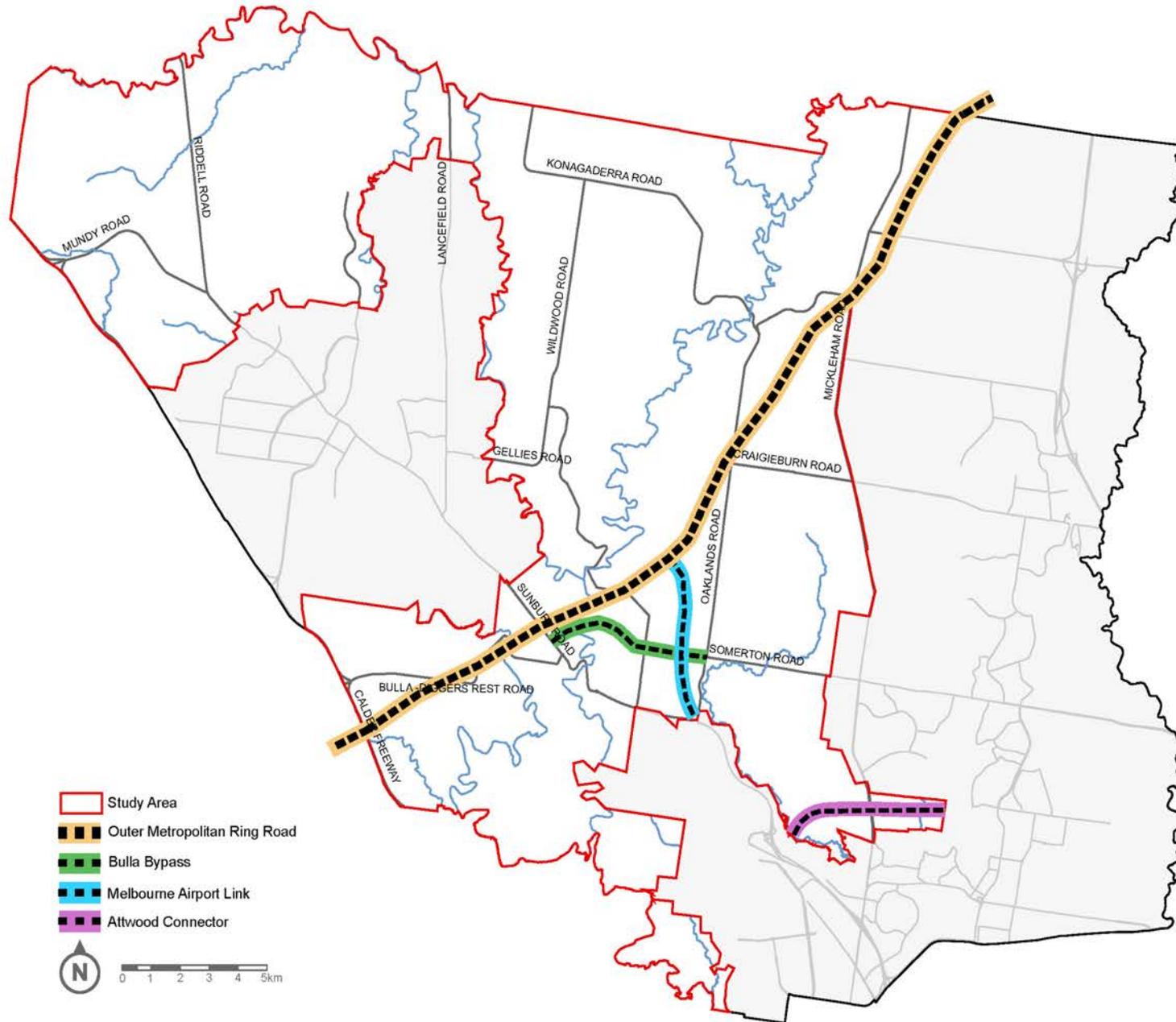
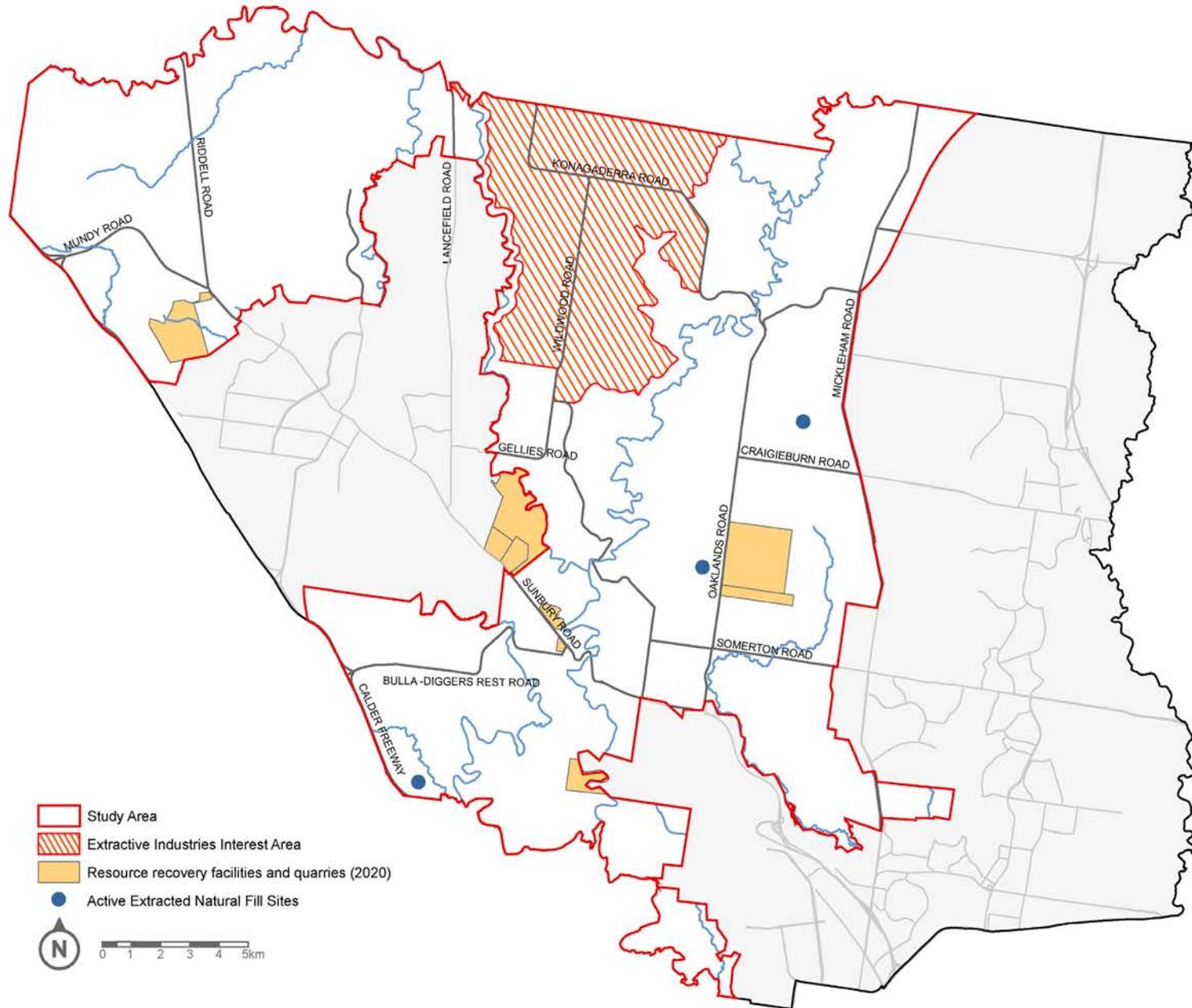


Figure 14 – Existing and Potential Extractive and Resource Recovery Facilities



Large areas of Wildwood and Clarkefield have been identified as an Extractive Industry Interest Area. As the demand for quarried materials for construction projects will only increase into the future, development around the Extractive Industry Interest Area will be managed to ensure opportunities to locally source extractive materials is not compromised.

### ***Disposal of Fill Material and Illegal Waste***

The rural areas are sometimes seen as a convenient option for waste dumping, particularly natural excavated virgin fill materials from urban development.

Natural excavated virgin fill materials is the soil, rock, clay and other materials excavated during the construction of housing and other development projects. This fill material has often been dumped on roadsides and in public reserves, however it occurs without approval on private properties where it has been spread over large areas and within creeks and waterways. The environmental impact of fill material dumping includes an increased risk of erosion and the destruction of native vegetation, faunal habitats and degrades waterway health. It is also a visual blight and disrespectful to the rural community.

There are several approved fill material sites in the rural areas, however with the increase in housing development across Melbourne the rural areas will continue to experience pressure to serve as a place of fill material dumping. Council will continue to take enforcement action against any illegal fill material dumping. It is therefore necessary to manage where fill material depositing could be acceptable, (refer to the criteria of planning permit required uses in Box 9).

#### **6.3.1 Objectives**

To protect the role of the rural areas in the provision of waste services and extractive materials.

To minimise illegal dumping of waste and natural excavated virgin fill materials.

#### **6.3.2 Strategies**

- Safeguard the long-term potential of the Extractive Industry Interest Area in Clarkefield and Wildwood.
- Explore appropriate planning scheme mechanisms to formalise extractive industries and waste facility buffers.

- Prosecute the illegal dumping of rubbish and natural excavated virgin fill material.
- Manage appropriate locations for natural excavated virgin fill materials from urban development.

## **6.4 Appropriate Locations for Schools and Places of Worship**

The State Government introduced changes to the Green Wedge Zones for metropolitan Melbourne in 2013 to allow schools and places of worship proposal. The green wedge areas are attractive to new and existing non-government schools, and places of worship because of the cheaper land and more space for long term expansion compared to urban land within the urban growth boundary.

Schools and Places of Worship serve the needs of urban communities and are preferred within the urban growth boundary close to their local community and public transport and path networks. Inside the urban growth boundary, greenfield land for different uses is allocated through the structure planning process undertaken at a precinct level. This process relies on private schools or places of worship to demonstrate interest during the early planning phase, which can often be years before development commences. The need for schools and places of worship however, generally follows the incremental development of new urban areas as the needs of specific communities emerge and therefore is unknown at the important precinct planning stage.

Council appreciates that the timing of the precinct planning process, coupled with issues of finding affordable land after this planning process has occurred, mean that schools and places of worship are often unable to find available land within the urban growth boundary where their communities live.

In the absence of effective planning for these uses inside the urban growth boundary, the rural areas can provide an opportunity for the establishment of schools and places of worship in appropriate locations. This needs to be carefully balanced against the impacts that schools and places of worship will have on the rural areas, such as accessibility; conflict with existing rural land uses; environmental impacts; increased traffic movement; decreased liability of the urban areas; and specifically for Hume, the impact of Melbourne Airport and the flightpaths.

Given that this challenge is common to most Council's with rural land in and around Melbourne, it is important to provide greater guidance on schools and places of worship in rural areas through State planning policy. In the absence of state-wide guidance, Boxes 9 and 10 provide guidance where a school or place of worship is proposed in Hume's rural area.

#### 6.4.1 Objectives

To support well designed and appropriately sized schools and places of worship in appropriate locations.

### Box 10: Urban Uses – Schools and Places of Worship

Schools and place of worship (land used for religious activities) uses can be allowed under the Green Wedge Zone. These uses generally serve urban communities and are ideally located inside the urban growth boundary where access to active and public transport options are available.

Council agrees that some locations in the rural areas with access to the arterial network may be appropriate (refer guidelines below). Council will recommend these guidelines be applied throughout metropolitan Melbourne's green wedges in advocating to the State Government.

#### ***Guidelines for Schools and Places of Worship in Hume's rural areas***

Proposals for Schools and Places of Worship in Hume's rural areas will be considered against the following transport accessibility attributes (in preference order):

1. a declared arterial road with public transport services on the immediate edge of the urban growth boundary

#### 6.4.2 Strategies

- Advocate for State Government to develop guidance and criteria for the appropriate scale, location and design of schools and places of worship in rural areas on the fringe of Melbourne and explore options for developing Hume-specific criteria to be incorporated in the Planning Scheme.
- In the absence of State policy consider the parameters set in Boxes 7 and 8 in assessing planning proposals for schools and places of worship.

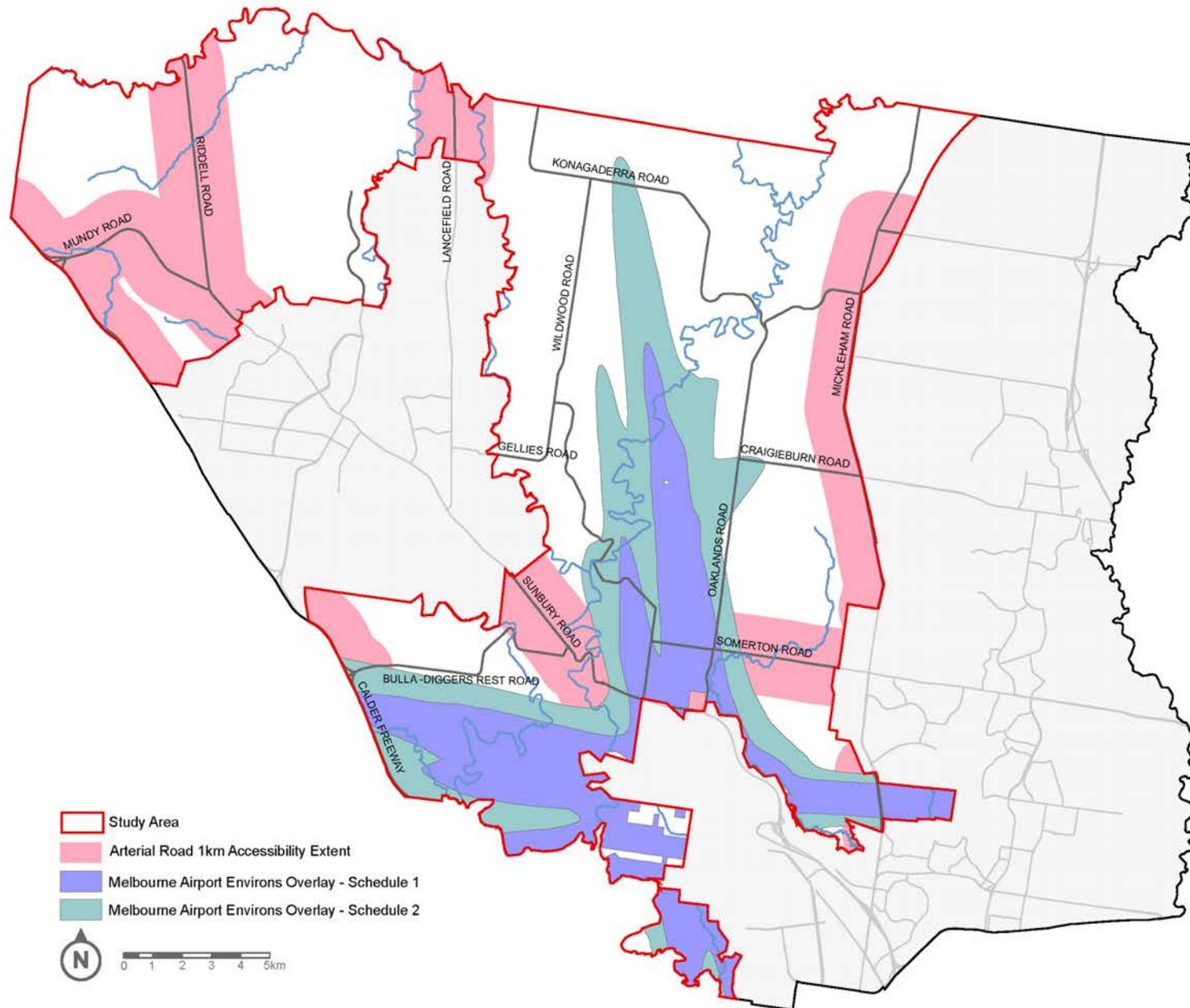
2. a declared arterial road with public transport services
3. a declared arterial road without public transport services
4. a local road within 1km of a declared road and with a full lane width in each direction and public transport services (minimum 7 metres wide)
5. a local road within 1km of a declared road and with a full lane width in each direction
6. where the existing and forecast road volumes have capacity to accommodate any likely traffic volumes.

Such facilities are discouraged in locations that do not have these transport attributes and will generally not be supported under the Melbourne Airport Environs Overlay.

Figure 15 illustrates locations that may be suitable based on the above transport accessibility attributes.

These proposals will also be assessed under the Considerations for Section 2 use proposals under the Green Wedge Zone (refer Box 7) relating to visual, landscape and environmental qualities; amenity; and car parking.

Figure 15 – Potential areas for Schools and Places of Worship





# 7 Implementation

The draft Strategy responds to a wide range of issues facing the rural areas and its landowners. As set out in Chapter 2, the strategic responses reflect a holistic and partnership approach designed to provide:

- **Certainty** – on the future planning for the rural areas, particularly future urban development and subdivision, to assist the rural community make investments in their land with a greater level of confidence.
- **Support** – to help enable landowners to continue to pursue current activities, diversify into new activities, maximise opportunities associated with a growing urban population, and to effectively manage land.

- **Engagement** – to inform the rural community of potential future changes and to grow community connectedness and capacity to realise future opportunities and manage challenges.

In finalising the Strategy following consultation, an Action Plan will be prepared to bring all the strategies together, allocate responsibilities and provide an indicative timeframe. The Action Plan will give guidance on monitoring and review of the strategies over the next 20 years.



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