

RURAL AREAS STRATEGY PLAN

Towards 2011

PREPARED FOR THE

Shire of Bulla

BY

Henshall Hansen Associates

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIS STRATEGY PLAN AND THE SHIRE OF BULLA GENERAL PLAN

The Council of the Shire of Bulla has prepared a General Plan for the whole of the municipality. That Plan provides the framework within which this Strategy Plan for the Rural Areas of the Shire has been prepared.

The General Plan presents the overall goals and policies for the municipality as a single entity. It also presents planning policies for each of four *key policy areas* which have been identified in the municipality. These *key policy areas* are Sunbury, Craigieburn, Greenvale/Attwood and the Rural Areas.

In addition the General Plan sets out goals and policies for certain *key issues* which are relevant to the future planning of the municipality. These issues include matters such as the environment and limits to urban growth, population, housing and residential development, human services and facilities, economic development and jobs, transport and access, physical infrastructure, development funding and implementation. The policies for many of these issues define the boundaries of urban development in the Shire and hence the extent and nature of the rural areas.

The range of policies which are contained in the General Plan set the basic parameters within which more detailed strategy plans for different parts of the Shire, such as this Plan for the Rural Areas, have been prepared. The purpose of the strategy plans is to advance the policies set out in the General Plan to a level where they provide sufficient detail to give meaningful guidance to enable Council to coordinate the future planning and development of each of those areas.

The General Plan for the Shire of Bulla is shown in Figure 1.

GENERAL PLAN

April 1993

FIGURE 1

Scale in meters

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THIS STRATEGY PLAN AND HOW IT WILL BE USED

This Strategy Plan sets out Council's policies for the Rural Areas within the municipality. These policies describe the way Council desires the Rural Areas to be planned and developed over the next 20 years to 2011. Extensive community consultation has been involved in preparing the Strategy Plan and as a result the Plan is also a reflection of the community's aspirations for the area.

The Strategy Plan is a more important document than the General Plan for those seeking a detailed understanding of how the Rural Areas are likely to develop over the next 20 years.

The Strategy Plan will essentially be used by Council to coordinate its own actions in planning and managing future land use, subdivision and development in the Rural Areas of the Shire, and by landowners and the community to understand the planning policies and controls which will apply to their land. In particular it will be used by Council as the basis for new planning controls and zones which will need to be prepared and included into the Bulla Planning Scheme, and for assessing development proposals in the area.



WHAT THE RURAL AREAS MEAN TO THE SHIRE OF BULLA

In interpreting and understanding this Strategy for the Rural Areas it is important to understand what the Rural Areas mean to residents of the municipality.

The Rural Areas are vitally important to the future of the Shire of Bulla. In many respects this Strategy is the most important of the four strategies being prepared for different parts of the Shire. Its success is essential if the rural character and amenity of the Shire is to be retained in the face of the extreme pressures for urban development which will occur in the future.

(1) "City Living Country Style"

The rural areas of the Shire of Bulla are fundamental to the character and identity of the municipality, not only for people who live in them, but for people who live in the towns and urban areas located within the municipality as well.

The corporate logo of the Shire of Bulla is "City Living - Country Style". This theme has real meaning for residents of the Shire - they relate to it and believe in it. It encapsulates what they like about living in the Shire of Bulla, which is the opportunity to live in a rural or country environment whilst having access to all the facilities normally associated with city living.

The principal objective of Council expressed in its Corporate Strategy, and which is strongly reiterated throughout the Bulla General Plan and the subsequent Strategy Plans, is to retain the balance between urban living and country lifestyle in the municipality in the future. Accordingly, the rural areas have an important role to play in the future of the Shire of Bulla.

(2) *Lifestyle*

Lifestyle relates to how people live and what they enjoy about life. The rural character of the Shire of Bulla has an overriding bearing on the lifestyle enjoyed by all residents of the municipality and is the reason why most people choose to live in the Shire of Bulla.

For people living within the rural areas themselves the rural areas provide them with a "way of life" and often a source of income. However, the unfortunate trend is for professional or full time farmers to leave the Shire to pursue farming activities in other parts of Victoria which are less affected by the innumerable pressures which arise so close to a large urban area such as Melbourne and which make farming difficult. A mere handful of what might be considered "viable farms" remain in the Shire today.

As a consequence, more people are choosing to live in the rural parts of the Shire for "lifestyle" reasons, as an alternative "living in the city". Many of these people may farm larger parcels, not to provide a living, but more as an interest or way of life. Their efforts may subsidise the cost of managing the property and in many cases "turn an income", but essentially they derive their income from other sources. Others live on smaller lots in rural areas for no other reason than to "live in the country", whilst at the same timing being close to Melbourne and the employment, education and other activities it provides.

For those living in the urban parts of the Shire what they enjoy about the rural areas is the sense of space and openness created by their rural surroundings, the opportunity get out of town and drive or walk through the rural areas, to see glimpses of the rural areas and surrounding hilltops from their homes and from places within the towns, and to experience the feeling of being part of an identifiable community which is separated from Melbourne.

However, there is a down side. Many people living in the rural areas, particularly older residents who have farmed their land for many years and who are no longer able to keep working their land, feel trapped. They have an asset which does not provide them with an income and often they have no way of remaining in their homes if they wish to sell their properties. Others may buy their "rural dream" only to find they underestimate the effort and cost of maintaining the property in a reasonable standard and as a result the land becomes degraded and the quality of the rural areas slowly deteriorates.

(3) *Separation between Urban Areas*

For urban residents one of the most important roles of the rural parts of the Shire is as a separation or "buffer" from the sprawling suburbs of metropolitan Melbourne. This "physical separation" helps towns such as Sunbury retain its individual character and identity.

Expanses of rural land and undeveloped hilltops also provide an important backdrop to urban areas. Rural land which is visible from within urban centres helps to retain the "city living - country style" theme which characterises the municipality.

These features are particularly important to Sunbury, which is nestled in the valley of Jacksons Creek and is surrounded by hills. Craigieburn is different, but still has much to benefit from its rural hinterland. Whilst Roxburgh Park will connect Craigieburn to metropolitan Melbourne in the future, the opportunity remains to ensure that the rural areas to the west, north and east of the town are used to contain the spread of urban development and to provide a rural backdrop and hinterland which can be integrated into the design and character of the urban area in the future.

(4) A Municipal Asset

The rural areas of the Shire of Bulla are a municipal asset. They are what makes the Shire of Bulla unique: they determines the character of the municipality and the identity of its urban centres; provide open spaces, fresh air and a sense of spaciousness for residents of the Shire; contain the most attractive environmental features, flora and fauna which exist within the Shire; contain mineral and stone resources; provide opportunities for living, working, leisure, education and recreation.

As with any asset the aim of the Council should be to not just protect this asset but to improve it. It is not appropriate for this Strategy merely to maintain the status quo. This was the aim over the past 20 years and the result has been a gradually declining rural land resource. A degree of change is essential in this process and it is the fine balance between change, and protection and enhancement of the environment, which this Strategy seeks to achieve.



PLANNING ISSUES IN THE RURAL AREAS

Planning issues relevant to the rural areas of the Shire of Bulla were initially identified in the Bulla Non Urban Wedge Study (Henshall Hansen Associates, 1990). Whilst that study only related that the central portion of the rural parts of the Shire of Bulla (generally between Lancefield Road and Mickleham Road) the issues identified apply generally throughout the rural parts of the Shire.

The main issues identified in that document and the Background and Issues Report prepared for the General Plan Study are summarised in this report to provide the context for this Strategy Plan.

- (1) *The appropriateness/relevance of Metropolitan Planning Policy* - Planning policies and planning controls which apply to the rural parts of the Shire of Bulla are widely applied across the metropolitan area. They have been in place virtually unchanged for 20 years, do not necessarily reflect local considerations relevant to the Shire of Bulla, and do not provide an appropriate policy framework for Council to use to plan and manage change in the rural parts of the Shire over coming decades.
- (2) *Agricultural viability/productivity* - Very few viable agricultural enterprises exist in the Shire at present and the number of commercially viable farms has been decreasing over the years despite stringent planning controls since the 1970s. This trend is likely to continue. Planning policies must recognise the changes underway and provide a framework in which appropriate change can occur, whilst maintaining an environment which supports and encourages viable farming activities wherever possible. Economic difficulty in maintaining viable farms does not mean that agriculture is not an appropriate use by which to maintain land in the rural parts of the Shire. Agriculture remains a productive use of land and is appropriate to continue throughout the rural parts of the Shire regardless of whether an operation is commercially viable. Agricultural productivity is less dependent on farm size than agricultural viability, and depending of management capabilities and the commitment of land owners, smaller parcels of land can be put to productive use than would be viable as single economic enterprises.

- (3) *Land management* - Effective land management practices which maintain and where possible enhance the value of the rural land resource are the most critical considerations in the future planning of rural land in the Shire. Maintaining *productive* parcels of land is the key to facilitating good land management practices. The productive use of rural land tends to lessen the burden of maintenance placed on individual property owners as the maintenance function is undertaken as part of the agricultural use itself rather than as a separate activity. This is particularly important throughout the Shire of Bulla due to the high susceptibility of the land to mismanagement, erosion, weed infestation, over grazing etc.
- (4) *Landscape Quality* - The visual contribution to the character and amenity of the Shire of Bulla is one of the most important functions of the rural areas. Visual considerations must be an important criterion in assessing the appropriateness of future change and development in those areas.
- (5) *Environment* - The rural areas of the municipality contain most of the important environmental features remaining in the Shire. These include major creek valleys, remnant stands of native vegetation, wildlife habitats, important topographic and geological features, and most probably a wealth of archaeological features which have not yet been identified. It is important that these features be recognised in the future planning of the rural areas.
- (6) *Lifestyle and access to services and facilities* - Regard must be given to lifestyle matters in considering development potential in rural areas. Lifestyle desires, rather than professional farming, are becoming an important reason why people move into the rural areas of the Shire. Council has a long term responsibility to ensure that the needs of residents can be adequately serviced in the future. Issues such as access to community services and facilities and other services such as roads, water, electricity etc are important considerations in the planning of the rural areas.
- (7) *Landowner Expectations* - Land owner expectations for future subdivision in the rural areas of the Shire, in particular the non-urban wedge, are high. As a general principle planning cannot be driven by land owner expectations, but must be based on wider planning and community considerations.
- (8) *Opportunities to improve the rural asset* - Current planning controls appear to be based on an objective of maintaining the rural areas for viable agricultural use. Planning policies should seek to positively enhance the qualities of the area. Initiatives to increase the productive potential of land and the intensity of agricultural activity, to revegetate cleared land and recreate wildlife habitats, to reduce erosion and reclaim despoiled land, to improve the quality of streams by reducing siltation,

and to establish public access along creeks and streams etc, are all matters which are appropriate to pursue throughout the rural areas.

- (9) *Other Land uses* - The type of non-agricultural land uses permitted in the rural parts of the Shire is an important issue to rural residents. Many residents are concerned that the attractive lifestyle they enjoy will be prejudiced by large scale uses, which are often related to metropolitan Melbourne, but which locate in the rural areas because of amenity problems they create closer to urban areas. These uses include quarries and waste disposal facilities, as well as planning decisions relating to Melbourne Airport and main roads, which are often seen to discriminate against rural residents.
- (10) *Mineral and Stone Resources* - Considerable potential exists throughout the area for the extraction of mineral and stone resources. Such activities are generally opposed by farmers and rural residents of the area due to the potential for adverse amenity impacts. Whilst such concerns are recognised, a responsibility also exists to protect the potential for mineral and stone resources to be extracted in the future in appropriate locations
- (11) *Melbourne Airport* - The Department of Planning and Housing has recently introduce new overlay planning controls to protect the long term operation of Melbourne Airport. The objective of these controls are intended to be achieved by preventing new urban development and housing from establishing in areas affected by noise from the airport. The overlay controls introduced by the Department affect a very significant proportion of the rural areas of the Shire and basically cover the whole central portion of the municipality from Lancefield Road to Mickleham Road. Strong community opposition exists to these controls and Council and the community is currently addressing their appropriateness as part of a separate process.
- (12) *Rates* - The issues of rates in the rural parts of the Shire is a major issue, particularly amongst those property owners who are trying to make a living from rural activities. High rates are seen as a major disincentive to continued productive use of land in the area for rural purposes and as an issue which Council should further investigate.
- (13) *The need for clear direction* - The rural community is looking for clear direction from the General Plan and this Strategy Plan about the future of the rural parts of the Shire. Many problems exist in the area and solutions are called for.



CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RURAL AREAS

The characteristics of the rural areas of the Shire were described in detail in the "Background and Issues Report (Report 1)" which preceded the Shire of Bulla General Plan. These physical characteristics of the area form the basis of planning policies which are presented in this Strategy Plan.

The main features which contribute the character of the area include:

- topography and landscape character;
- vegetation;
- scenic quality;
- the existing subdivision pattern and intensity of development; and

Figures 2 to 6 summarise these features.

Figure 7 summarises this information in terms of the perceived sensitivity of the rural landscape to accommodate change.



Background and Issues

LEGEND

- A. Western Hill Area
- B1. High Plains with Mt. Macedon Views
- B2. Plains with Shelterbelts
- B3. Plains with Woodland
- B4. Plains without distinct Character

- C1. Narrow-steep Creek beds
- C2. Wide Creek Valley Landscape
- C3. Emu Bottom Valley Landscape

- I. Industrial Dense Settlement

- Sharp Boundaries
- - - Narrow Transition Zone
- - - Arbitrary Boundaries
- ★ Distinct Hill Tops

CONSULTANTS TEAM

Henshall Hansen Associates

In association with:

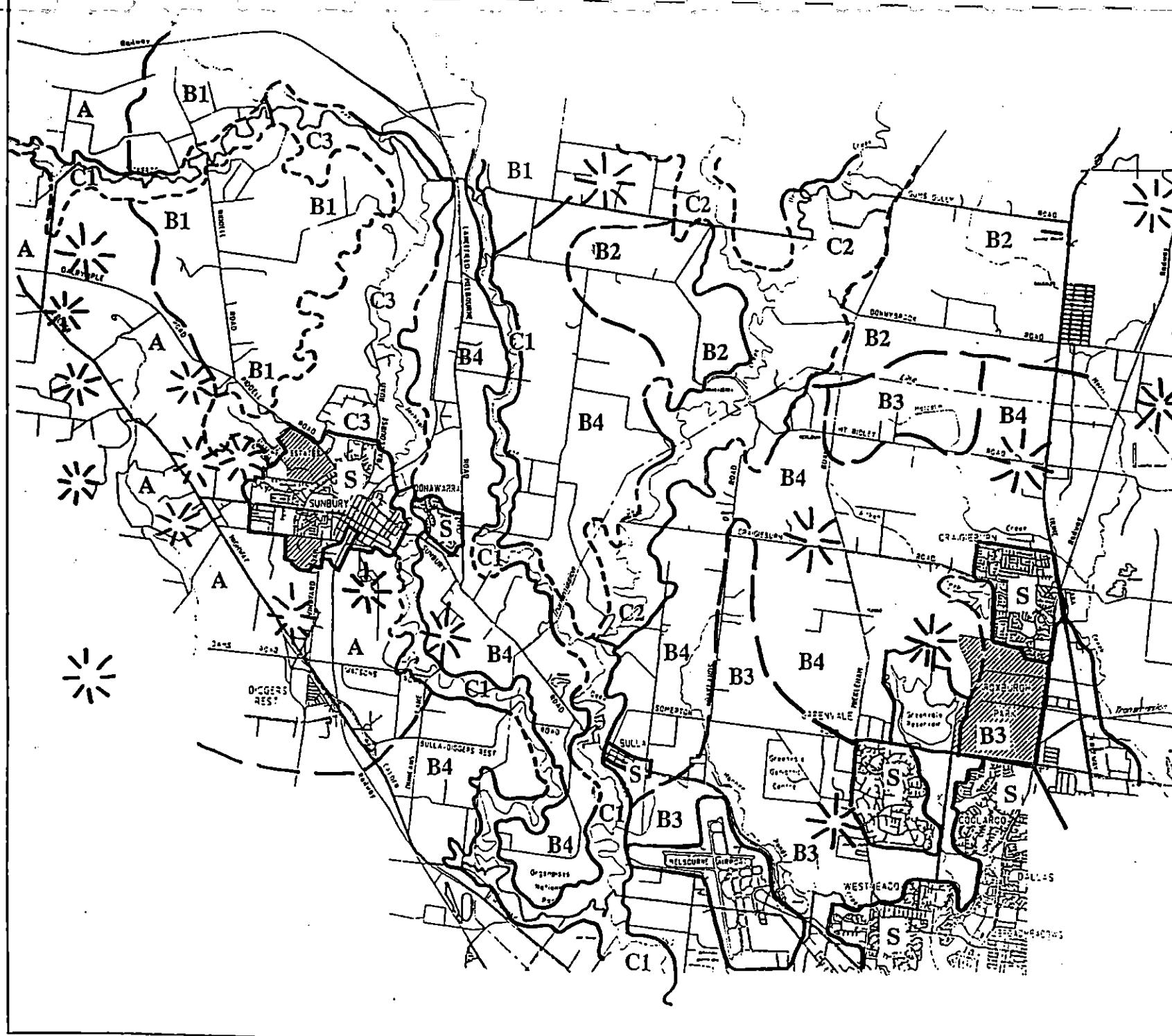
- WBCM Group
- Arup Transportation Planning
- Gerner and Sanderson Australia P/L
- Mc Vicar and Reynolds

1250 0 2500



Scale in metres

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNITS





Background and Issues

LEGEND

- Woodland
- Forest
- Major Windbreak & Shelterbelt Plantings
- Grassland Reserves.



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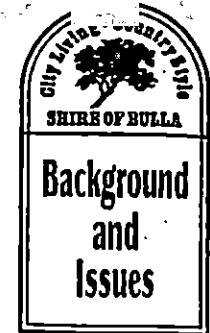
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- Arup Transportation Planning
- Gerner and Sanderson Australia P/L
- Mc Vicar and Reynolds

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Scale in metres



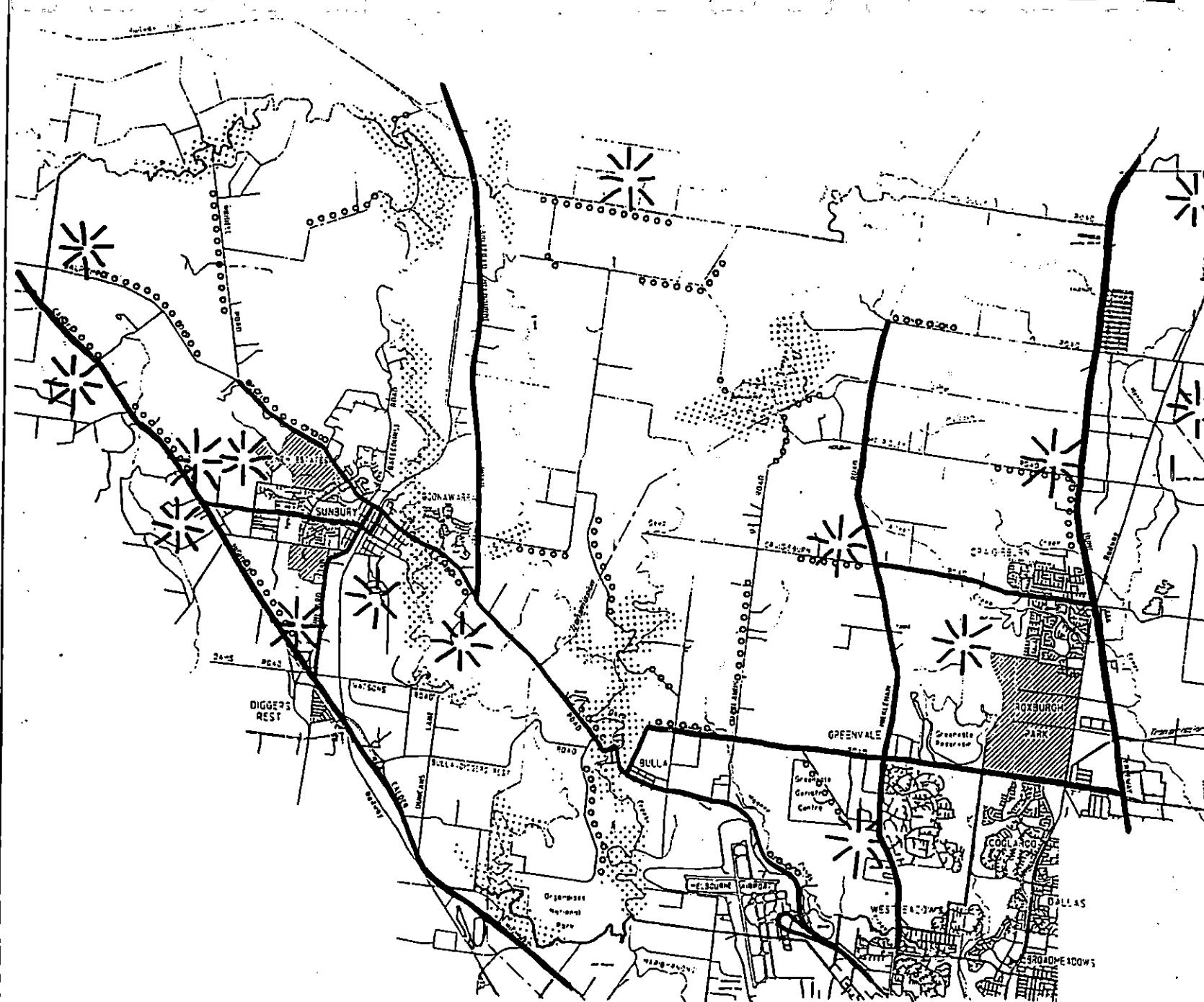
SIGNIFICANT VEGETATION



Background and Issues

LEGEND

- Creek Valley visible from Public Road
- Major View Corridor
- Portion of View Corridor with significantly wide views
- ★ Visually dominant Hill-top



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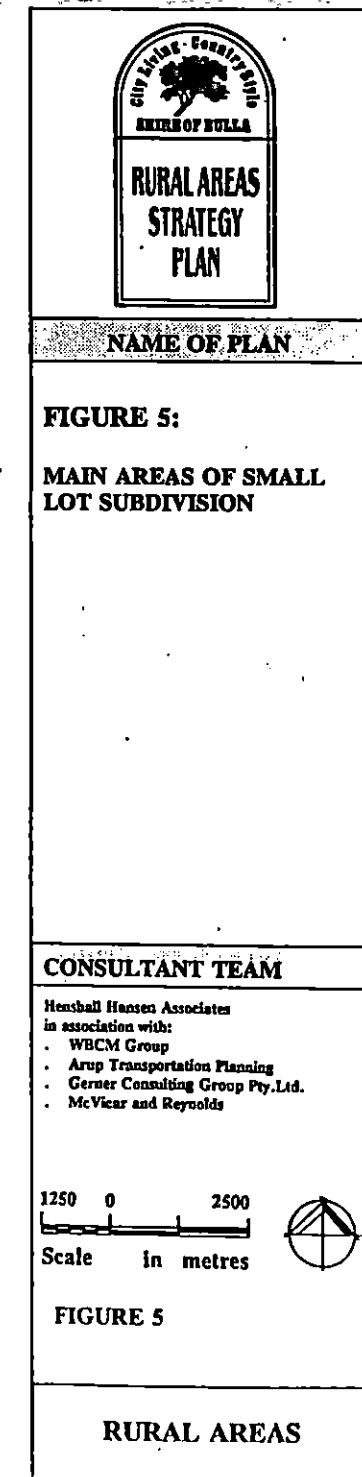
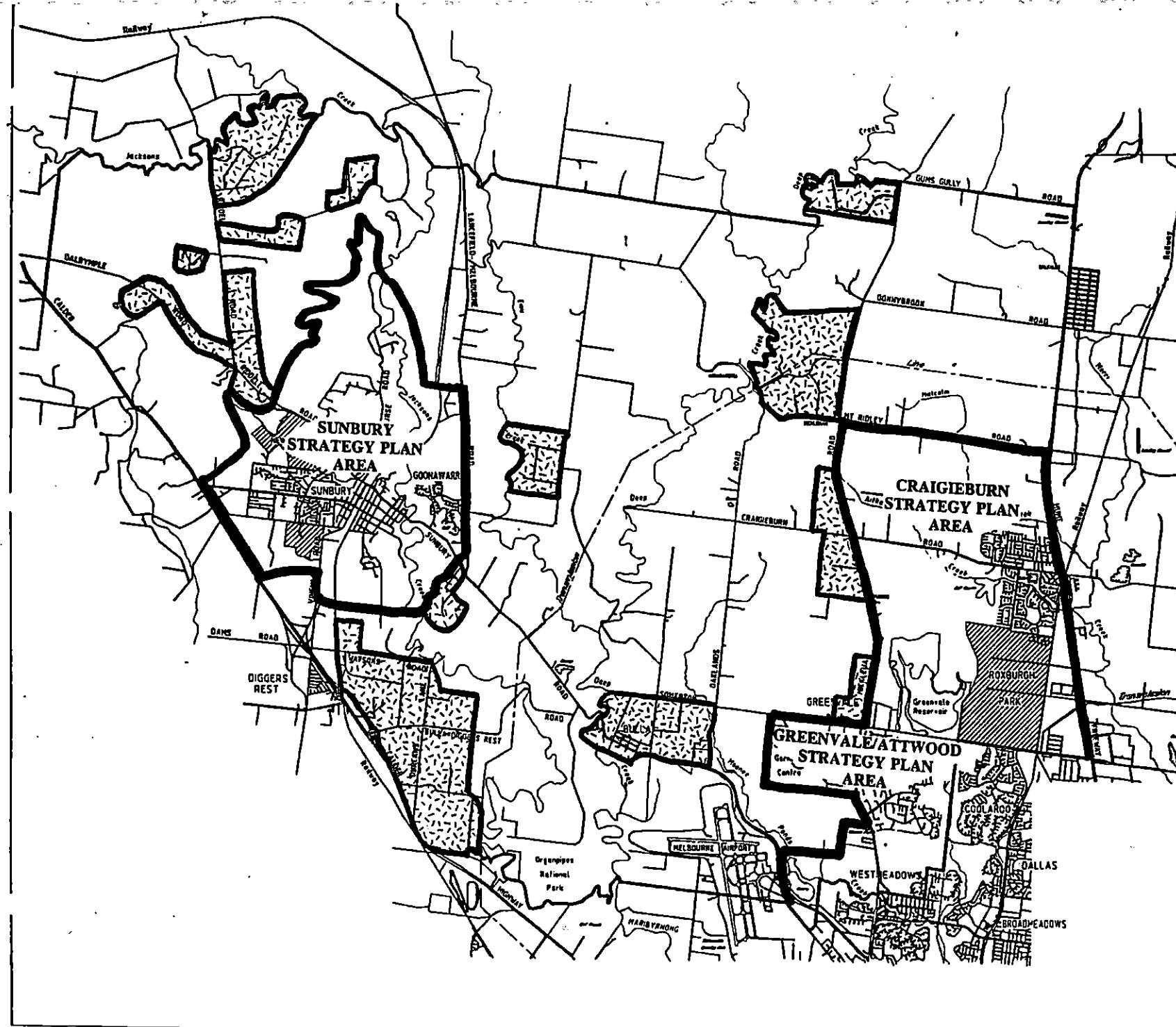
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Scale in metres

SCENIC QUALITY

FIGURE 4





Background and Issues

LEGEND

- Developed and committed area
- H High Sensitivity
- M Medium Sensitivity
- L Low Sensitivity

NOTES

"Sensitivity" is sensitivity to change.

Sensitivity based on Scenic and Heritage "Values", including: Views, Vegetation and Cultural, Geological, Archaeological, and Botanical significance.

CONSULTANTS TEAM

Henshall Hansen Associates

In association with:

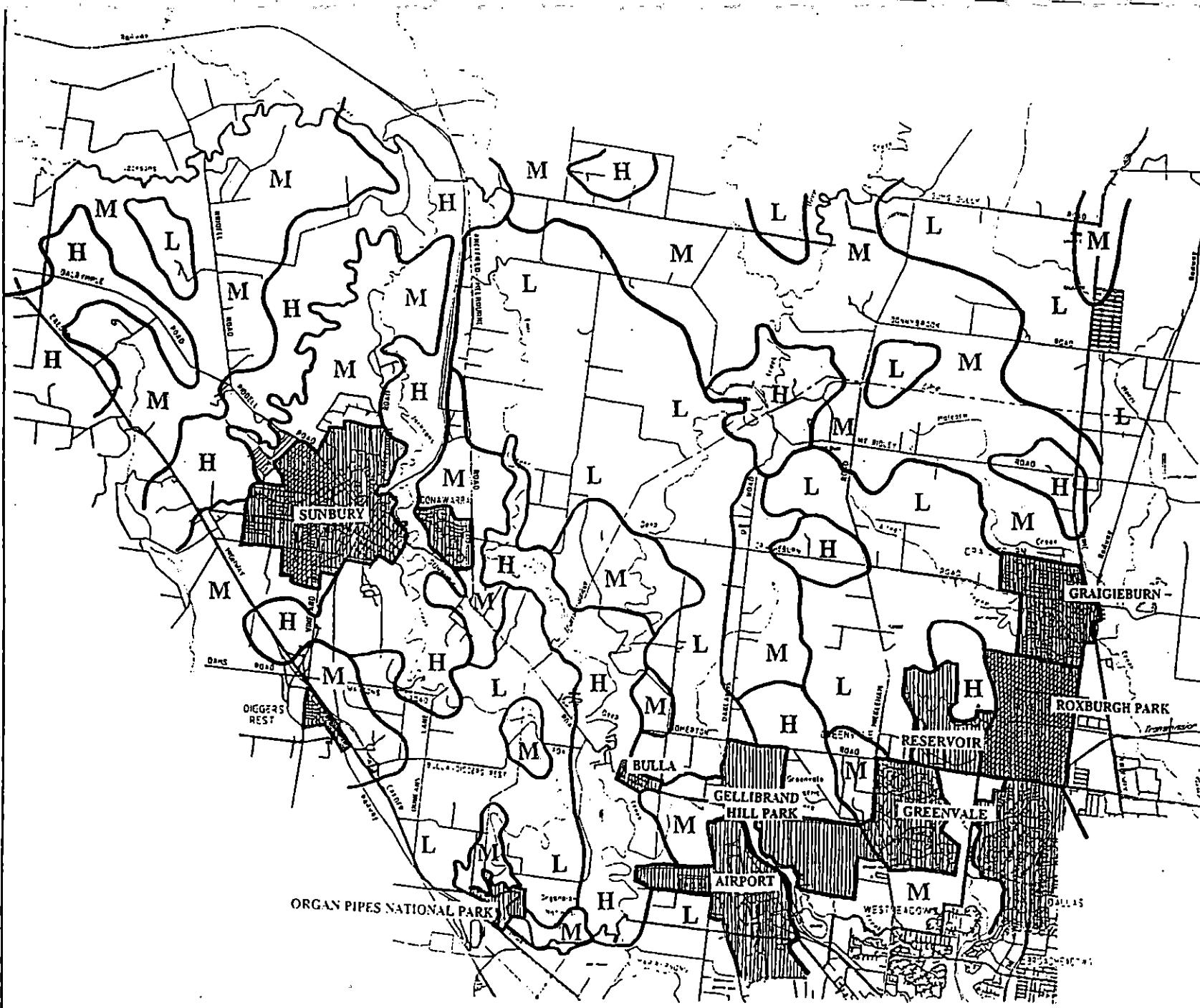
- WBCM Group
- Arup Transportation Planning
- Gerner and Sanderson Australia P/L
- Mc Vicar and Reynolds

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Scale in metres

LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY





THE BASIS OF THE RURAL AREAS STRATEGY

The following matters underlie the Rural Areas Strategy which is presented in the following chapter. They warrant description and an explanation in order to clarify the intentions and considerations taken into account in preparing this Strategy. This explanation should assist in the interpretation and implementation of the Strategy.

(1) Maintaining the Rural Areas as Rural Areas

The principal aim of the Rural Strategy is to maintain the existing rural parts of the Shire of Bulla as rural areas. Whilst the Strategy endeavours to refine existing planning controls to make them more responsive to local characteristics within the Shire of Bulla, the Strategy very clearly supports the retention of the areas as permanent rural areas in the context of metropolitan planning policy. Small lot rural residential subdivision is discouraged and the policies contained in the Strategy continue to recognise that agriculture and rural related activities will continue to be the most appropriate means of managing land throughout the expansive rural parts of the Shire. The Minister's Direction Number 6 is relevant in relation to the aim to discourage small lot rural and rural residential subdivision from occurring in rural parts of the municipality.

(2) Recognising that change is underway

However, a process of change is underway in the rural parts of the Shire whereby land users are changing from professional farmers to part time farmers and to those whose reason for choosing to live in the rural parts of the Shire is increasingly for lifestyle reasons.

Planning controls must recognise these changes. This can be done without undermining the basic rural character of the area and without making it less likely (than is the case at present) for professional farmers to continue to operate or to choose to locate in the area in the future. Rather than objectives which pursue commercially viable farming in the area (which may well be a "lost dream") equally important are objectives regarding issues such as long term sustainable land management, visual and environmental considerations. Nevertheless, professional farming and part time farming will continue to be encouraged in the Shire and

it is not the intention of this Strategy to initiate actions that would prejudice this from occurring.

(3) *Aim to achieve "an improvement" in rural areas*

The rural areas of the Shire of Bulla are an asset which must be built upon and enhanced. Existing planning controls do little more than maintain the status quo and in reality may not even be achieving this.

This strategy aims to positively enhance the quality of the rural land resource and the environmental features of the rural areas of the Shire of Bulla. This is to be achieved by means such as significant replanting and reforestation, stabilisation of erosion prone soils, reinstatement of riparian environments, improvement of pasture and on-site farm infrastructure, providing public access to environmental features such as creeks, hilltops etc (where appropriate), improvement to the appearance of buildings, and introduction of new techniques for long term sustainable agricultural and related activities as appropriate land management techniques.

This positive enhancement is unlikely to occur without some form of change in the rural areas in terms of additional subdivision and development. In fact, such is likely to be the incentive necessary to encourage land owners to improve the resources of the area.

Council will balances proposal for further development in the rural areas against improvements proposed by the proponents of those developments which would positively enhance the landscape, environmental and rural resources of the area.

(4) *Risk Posed by Inappropriate Development and the Need for Caution*

The potential risk to the quality and future of the rural areas is high if inappropriate development is allowed to occur throughout the rural areas.

Due to the relatively harsh local climate and marginal quality of soils, the land is highly susceptible to mismanagement. Soil erosion, over grazing, weed infestation, visual blight, pollution of streams and watercourses are likely outcomes of mismanagement which are already apparent to varying degree throughout the rural areas.

If inappropriate development was to proliferate the value and amenity of the rural areas would be lost forever and this would significantly detract from the overall character and amenity of the Shire of Bulla.

Hence this Strategy exercises a high degree of caution.

It is not the intention of this Strategy to initiate wholesale or rapid change to existing planning policies and controls in the rural zones which would lead to an influx of subdivision and new development. However, this strategy does provide greater flexibility to enable Council to consider local characteristics and new and innovate proposals which provide solutions to the problem of long term land management in rural areas on the urban fringe. However, Council will only support proposals after careful consideration and assessment. It will monitor the rate of change and the success of approved proposals before supporting wider spread development.

(5) *Land Use Emphasis*

The strategy presented in this report is based on a series of planning policies which relate to a perception of a number of different "fundamental purposes" or roles which are considered suitable to rural areas having various characteristics. Planning policies which reflect the "roles" or purposes for which different areas are considered to be suited are provide for different areas throughout the rural parts of the Shire. Each of the planning policy areas identified is related to an underlying land use or environmental emphasis (or role) which distinguishes it from the others, although in reality each area may be suited to a number of roles to varying degrees.

The four general areas of emphasis identified are:

Lifestyle - *Where land use emphasis is basically on lifestyle, with little interest in undertaking or participating in agricultural pursuits.* This lifestyle may be enjoyed by people living on relatively small parcels of land who merely enjoy living in a rural area without becoming involved in farming or agriculture. Given that this purpose has no basic rural or agricultural function it is not considered appropriate on a large scale throughout the rural parts of the Shire.

The Strategy essentially recognises existing concentrations of small lot rural residential development where they are considered to be appropriate, but opposes the expansion of this form of land use throughout the rural areas generally.

This land use category is associated with *Rural Living Policy Areas* shown on the Strategy Plan.

Landscape - *Where the primary land use role or emphasise is on maintaining an attractive rural landscape.* In such areas retaining attractive views, ensuring buildings (if and when they occur) are appropriately located and sited so as not to impinge on the visual appearance of the area, and providing an attractive landscape are the most important considerations. In such areas development

density is a function of the nature of the topography and vegetation cover and its ability to "screen" development from view, rather than solely on the land areas required for productive agricultural operations. However lot sizes are likely to be in a moderate range (10ha to 20ha) in order that development does not dominate the landscape. This will provide the opportunity for such area to maintain a "secondary" rural function as well.

This land use category is appropriate to apply to areas of high landscape value which are characterised by attractive undulating terrain, a relatively high degree of vegetation cover and attractive views, especially where existing land ownership patterns are fragmented into smaller holdings. Areas to which this description apply include the Bardwell Drive area. Areas along Somerton Road and the southern portions of the Oaklands Road area also have potential to be considered within this category. However this area is affected by noise from Melbourne Airport and generally no further development should be encouraged in this area.

This category may also be applied to areas where an improved rural landscape is to be encouraged. This may be achieved by way of promoting more intense rural activities, appropriate tree planting and landscaping, improvement to farm infrastructure and improved pasture maintenance etc. Land along Sunbury Road, which is one of the main approaches to Sunbury and is an area which has limited scope for continued broadacre farming in the longer term, is considered to have this potential.

It is also considered appropriate to apply this category to land to the northwest of Sunbury on the plains above "the rim" of the Jackson Creek Valley. This land has spectacular views of Melbourne. Existing smaller rural lot subdivision exists along Riddell Road and some further rural style development based on a landscape theme is considered appropriate in this area. The potential to improve public access to this area may be possible as part of any development that proceeds.

This land use category is associated with the *Rural Landscape Policy Areas* shown on the Rural Areas Strategy Plan.

Rural -

Where the land use emphasis remains on broadacre agricultural and rural land uses, as the most appropriate activities to maintain and manage the land resource in the future. Landscape values will still be important in such areas because of the overall contribution of all rural areas to the basic character and amenity of the Shire. However broadacre agricultural activities will remain the most suitable activities for extensive sections of the rural areas of the Shire

of Bulla. Much of these areas are extremely flat, cleared of vegetation, visually exposed, and do not present an environment which is intrinsically suited to lifestyle pursuits (as distinct from continued farming activities).

A distinction is made between two different types of areas which fall within this general "rural" category. The first relates to those areas generally to the east of Deep Creek. Whilst these areas are in many ways similar to the open rural plains which exist elsewhere in the Shire, they generally possess a more attractive landscape, the topography is more undulating, greater tree cover exists and in places the ownership pattern has been partially subdivided in the past.

The Settlement Road area to the north of Sunbury is also included in this policy due to its relatively fragmented land ownership pattern, despite underlying environmental character of the area being similar to that normally associated with the following areas.

In contrast the areas to the west of Deep Creek and those west of Riddell Road and Dalrymple Road remain basically expansive broadacre rural areas with little topographical relief (except for along Dalrymple Road) or vegetation cover. Little justification exists to encourage further development in these areas (as a general principle - except where individual proposals of substantial merit are put to Council for special consideration as outlined in the following chapter).

This land use category applies to most of the land in the Shire and is associated with *Rural Policy Areas (1 and 2)* shown on the Rural Areas Strategy Plan.

Conservation - *Where the emphasis is on conserving, enhancing and improving attractive environmental features.* This mainly applies to areas of high environmental quality such as the creek valley or areas of significant native vegetation. Whilst such areas may also have a lifestyle function and be suited to farming activities, the prime concern is that of conservation and enhancement of the natural and visual environments.

This land use category is associated with *Rural Conservation Policy Areas* in the Strategy Plan and generally applies along the creek valleys throughout the Shire. It also applies to a significant stand of red gums in the proposed "inter-urban break" to the north of Craigieburn (north of Mt Ridley Road).

(6) Bulla Township

The Bulla township is a small residential community surrounded by an area of small lot rural subdivision on the Sunbury Road near Deep Creek.

The township is close to the north south flight path from Melbourne Airport and is affected to varying degrees by noise from the airport. As a consequence, the town of Bulla is contained within the Airport Environs overlay controls which the Department of Planning and Housing has imposed on the area.

Given the situation in Bulla in relation to noise from the airport, it is not appropriate to encourage any further expansion of the town as urban development in this location may in the longer term impact on the continued ability of Melbourne Airport to expand and operate in an unconstrained manner.

This Strategy Plan recognises and supports the containment of residential development within the existing boundaries or residential zones of the Bulla Township, but does not support any extension to those boundaries.

The General Plan also supports the Bulla Bypass, which will take through traffic out of the town and significantly improve the amenity of the township of Bulla.

It is acknowledged that not all areas of conservation significance are identified on the Rurals Area Strategy Plan. Further detailed work is required by Council in consultation with the department of Conservation and Natural Resources to identify and develop appropriate policies to conserve significant areas. Recent work completed such as "Sites of Botanical Significance in the Merri Corridor" should be used to provide base information regarding these matters.



THE STRATEGY

The Planning Strategy for the Rural Areas of the Shire of Bulla comprises the following parts:

- (1) *Overall Planning Principles from the General Plan*
- (2) *Rural Areas Strategy Plan*
- (3) *Rural Areas Policy Statement*
- (4) *Policy for Considering Individual Proposals of Merit*
- (5) *Other Policy Matters*
 - *Average Lot Size*
 - *Subdivision and Development Requirements*
 - *Development guidelines*
 - *Monitoring and Staging of Development*
 - *Public Education*
 - *Extractive Industry*
 - *Other uses*
 - *Rates*

7.1 Overall Planning Principles from the General Plan

The overall planning policies for the rural areas were set out in the Shire of Bulla General Plan. Those policies provide the framework for the more detailed policies for the Rural Areas which are contained in this Strategy Plan.

The overall planning policies for the Rural Areas from the General Plan are:

- (1) To clearly identify the extent and the boundaries of rural areas in the Shire of Bulla over the next twenty years, and to plan those areas so as to retain a rural identity and a rural character for the municipality.

- (2) To recognise the role of the rural parts of the Shire as contributing to the overall amenity, appearance, lifestyle and character of the municipality, and as providing an important separation between towns and as a backdrop to urban areas.
- (3) To identify, protect and enhance environmental features throughout the rural areas such as watercourses, soil resources, valleys, hilltops, natural vegetation, habitats, etc.
- (4) To protect the quality of view sheds and landscapes from roads and other vantage points throughout the rural areas.
- (5) To provide a degree of certainty to existing land owners regarding the future of the rural parts of the municipality.
- (6) To encourage agriculture and associated rural activities as the most appropriate land management technique throughout the rural areas, whilst recognising the changing business outlook for agricultural enterprises in the Shire and the impact of this on farm incomes.
- (7) To recognise the potential for some parts of the rural area to provide the opportunity for rural living within the visual and physical capability of the area to accommodate additional subdivision.
- (8) To promote improved land management and reclamation of degraded land, and the re-instatement of environmental features throughout the rural area.
- (9) To recognise the existence of mineral deposits and to ensure that incompatible development does not compromise the opportunity for environmentally sensitive extraction to occur, whilst controlling associated activities to prevent amenity impacts.
- (10) To encourage flexibility in controlling use and development so as to allow innovative development proposals which create a positive benefit to the environment and the landscape.
- (11) To ensure that any new planning policies for rural areas are phased in over an appropriate period of time to ensure that future development occurs in an orderly and progressive manner, and is monitored by Council to ensure that the objectives for the rural areas are being achieved.
- (12) To ensure that development does not occur which would compromise the rural character of the area or which would cause the encroachment of urban development into rural areas.

- (13) To ensure that any new development is based on criteria concerning the environment, visual and land management capability of the land.
- (14) To educate existing and potential landowners of the advantages and disadvantages of rural living, and of the obligation imposed on owners to properly manage and maintain their properties.
- (15) For Council to investigate the impact of rates on the operation of productive farms in the municipality and to investigate the opportunity for rural rates aimed at encouraging continued productive use of rural land.
- (16) To recognise the constraints posed to the future expansion of the town of Bulla (which is located within the rural parts of the Shire) due to noise associated with the operation of Melbourne Airport (existing and future) and the lack of reticulated sewerage in the town, and to support consolidation and infill development within the existing land use pattern of Bulla and the restructuring of smaller "township lots" where necessary to achieve adequate on-site effluent disposal and having regard to amenity considerations.
- (17) To recognise Melbourne Airport as a key economic asset in the municipality and to ensure that development does not occur in the rural areas that might prejudice its long term operation.

7.2 Rural Areas Strategy Plan

This Strategy identifies different policies for different parts of the rural areas of the Shire. The Rural Areas Strategy Plan (see Figure 7) identifies the areas to which these different policies apply.

The plan is conceptual only. The boundaries shown on the plan are not precise and the plan is not intended to be interpreted as a zoning plan. More detailed investigation of boundaries will be required before any rezonings occur.

7.3 Rural Areas Policy (General Policies)

This part of the Strategy sets out the more detailed planning principles for the future planning of the rural areas within the Shire of Bulla. Whereas the General Plan Policies relate to the whole of the Shire, these policies relate to different areas within the rural parts of the municipality as identified on the Rural Areas Strategy Plan (Figure 7).



LEGEND

- Rural Living
- Rural Landscape (1 & 2)
- Rural (1)
- Rural (2)
- Rural Conservation
- Corridor
- Balla Township
- National Park
- Special Use
- Proposed Noise Contour
- Melbourne Airport (25 ANLs)



CONSULTANT TEAM

Horwath Hamer Associates
in association with
WBML Group
Arapco Environmental Planning
Gerner Consulting Group Pty Ltd
McVicar and Reid Pty Ltd

100 0 500 1000

Scale in metres

FIGURE 8

April 1993

RURAL AREAS

These policies provide the basis for land use and development controls, and the land use zonings which will be prepared over time by the Shire of Bulla to give this Strategy statutory force.

The policies will remain the basis for any future statutory controls prepared and will be continually referred to by Council both in preparing and amending planning controls and in assessing development applications and proposals in the future.

The policies contained in this section are by nature restrictive. This is to ensure that Council has adequate control over new subdivision and development, and has the ability to regulate the rate of development and to monitor the impact or success of this Strategy Plan in managing land use change and environmental improvement in the rural areas over coming years.

However flexibility is provided to enable consideration of worthy proposal which might be prohibited by the "general policies" contained in this section, by policies which allow Council to "consideration individual proposals or merit" which are set out in the following section of this report.

The policies for each of the Rural Policy areas is set out in the Table 1, Planning Policies for the Rural Areas of the Shire of Bulla.

7.4 Policy for Consideration of Individual Proposals of Merit

This policy applies throughout all of the rural areas of the Shire of Bulla and in all of the Rural Policy Areas described in the preceding section.

It is a statement of Council's willingness to consider individual proposals which may be prohibited by the statutory planning controls in the rural areas, but which for various reasons warrant special consideration.

It is not intended that this policy be used frequently in an endeavour to circumvent the general Rural Planning Policies set out in the preceding section. This policy will only be used in special circumstances to provide Council with the flexibility to consider proposals of "particular merit" which satisfy the following criteria:

- (1) The proposal involves a rural or related use or a use which is appropriate to locate in a rural area.
- (2) The proposal includes initiatives which would significantly improve the quality of the rural land resource and/or the environmental quality of the area.

- (3) The proposal would not prejudice the continuation of rural and related activities on other land in the vicinity having regard to the policies for land use in those areas contained in this Strategy.
- (4) The proposal presents a long term sustainable land management solution which is based on rural or related activities.
- (5) The proposal is commercially viable and marketable, and does not present an undue risk of failure.
- (6) The proposal identifies and takes measure to conserve site of environmental and biological significance on the property.
- (7) Consideration of Government policy regarding subdivision in rural areas.

Any proposals submitted for consideration under this policy should be submitted to Council in two stages to avoid the need for the proponent to undertake detailed investigations and preparation of plans in situations where Council's support is unlikely.

Stage 1: Acknowledgment of Preliminary Concept

The purpose of this stage is to provide sufficient information to Council to enable it to undertake a preliminary assessment and to provide an initial indication whether it is worthwhile pursuing the proposal further.

Council will comment on any proposal lodged "in principle" within 8 weeks. Council's response, if supportive, will include a list of additional detailed information required to be provided and a statement of the likely requirements that would need to be met/pursued for the proposal to receive Council approval.

Support "in principle" at this stage does not place an obligation on Council to finally approve the proposal.

The information provided to Council at this stage should include:

- A description of the land and features on the site and a description of the nature of the proposal.
- A description of the positive benefits which would be derived from the project and which justify Council's special consideration of the proposal.

- A description of compliance with the above mentioned criteria which form the basis on which Council will consider individual projects of merit.

Stage 2: *Detailed Consideration*

If Council considers that a proposal has merit and the proponent decides to proceed to seek full approval, further detailed documentation will be required to be submitted to Council to enable a full and thorough assessment of the merits of the proposal to be undertaken. The information required will be set out in Council's initial direction but might include:

- a detailed feature survey of the site;
- full development plans;
- farm/land management plan;
- schedule of improvements to be made to the site and local environment;
- indication of the marketability and commercial viability of the project;
- assessment of the environmental impacts of the proposal (to a level of detail considered appropriate by Council);
- visual assessment; and
- other matters as indicated by Council. -

Approval of individual proposals of merit will be by way of an amendment to the planning scheme. It should be noted that no appeal rights exist against a decision by Council to refuse to consider a request for an amendment.

Legal agreements will most probably be required to be entered into with proponents where approval is granted to ensure certain matters and undertakings described in the proposal are undertaken to the satisfaction of Council.

7.5 Other Policy Directions

(1) *Average Lot Size*

Council supports the application of an "average lot size" in subdivisions in the Rural Areas. The reason for this is to encourage subdivision design which is sympathetic to the natural

features of the land and the environment, and which has a lesser impact on the visual amenity of the countryside.

The design of subdivisions and the location of buildings should have regard to:

- the topography and natural features of the site;
- existing vegetation;
- the future use of each lot and the long term management of each;
- the ability of each lot of lots to be used for the purpose intended and to support that use; and
- the impact on the visual character of the area.

The impact of development may well be minimised by clustering development in certain locations on a property which are better suited to development and which reduces the visual and/or environmental impact of development, and which retains land which is better suited to ongoing rural activities in appropriately sized parcels.

Council will encourage applicants to consider these principles in preparing applications for subdivision.

(2) Subdivision and Development Requirements

Land should not just be subdivided without the necessary on-site infrastructure being put in place at the time of subdivision to ensure that each lot can be used for an appropriate rural purpose. Generally Council will require the following for new subdivision.

- Each lot to be satisfactorily fenced to contain stock and so that the obligation is placed not on new owners to fence new lots created.
- Each lot created should have access to a water supply suitable for both the domestic and agricultural needs of the property.
- Each should have approach access to roads, electricity and telecom.
- Each lot to be capable of containing all effluent on site in conformity with State Environment Protection Policy (Water of Victoria)
- Regard to Minister's Direction Number 6.

Council's aim in seeking these improvements is to ensure that the responsibility of providing these "improvement", which are necessary for the future use of the land, are met by the developer (subdivider) rather than the purchaser. Too often in the past "uneducated" purchasers of rural lots have underestimated the cost of providing this infrastructure and the result is an under capitalisation of the site and subsequent mismanagement, to the detriment of the rural environment.

(3) *Development guidelines*

Council will prepare guidelines to assist officers in assessing applications in a consistent way and to assist applicants in preparing applications and improving the quality of development that occurs in the rural areas. Guidelines will be required for matters such as:

- Subdivision Design and Layout.
- Tree Planting and Vegetation.
- Location and Design of Buildings.
- Rural Land Management.
- The Use of Rural Properties.

(4) *Monitoring and Staging of Development*

This Strategy Plan introduces new policies for the rural areas of the Shire of Bulla for the first time in over 20 years. The effect of these new policies on the rural environment will be monitored by Council to assess:

- the nature and rate of development which occurs and its long term appropriateness for the rural areas;
- the changing nature of land use, population and activity in the rural areas;
- the impact on the quality of the rural and natural environment; and
- the community's response to the Strategy.

This process will enable the effectiveness of the Strategy to be determined and consequent modifications to be made which may be required from time to time to update and improve the Strategy.

(5) *Public Education*

In order to protect and enhance the rural environment is it crucial that people who buy land in the area are aware of the how to maintain the land in an appropriate manner. Many "city people" who purchase rural properties under-estimate that time and financial commitment required to adequately maintain a rural property. The results are manifest by over grazing, deterioration in pasture, weed infestation, soil erosion, inadequate control of pets (especially dogs), neglect of building and fences etc.

Council will initiate a program to provide information regarding these matters to existing and prospective residents of rural areas with the aim of considerably improve the existing situation.

(6) *Extractive Industry*

The rural areas within the Shire of Bulla contain considerable mineral resources.

The extraction of these resources is considered to be a legitimate activity within the rural parts of the Shire, subject to the suitability of individual sites for that purpose.

New sites proposed for extractive industry should be subject to normal planning scheme amendment procedures to provide the opportunity for public input into the planning decision. If approved, long term operations should be rezoned to an appropriate zone to provide security of use for operators. This will enable operators to proceed with confidence to undertake the quite significant investments which may be required to landscaping and beautify the site so as to minimise the impacts of such uses on the surrounding area.

Activities associated with extractive industries (such as bitumen plants, concrete batching plants etc) are potentially appropriate uses to occur in conjunction with extractive operations subject to suitability of individual sites. Again such activities should be subject to normally planning approval processes (most probably planning permit applications if the sites have been rezoned for extractive industry) to determining the suitability of a proposal in each instance.

Extractive industry brings with it an after use potential of landfill. Again this is an activity which may be appropriate within rural areas subject to individual site suitability. The possible after use of extractive industry sites for landfill purposes will be taken into account by Council in its initially assessment of requests for extractive industry unless other realistic options for after use are put forward by a proponent.

(7) Other Uses

The rural areas in the Shire of Bulla, due to location on the fringe of Melbourne, will come under increasing pressure in the future to be used for urban related activities which may have difficulty locating in built-up urban areas due to potential adverse amenity impacts. Examples of such uses include private sports, social sporting, religious clubs, dog kennels and catteries etc.

These uses are potentially appropriate uses within the rural parts of the Shire subject to individual site suitability and having regard to the compatibility of such uses with the overall planning policies and objectives identified in this Strategy for surrounding areas. Planning permits would be required before any such use could locate in the rural areas.

(8) Rates

Considerable concern is expressed by farmers in the rural areas about the disincentive to farming posed by high rural rates in the Shire of Bulla.

This is an issue which requires investigation by Council to determine a position on the matter. Council will investigate options regarding approaches to rating for bona fide commercial rural enterprises as an incentive to continued agricultural production throughout the rural parts of the Shire.

TABLE 1: PLANNING POLICIES FOR THE RURAL AREAS OF THE SHIRE OF BULLA

RURAL POLICY AREA	PRIMARY LAND USE EMPHASIS	AREAS TO WHICH POLICY APPLIES	PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVE(S)	NATURE OF CONTROLS
Rural Living	<p>Essentially <i>lifestyle</i> (typical of a rural residential nature).</p> <p>Given the small size of lots associated with this form of land use such areas to not generally serve a rural or an agricultural function.</p>	<p>Essentially applies to areas which have already been subdivided into small rural residential lots in the past and which are considered appropriate to be recognized by a specific zoning. Where this is the case some potential for infill development may occur but expansion of the areas is not supported.</p> <p>The areas included are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extensive areas of small lot subdivision which exists between Jacksons Creek and the Calder Highway Small pockets of land along Riddell Road to the north-west of Sunbury which are presently included in a Bulla Rural Zone. <p>Areas of isolated small lot subdivision which exist in other parts of the rural area are not identified specifically and are appropriate to be included in adjacent policy areas.</p> <p>New subdivisions of this type and size are not generally supported in the rural parts of the Shire.</p>	<p>To recognize areas of existing small lot rural subdivision and to enable infill development to occur at similar density to that which already exists.</p> <p>To improve the appearance of existing small rural lot subdivisions by encouraging the sensitive location and design of buildings, appropriate landscaping, and appropriate land use management techniques to improve the appearance and overall maintenance of land in these areas.</p>	<p>Modified version of the existing Bulla Rural Zone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses restricted to those which are compatible with a rural residential environment. Average subdivision size of the (reflecting existing provision of the Bulla Rural Zone) Control of the location and design of buildings, landscaping and subdivision to be in accordance with guidelines.
Rural Landscape	Emphasis on the appearance of the <i>landscape</i> with emphasis on maintaining an attractive rural appearance. However these areas will also have a strong <i>lifestyle</i> role as well as a limited rural/agricultural role.	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land along Sunbury Road (Rural Landscape 2). This land is highly visually from a main entrance to Sunbury and its appearance is important to maintaining a rural approach to the town. It is considered that the area would benefit from a more intense form of rural activity and land management. This could be complemented with attractive landscaping, the sensitive location of buildings and efforts to upgrade existing pastures to improve the overall appearance of this approach to Sunbury. Land on the plains to the north-west of Sunbury (Rural Landscape 1). This area has magnificent views of Melbourne and small lot subdivision has already occurred along the eastern side of Riddell Road. This is considered to have potential for some additional development subject to sensitive landscaping and visual considerations. The Bardwell Drive area (Rural Landscape 1) has been included due to the attractive undulating nature of the land and the existing small lot subdivision pattern which already exists. The opportunity for infill development exists within this area but the extent of development should not be expanded into adjoining rural areas. 	<p>To recognise areas of high landscape value and to enable appropriate rural development to proceed within the capability of the areas to visually accommodate development in the form of rural farmlets.</p> <p>To encourage upgrading of the appearance of important rural landscapes by enabling limited rural development as an incentive to improving the maintenance of land and pasture, and undertaking landscaping to enhance the attractiveness of the rural landscape.</p>	<p>New Zone required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses appropriate to a rural/residential environment. Average subdivision size: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural Landscape 1 = 10ha Rural Landscape 2 = 20ha Requirement for landscaping and improvement of farm infrastructure as part of any development. Control over buildings and works. Guidelines for subdivision and development.
Rural	Emphasis on rural and associated agricultural activities as the most appropriate use for the land in the longer term.	<p>This policy area generally applies to existing areas of intact broad acre farmland which are generally suited to continued farming activities. In most cases these areas comprise relatively flat land with little vegetation and comprise the majority of rural land in the Shire.</p> <p>This policy area is divided into two categories (as explained in the preceding section):</p> <p>Rural 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land to the east of Deep Creek. Land in the vicinity of Lombers Road. Land to the north of Sunbury in the vicinity of Settlement Road <p>Rural 2 -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balance of the Shire 	<p>To recognise those rural parts of the Shire of Bulla in which broad acre farming activities are considered the most appropriate form of long term land management.</p>	<p>New zones required based on modified General Farming A and B Zones.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses appropriate for extensive rural areas which contain low intensity of development and population. Average subdivision size: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural 1 = 40ha Rural 2 = 80ha Controls over large buildings or buildings within 100 metres of a road.
Rural Conservation	Conservation, preservation and enhancement of natural environment features.	Creek valleys and other environmentally sensitive areas such as the red gums to the north of Mt Ridley Road.	To conserve areas of high environmental quality.	Existing Conservation Zone.
Merri Corridor Rural Areas	Emphasis on maintaining long term potential of the area for future urban development, but with emphasis on retaining rural/agricultural land uses as an interim use.	Merri Corridor Area, as identified by metropolitan planning policy.	<p>To preserve the potential for long term urban development.</p> <p>To maintain broad acre rural activities as an appropriate interim use.</p>	Retain existing Corridor C Zone.
Bulla Township	Lifestyle	Existing residentially zoned areas of the Bulla Township	<p>To recognise the existing Bulla Township but to prevent the future expansion of the town due to its location in proximity to areas affected by aircraft noise from Melbourne Airport.</p> <p>To enable new residential development to occur only within existing residentially zoned areas.</p>	<p>Retain existing residential zones but apply the following guidelines when exercising discretion for development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The size of lots on which houses may be built to be determined by ability to accommodate on-site effluent disposal. Satisfactory access must be provided to each lot (this particularly applies to vacant residentially zoned land adjacent to Deep Creek which must access Sunbury Road in a dangerous location near the bridge) Noise attenuation within buildings (where appropriate having regard to noise effects from aircraft using Melbourne Airport)