

GROWING PLACES STRATEGY - FAQs

August 2024

Does Golden Plains Shire have to grow?

Yes. The Victorian Government requires that every Council plans for population growth to help ensure there are enough homes for Victoria's growing population.

Councils are required to have plans in place to provide enough land for the housing we need for the next 15 years, based on the State Government's Victorian in Future (ViF) projections.

Where are Geelong and Ballarat going to grow?

Over the next 15 years, whole new suburbs will develop west of Geelong right up to our border from Batesford North to the Barwon River near Stonehaven. You can find out more in the City of Greater Geelong webpage here: <https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/futuregrowth/default.aspx>

Similarly, Ballarat's suburbs and townships will extend south to our borders from Cherry Flat Road to Colac-Ballararat Road. You can find out more on the City of Ballarat website here:

<https://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/property/ballararat-west-growth-area>

How much will Golden Plains grow?

Each of Victoria's 79 councils has been provided with a draft target for new homes by 2051. The draft Housing Target for Golden Plains Shire is 11,700 new homes.

An Independent Housing Needs Assessment conducted in 2022, found that given of our location between Geelong and Ballarat, growth pressure could exceed this. It says we could grow by up to 14,417 new houses by 2051.

How could growth benefit Golden Plains?

If planned carefully, additional population could help:

- Attract investment in new and upgraded community services and facilities like health, education and recreation.
- Provide more local workers so our regional industries can grow.
- Inspire new businesses and entertainment options to open, and sustain our local clubs and community groups.
- Strengthen our local economy so there are more local jobs and career pathways.
- Broaden our small rate-base - or joint pool of funding – so there is more to invest in the services, facilities and upgrades our community wants right across the Shire.
- Build a stronger case to advocate for State and Federal Government investment into our Shire (such as passenger rail).

Is Council considering the negative impacts of growth?

Yes. Growth has its challenges, especially if it happens in the wrong places or in an unplanned and unsupported way.

Our Community Vision 2040 for Golden Plains is very clear. You want to protect our historic townships, natural landscapes and the country lifestyle we enjoy.

We know we must preserve important cultural, environmental and agricultural land and features, and make sure growth is appropriate for a changing climate.

That's why we think its important to get on the front foot and plan for potential growth now, so we're not caught out, which can lead to negative impacts.

Why is Council planning to 2050?

Developing the Growing Places Strategy will take time and involves many different steps, and implementing it is a long-term process. See our fact sheet: Draft Growing Places Strategy for more information.

We need to think about the high-level, long-term plan now to give us time to do the more detailed planning that is needed before any new land would actually be available for housing.

Is Council just after more rates?

No, but it is one of many different benefits to be considered.

Our Shire is big geographically, but compared to our neighbouring cities, we have a much smaller population. This means we have a smaller rate-base – or fewer properties that contribute to our joint pool of funding used to invest in the services, facilities and upgrades our community wants.

More homes and businesses would increase our rate-base, meaning there would be more properties contributing to our joint pool of funding, potentially making it bigger. This would help deliver additional benefits across the whole Shire.

It might be unpopular to talk about, but it's one of many factors to consider, and important for a Shire like ours which has limited income and struggles to attract the funding from other levels of government that our neighbours can draw upon.

How fast will new housing happen?

There are many different stakeholders involved in getting the new housing built.

First, Council needs to develop the Growing Places Strategy (GPS) and incorporate this into the Golden Plains Planning Scheme which will require approval from the Minister of Planning. See the fact sheet: Draft Growing Places Strategy for more about how the GPS is developed.

Once the GPS is in place, implementing it is a long-term process and will not happen for some years.

Council may need to prepare more detailed township-based implementation plans, called Structure Plans, that show 'how' growth will be accommodated in the town.

Land may need to be re-zoned so it can be used for a new purpose to support growth, such as for housing, public space or commercial.

Other types of plans and guidelines may also be required like bushfire resilience, environmentally sustainable design, landscape and vegetation or protections for cultural places of significance.

The **State Government** (Minister for Planning) also has to approve these too.

Once these are in place, **land owners** and the **development sector** will design, seek permits for and build the new homes.

And Council, other levels of government, private and community organisations will need to invest in the new services, businesses, facilities, transport networks and spaces that are needed too.

How does this fit with the State's Housing Targets?

Preparing the Growing Places Strategy has put Council in the favourable position where it can inform the State Government on its planned capacity for growth based on technical reports, evidence and consultation.

How will the rural feel of the Shire be retained?

A comparative character assessment has been undertaken of all the towns and localities across the Shire to highlight their unique historical and character elements.

Future planning of areas will be required to respond to and reflect the key character elements in design proposals for new areas. For example, maintaining views to rural areas and clusters of native trees; utilising bluestone as a design element; including drystone walls, planted windbreaks, rural fences and an open sense of space.

How has the Community Vision been considered in the Strategy?

The Community Vision themes of Community; Liveability; Sustainability and Prosperity have provided the foundational principles that the Growing Places Strategy is built upon.

Of particular importance is that growth in certain areas of the Shire delivers benefits across the entire Shire, so that long-standing towns as well as new growth areas are interesting, vibrant, inclusive places, with diverse economies, populations and land uses with a healthy local environment and a character that is unmistakably 'Golden Plains'.

They will be positive, healthy places that people want to move to, while also remaining accessible, familiar and fulfilling to those who have stayed.

What is the Shire doing about Housing Affordability?

While there is a significant undersupply of social housing, the Shire offers more affordable lot prices on a per square metre basis than Geelong and Ballarat. Having a plan for future housing growth and providing a steady supply of land for residential purposes will help maintain housing affordability.

Will there be new schools, kindergartens and facilities to support growth?

Planning for infrastructure and services to support growth is critical and requires cooperation with different levels of government. Having a plan for future housing growth means everyone involved in delivering the housing, facilities, infrastructure and services to support that growth, can start planning now so it is coordinated and sustainable.

Will traffic congestion become a bigger problem with growth?

Integrated planning and transport is fundamental to the future growth of Golden Plains Shire. New growth areas will be required to be supported by an improved regional public transport network to increase connectivity and accessibility and reduce congestion on road infrastructure.

Improving connectivity and access into the regional centres of Geelong and Ballarat will be essential when it comes to supporting future growth in the Shire. New growth areas will differ from the car-based suburban model with pedestrian friendly pathways, dedicated cycle lanes and public transport stops at key activity centres and schools.

Will there be passenger rail along the Geelong-Ballarat corridor?

Community and stakeholder feedback from the Growing Places Informing Document included strong support for the re-instatement of passenger rail and the G21 Integrated Transport Strategy advocates for the revival of the passenger rail between Geelong and Ballarat. However, the Department of Transport and Planning has no plans to reinstate passenger rail between Geelong and Ballarat at this time.

Until this position changes, the Shire will advocate for improved bus services, connections and frequency and enhanced active travel modes.

What will happen to the towns where growth is not identified?

Most towns have structure plans in place which provide capacity for growth. These Structure Plans will remain in place. The Growth Strategy looks beyond the growth that is already planned and included in the Structure Plans across the Shire.

When will we know what the final plan is?

The project will culminate in a planning scheme amendment which incorporates the Growing Places Strategy into the Golden Plains Planning Scheme. This is required to be signed off by the Minister for Planning following a formal planning scheme amendment process. This planning scheme amendment process will commence in 2025 and can take around 18 months to complete.

How will the proposed windfarms affect the Strategy?

Applications for renewable energy facilities are managed by the Minister for Planning. Buffer distances are required between wind turbines and residential development. The proposed growth locations are outside the buffer distances from approved and planned windfarms.

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