



GROWING PLACES | STRATEGY DRAFT



GOLDEN PLAINS SHIRE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Golden Plains Shire spans the traditional lands of the Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar People. We acknowledge them as the Traditional Owners and Custodians.

Council pays its respects to both Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar Elders past, present and emerging.

Council extends that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People who are part of the Golden Plains Shire.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND EMBEDDED VALUES

Golden Plains Shire is positioned between the Cities of Greater Geelong to the south and Ballarat to the north, and its south-east portion is within 100km of Melbourne CBD, yet it offers a country atmosphere and rural landscapes that the community values.

As Victoria's population grows rapidly, the Shire's neighbours are experiencing significant growth pressure, with development planned right up to its borders. While Golden Plains already has enough planned residential land supply to meet the State Government's 15-year growth forecast, independent research suggests this estimation is modest.

This presents Golden Plains Shire with an opportunity - to leverage more growth from its neighbours and capture benefits for the community, and also a challenge - to be prepared if forecasted growth rates change, and more residential land is needed quicker than anticipated.

This Growing Places Strategy (GPS) is Council's response.

It is a high-level plan that identifies where future housing could be located as the Shire's population increases to 2050 and beyond.

The GPS is driven by the aspirations of the Community Vision 2040, and is informed by extensive research and technical studies, and significant stakeholder and community feedback.

Ultimately, it's about directing the right housing to the right places in a way that delivers net benefits to current and future communities, and preserves the Shire's valuable assets and country feel.

The 'right housing' means the quantity and type to meet anticipated future demand:

- Matching the type of housing provided to the needs of different household types to maintain its relative affordability, and support a diverse and resilient community.
- Being able to provide the right number of homes to support different rates of population growth in a way that is sustainable and contributes to the unique character of our townships.

The 'right places' means locations that are safe for people to live and where they are connected to the foundations for a good life:

- Directing growth to areas with low risk from bushfire, flood, and other natural and human-made hazards.
- Considering the essential services and infrastructure needed to support growing populations, where people can live, work, connect and thrive.

But planning for individual townships and locations is only half the story.

This GPS is designed to capture the benefits of growth to increase the wealth and wellbeing of the whole community, now and into the future. This means growth in certain areas delivers benefits across the entire Shire:

- An expanded rate-base allows more Council investment in services and infrastructure.
- Larger populations justify additional investment from other organisations and levels of government like health services, education and much needed public transport.
- A stronger local workforce stimulates industry development and in turn, more job opportunities in the Shire.

However, it's important these benefits don't diminish what already exists. The GPS sets out a plan that balances growth with the Shire's 'carrying capacity'. This means it protects the Shires valued landscapes, culture and lifestyle:

- Using residential land most efficiently to retain agricultural land that will become increasingly important to the state as the climate changes.
- Continuing to identify and conserve places with cultural heritage significance, and connect and enhance important biodiversity areas and wildlife corridors.
- Retaining the rural feel across the Shire, by keeping a mix of small towns, localities and district townships and focussing more urban living in rural centres.

The GPS does all this by identifying five key Potential Growth Locations, as well as other smaller areas of change, and the preconditions required to support that growth sustainably.

- Growth is already planned for in Bannockburn;
- It focusses new growth in Meredith, Lethbridge and Teesdale; and
- Cambrian Hill and Stonehaven are identified as future growth opportunities only if necessary infrastructure becomes available.

None of this will happen quickly, and the timing is not what is most important.

What matters is that a robust, considered long-term plan is in place, so we can be on the front foot and start the necessary strategic work for these Potential Growth Locations now.

The GPS provides certainty for the future - for Council, other levels of government, service providers, developers and the community - to allow integrated planning and delivery. At the same time, it is flexible and can adapt over time as circumstances and preconditions change to achieve well-planned, thoughtfully sequenced growth.

This GPS will shape the future of our Shire for decades to come.

BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE

WHY IS THE GROWING PLACES STRATEGY IMPORTANT?

Makes sure there is enough land available to provide homes for our share of Victoria's growing population.

Golden Plains Shire Council is carefully planning for anticipated future growth. It is important that Council directs growth to where it is best suited, delivers the most benefits for our current and future community, and protects the places and lifestyle we know our community loves.

WHAT IS THE GROWING PLACES STRATEGY?

Shows where future growth can be considered and the steps required to get the ball rolling.

The GPS is a high-level plan for where future housing could be located as our population increases, with an action plan to support this growth.

It outlines the location, type and scale of housing growth over time, to 2050 and beyond.

The GPS takes a long term view so we can leverage benefits of population growth for the Shire, while protecting our diverse mix of rural and urban townships for the future.

HOW WAS IT PREPARED?

See [Growing Places Informing Document](#)

The GPS is informed by an extensive program of independent expert research, consultation with key local and regional stakeholders, and underpinned by the aspirations of the Community Vision 2040.

The independent research is summarised in the Growing Places Strategy Informing Document, which also explains in more detail how the GPS was prepared.

It is a living document, to be reviewed and adapted as the Shire grows.



WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO GOLDEN PLAINS?

OUR COMMUNITY VISION

The strategic directions and objectives of the Community Vision are the foundational principles that the GPS is built upon.

The Community Vision 2040 and the recently refreshed Community Vision (adopted by Council August 2024) was developed through extensive consultation with our community. It identifies four themes: community, liveability, sustainability, and prosperity.



Figure 1: Updated Community Vision 2040

To achieve these aims, the informing documents of the GPS consider how growth in the Shire can support the Vision themes.

CONTEXT

A combination of factors makes the Shire of Golden Plains unique.

Between the regional cities of Geelong and Ballarat

Victoria is growing, and so are our neighbouring regional cities Geelong and Ballarat. By 2035 we will see housing and even new towns emerge along parts of our Shire borders.

This presents Golden Plains Shire with a unique opportunity to strategically capture flow on growth and secure benefits locally and for the whole Shire community – benefits that align with many aspirations of our Community Vision 2040.

Within the Peri-urban area of Melbourne

In September 2023, the Victorian Government released Victoria's Housing Statement with a target to build 800,000 homes in Victoria between 2024 and 2034. A portion of Golden Plains Shire is located within a commutable distance (100km) of central Melbourne, often classified as the peri-urban area, so there are additional growth pressures. This can be seen by the higher growth rates in the south east of our Shire.

Peri-urban municipalities in Victoria are coming from low population bases, which creates additional challenges in managing that growth. This includes a lower rate base to fund infrastructure and service improvements, greater difficulty in attracting and retaining staff, and more noticeable impacts to the character and amenities of the towns (Hansen Partnership, Managing Urban Growth in the Peri Urban Area, March 2023).

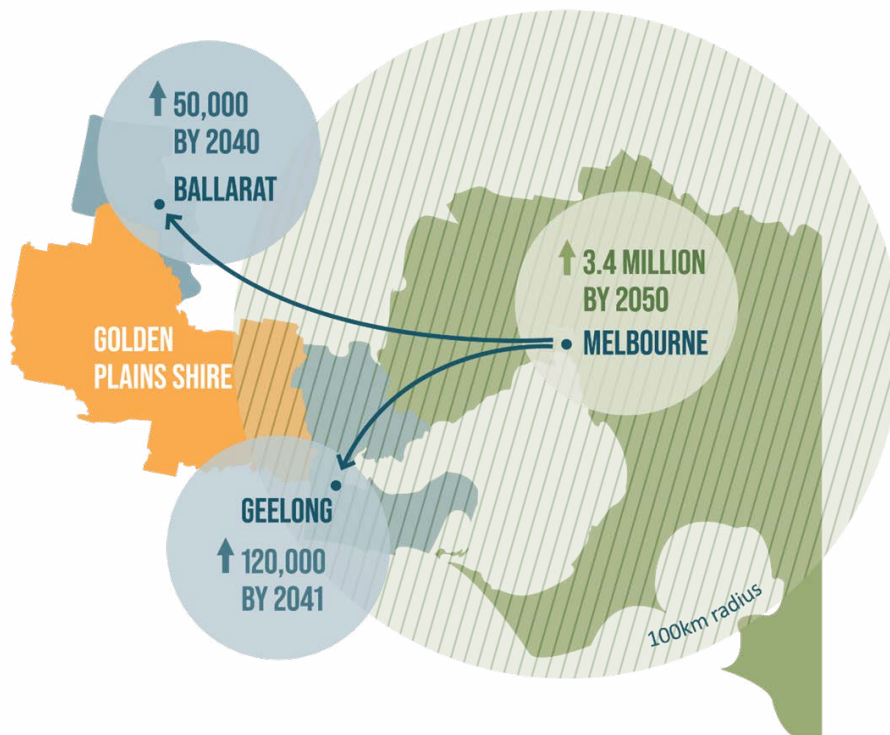


Figure 2: Golden Plains Shire Context

Plan Victoria

Following the release of Victoria’s Housing Statement in 2023, the State Government announced that Plan Melbourne will be reviewed and expanded to cover all of Victoria. The Plan for Victoria is being prepared at the same time as this Strategy has been developed, so the detail is not yet known, however it is understood that the Plan will be built around the following five pillars:

- Affordable Housing and Choice.
- Equity and Jobs.
- Thriving and Liveable Suburbs and Towns.
- Sustainable Environments and Climate Action.
- Self-determination and caring for Country.

Council is providing the informing documents for the GPS as part of our submission to the consultation, with the aspiration that these - and strategic work carried out by other Victorian councils - are used in the development of Plan Victoria.

Golden Plains Shire is split between two Regional Growth Plans that were prepared in 2014. The Central Highlands Regional Growth Plan covers the north of the Shire including Meredith, Smythesdale and Rokewood, and the G21 Regional Growth Plan includes the south of the Shire taking in Shelford, Bannockburn and Lethbridge.

The Regional Growth Plans are being reviewed in line with Plan Victoria, and need to consider additional work completed after they were created such as: Bushfire Risk Assessments and the Distinctive Areas and Landscapes designations for the Surf Coast and Bellarine Peninsula, which impact previously identified growth locations.

The GPS considers the Regional Growth Plans where they have not been superseded by later information.

Providing for housing need

“Housing should be in close proximity to where employment opportunities are located, as well as to transport and other services. Housing also needs to be located in areas that do not face a high risk of natural hazards or where development is predicated on design and investment which reduces disaster risk, informed by future climate scenarios. The expansion of remote work presents new opportunities for flexible employment but also presents challenges such as access to services in regional and rural areas”

Natural Urban Policy, Consultation Draft, Australian Government, May 2024

Victorian planning policy requires all Councils to maintain at least a 15-year supply of land for residential development.

Victoria’s Housing Statement (2023) sets a target of 425,600 new homes across regional areas by 2051. Plan Victoria will provide further detail on how and where this will be delivered, however draft housing targets have been developed for each Local Government Area. For Golden Plains Shire this is 11,700 new houses by 2051. When finalised, the housing targets will be incorporated into Plan Victoria and may replace the 15-year land supply requirement.

The State Government regularly forecasts how growth will be distributed across the state called Victoria in Future (VIF). The most recent VIF release in 2023 stated that Golden Plains’ population was 24,890 people in 2021 and projected to reach 34,000 in 2036, an increase of 9,140 with an average increase of 2.1% per annum.



Table 1

Victoria in Future Projections - Golden Plains Shire

Local Government Area	2021	2026	2031	2036
Population Projections	24,892	27,276	30,166	34,036
Total Dwellings Projections	9,408	10,405	11,593	13,134

The Bannockburn Growth Plan (2021) outlines three growth precincts, the South East, North West and South West. These three precincts are estimated to accommodate an additional 18,000 people, enough to meet the required 15-year supply from the VIF projections. The Bannockburn Growth Plan anticipates this growth will take place over 30 years, and while this land is identified, it is not yet appropriately zoned. This undersupply of zoned residential land in Bannockburn has reduced the growth rate over the last five years.

A shire-wide Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) in 2022 identified that the same growth rate in the north of the Shire had not been realised due to a mismatch between supply and demand. While there is supply of rural living sized allotments, there is a lack of low density residential or larger suburban sized lots. As a result, the HNA suggests that Golden Plains has potential to grow at a faster rate than the VIF estimates predict, and recommends that the GPS allows for scenarios with different growth rates.

Integrated strategic planning enables a pipeline of zoned, serviced land to meet housing need. This strategy considers the amount and type of housing needed for the future, and considers the spatial capacity and conditions required to sustainably meet the projected housing need.

This requires two sets of analysis:

1. The ‘carrying capacity’ of the municipality by assessing constraints and opportunities.

This is considered in Section 5 of the Strategy.
2. Housing targets based on need and diversity projections, including:
 - Population predictions.
 - Household characteristics.
 - Social, affordable and key worker housing needs.
 - Community wealth and wellbeing considerations.
 - Enabling infrastructure.

INFORMED DECISIONS AND DIRECTIONS

SAFEGUARDING FUTURE COMMUNITIES

Protecting human life is a primary consideration that guides whether areas are suitable for future growth.

Bushfire

Bushfire is a significant issue across the municipality, with the highest risk areas predominantly in the north of the Shire.

Conserving vegetation is a lower priority than protecting human life, but is still important in bushfire prone areas. Avoiding development and rezoning in bushfire areas reduces the need for bushfire protection measures that impact on vegetation and also minimises risk to human life.

Therefore, bushfire risk will be mitigated by directing growth to areas of low bushfire risk.

In established areas with higher levels of bushfire risk, growth will be minimal. Development will only be considered where it helps to reduce the risk to the township through tailored protection measures.

For townships where incremental growth is directed, the Strategic Framework Plan will need to be reviewed with a bushfire mitigation lens and include strategies to minimise risk.

Townships and areas identified for substantial growth are identified as low bushfire risk.

The Strategic Bushfire Risk Assessment (2022) identifies that the Bushfire Management Overlay is inadequate in some locations and needs to be reviewed.

Flooding

Along with bushfire, the Natural Environment and Hazards Analysis (2022) identifies flooding in the highest risk category. Flood prone areas are identified through the Planning Scheme. The GPS avoids growth in flood prone areas based on existing flood mapping. Flood maps will need to continue to be updated in partnership with the Catchment Management Authority. The Teesdale Flood Risk Identification Study (2023) uses climate change models to map future impacts and will be a template for future flood studies.

Flooding around Smythesdale is identified for further investigation through the updated Structure Plan.

Future developments will need to conduct a flood impact assessment as part of any rezoning proposal.

Existing policy applies and the GPS will introduce a minor change to the Golden Plains Planning Scheme to acknowledge climate change as a reason for increasing flood impacts.

Natural and human-made hazards

Hazards that are less likely to pose an immediate threat to human life, but can have an adverse impact to amenity and health, are also considered when planning locations of residential growth. The GPS directs growth to areas outside the buffers of the existing airport, windfarms, food production precinct, and intensive farming operations.

The EPA regulates and provides recommendations on buffer distances and assessments of many other human-made hazards including landfills and contaminated land.

Areas susceptible to landslip/erosion, of historical mining activity and salinity may require further technical investigation for future growth areas before rezoning can be considered.

Existing policy applies and no changes are required to the planning scheme in relation to natural and human-made hazards.

Climate change

The goal in addressing climate change is to create sustainable towns by being proactive and innovative, integrating climate resilience into urban planning to ensure the safety and well-being of urban populations. This isn't just about the future – it's about addressing immediate threats today while laying the groundwork for a resilient, sustainable and responsive tomorrow.

PIA Foresight Anticipating Future Trends Shaping Planning, Planning Institute of Australia, 2024

The Golden Plains Climate Emergency Plan 2022-2032 is Council's commitment to mitigate, adapt and respond to climate change.

It includes actions towards achieving net zero emissions for a more sustainable future for Golden Plains Shire across five themes:

1. Embedding climate action into Council.
2. Resilient and adaptive community.
3. Caring for the land.
4. Climate responsive development.
5. Sustainable transport and travel.

To lead action on climate change, Council will support renewable energy, facilitate sustainable transport and development, and develop adaptation focussed land management strategies.

As described in section 'Flooding', the effects of climate change on the extent of floods will be considered when updating flood maps.



I PROTECTING WHAT'S VALUABLE

The strategic directions and objectives of the Community Vision 2040 are the fundamental principles that guide what is most valued and to be protected through the GPS.

Sustaining communities

Golden Plains Shire is a large geographic area but has a low rate-base. Meeting community expectations of services and infrastructure is a key challenge. Broadening the rate-base through an increased population could help but would also require investment in additional infrastructure to support that growth. A Developer Contribution (DC) framework could be explored for key townships; as a shire-wide approach has been found to be unsuitable.

The structure planning process, which involves township-wide Structure Plans, Precinct Structure Plans for large greenfield developments, or Development Plans for smaller scale development areas, must include a DC framework that requires the developer to provide funds to deliver the identified infrastructure and services needed to support healthy communities.

The Community Services and Infrastructure Plan Update (2023) includes a benchmark of facilities and services currently provided in our townships, and identifies what will be required as the Shire grows. This information will be used for the DC framework.

The Shire has 56 rural communities and 16 townships. While town centres, businesses

and industry to the north and south-east are growing, some town centres in the central and west of the Shire are facing, or risk facing decline due to lack of population to support them.

Growth in our Shire must support increased wealth and wellbeing throughout all the Shire's communities. This will be achieved by:

- Encouraging healthy lifestyles
- Expanding access to healthcare in underserved areas
- Capturing and distributing economic value through the community
- Retaining mixed land use
- Planning for diversity in housing types

An increased population can justify and stimulate other organisations to expand services into Golden Plains, such as primary and allied health, education, and public transport.

Developers will be required to respond to the wealth and wellbeing ideals of the Shire when proposing future growth areas.

Biodiversity

While conserving vegetation and wildlife corridors is encouraged across all land uses and landscapes in the Shire, climate modelling scenarios in the Golden Plains Biodiversity Strategy (2016) indicate where biodiversity conservation efforts are best focused.

The Golden Plains Biodiversity Strategy (2016) classifies areas into 'Marginal', 'Favourable', 'Focal' and 'Strategic'.

'Marginal' and 'Favourable' areas are predicted to have low strategic value in the future climate. More research will be required as part of future structure planning work to verify and clarify the modelling results as it applies to land use change at a local level. In these areas, efforts should be made to protect and enhance the very rare vegetation communities that are present.

'Focal' and 'Strategic' areas have been identified as having the most strategic value for biodiversity conservation due to a favourable future climate. These areas are dispersed across the Shire and habitat linkages are proposed to connect them. These should be identified as Targeted Strategic Biodiversity Corridors and protected from habitat fragmentation and urban growth.

Targeted Strategic Biodiversity Focal Areas and Corridors will aim to recreate the ecosystem structure with resistant local species and provide a buffer to 'Focal Areas' as well as extend and link existing remnant vegetation.

Further strategic work will be required to identify Targeted Strategic Biodiversity Areas and Corridors.

First Peoples cultural heritage

The landscape incorporating Golden Plains Shire is the traditional Country of the Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar peoples. For tens of thousands of years and countless generations they have nurtured, protected, cared, and learnt from Country.

A First Peoples Cultural Heritage Report was prepared in consultation with both Registered Aboriginal Parties. Its aim is to provide the foundation for respect, protection and defining First People's Cultural Heritage in the GPS.

Golden Plains Shire Council supports and commits to the Victorian process of self-determination and Treaty. To achieve this, the GPS will update the Golden Plains Planning Scheme Clause 02.03-5 Built Environment Heritage to:

- Acknowledge Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar are the traditional knowledge holders.
- Ensure the protection and enhancement of places and features of natural, archaeological, and cultural heritage significance.

Further, it will add Clause 15.03-2L Aboriginal Heritage to include the objective to acknowledge Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar traditional knowledge and further support the identification, assessment, protection, and conservation of places with cultural heritage significance. This will include guidelines to:

- Support the visibility of Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar cultural heritage through recognition and use of language.
- Support the history and culture for Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar within design of the landscape and public infrastructure.
- Enable the transition to healthy people and Country through design, with the provision of areas for cultural burning practises to build resilience, ecosystems, cultural connectiveness to Country and reduce the risk of bushfire.

Post contact heritage

The post contact journey in Golden Plains commenced in the mid-1830s. As a land manager, Golden Plains Shire has a statutory responsibility to protect places and objects that are important to the community and state.

A Post Contact Heritage Report has been prepared to make improvements to the way Golden Plains Shire statutory obligations under the Heritage Act 2017 are enacted, to ensure post contact heritage is acknowledged, protected, and are part of our strategic planning and throughout the planning approval process.

The GPS will update the Golden Plains Planning Scheme Clause 02.03-5 Built Environment Heritage to reflect a commitment to:

- Respect First Peoples perspectives of post contact history.
- Investigate the potential of heritage places and objects prior to urban development.
- Incorporate registered heritage places into the urban landscape to protect and conserve the heritage place.
- Design that protects heritage places adjacent to major upgrades to the integrated transport network and essential services/infrastructure.

It will also include the addition of Clause 15.03-2L Dry Stone Walls to incorporate these walls into the urban landscape. This will contribute to the understanding of historical farming practises, and support the retention, conservation and repair of dry stone walls affected by the Planning Scheme's Clause 52.33 Post Boxes And Dry Stone Walls.

Agriculture

A key asset of the Shire is its supply of land, much of this is cleared agricultural land.

All agricultural land in Golden Plains Shire is valuable for food, fibre, energy production and more. There are opportunities to increase the productivity of agricultural land through technology, economies of scale, biosecurity

measures, new crops, water management and farming techniques, plus non-agricultural uses like carbon farming and renewable energy. Innovation, value-adding and diversification are important for the future to support a thriving local economy and provide food for a growing population.

While the Agriculture Assessment (2022) shows that the Shire does not have high classes of agricultural land, this land is predicted to be less severely affected by climate change than many other agricultural areas of the state. This makes the Shire's rural land important to protect as it's contribution to agriculture may become increasingly relied upon in the future.

Protecting the rural land in the Shire will create opportunities for investment and growth in agriculture and maximise sustainable landscapes. To embed the principles of 'community wealth' and 'a circular economy' into the GPS, it must protect and value-add to clusters of agricultural activities, and strengthen local supply chains and opportunities for local manufacturing.

Large areas of land are required for separation and buffer distances, as well as energy production, to support sustainable agriculture and communities into the future. Therefore, any agricultural land identified for residential growth needs to be sustainably consumed so there is sufficient rural land for the future.

Specific policy for permitting dwellings and sensitive uses in rural areas needs to be clear and based on the primacy of the rural purpose of the land.

Victoria has some of the best quality agricultural areas in Australia and grows a diverse range of food for ourselves and for export. We need to protect our agricultural land from urban expansion, climate change, natural disasters and resource scarcity. We can do this by establishing township boundaries to create a clear edge between housing and agricultural land. This will ensure we can live sustainably. - Big Ideas for Victoria's future, State Government of Victoria, 2024

Landscapes

Golden Plains Shire is privileged to include many areas of natural beauty or historic and cultural significance. Protecting these is important to Council and the community.

Landscape character consists of a site's geology, topography, vegetation, water bodies and other natural features, combined with the effects of land use and built development. Golden Plains' landscape character includes western volcanic plains, and uplands, as considered in the South West Landscape Assessment Study (2012).

Schedule 18 to Clause 42.03 Significant Landscape Overlay – Rivers of the Barwon: Moorabool river (Moorroobull) Corridor Environs was introduced in May 2023 by Planning Scheme Amendment VC201. It provides protection on many levels including living cultural heritage, and natural and landscape value. Where this overlay applies, the application requirements work well to ensure the values of these areas are well considered. The Schedule is due to expire in 2026 and the GPS supports removing this expiry so that it remains in place indefinitely.

Character

Our community strongly values the 'country feel' and character of Golden Plains and its different townships, and does not want to see new development that resembles the suburbs in other growth areas through the region. Retaining the rural feel across the Shire, through a mix of rural and urban living is important as the Shire grows.

Character profiles were developed for all townships and localities in the Shire in the Golden Plains Shire Town Character Profiles (2022). These include the history, visual character, identity, housing types, land use types and approximate populations. A hierarchy of towns was prepared based on an assessment of population, community facilities, assets and attributes, and character.

As the Shire grows, some towns will experience minimal change or incremental change, whereas in other areas there will be substantial change. See Section 6 for more information on the change locations. Regardless of the scale, it is important that this growth contributes to each town's unique character.

The First Peoples Cultural Heritage Report (2023) also highlights the opportunity to elevate and embed Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar culture and communities across Golden Plains through our growth area planning.

To achieve this, Design Principles will be required to integrate important elements into future growth. These principles will consider the interaction between built form, topography and vegetation across the public and private realm.

The Golden Plains Planning Scheme will identify each town's: long-term classification and role; the expected level of essential servicing; range of facilities available; and their character elements that are important to retain.

HOUSING NEEDS, DIVERSITY, LAND SUPPLY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

A core element of the GPS is to determine appropriate levels of land supply, growth rates, related land uses, lot sizes and densities. It also needs to identify the infrastructure required to support the community's preferred type of growth in the identified locations.

Population predictions

There were 9,408 households in Golden Plains Shire as at the 2021 Census.

There is potential for different levels of population growth (growth scenarios) which can be influenced by planning policy. The preferred growth scenario for Golden Plains is one which doesn't exceed infrastructure servicing and enables Council to sustainably cater for and aligns with the Community Vision.

By considering a range of growth scenarios, the implications of different growth rates can be tested which helps to develop a robust Growth Strategy able to manage changes in future housing demand.

Council's current planned growth in Bannockburn provides sufficient land supply to cater for the 15-year supply from the 'baseline' VIF projections. However, there is also a realistic opportunity to accommodate a higher level of growth relative to the Geelong and Ballarat housing markets.

The drafting of Plan Victoria has included a preliminary target of 11,700 new houses for Golden Plains by 2051. This figure may change as Plan Victoria is finalised.

The Housing Needs Assessment (2022) prepared for the GPS, identifies potential demand for 14,770 new houses by 2051.

The GPS provides a framework to respond to various growth scenarios in alignment with the Community Vision. It identifies the locations suitable for further investigation for growth and outlines the pre-conditions to cater for sustainable growth.

Household characteristics

Shifting demographics – diversity will continue to broaden as migration trends continue; the population ages; families get smaller; and traditional housing models adapt to accommodate multigenerational households.

PIA Foresight Anticipating Future Trends Shaping Planning, Planning Institute of Australia, 2024

Compared to Geelong and Ballarat, the Golden Plains population and housing stock has some distinctive characteristics, including:

- A high proportion of families with children living in detached dwellings, including a high percentage of larger 4+ bedroom homes.
- A low proportion of single person households and single parent families.
- A particularly high proportion of households that either own or are buying their houses.
- A limited number of rental properties.
- A high rate of vehicle ownership – presumably because limited public transport services make car ownership (and often multiple car ownership) a necessity.

A large proportion of Golden Plains households are young workers and families. Some 40 per cent of households are couples with children; almost double that for the rest of regional Victoria (Community Wealth and wellbeing Analysis, 2023). Increasingly, the area will be seen as an attractive place to start and raise a family due its rural lifestyle, relatively affordable housing and proximity to jobs and services in Ballarat and Geelong, as well as the Shire itself.

More variation in housing types to cater for different types of households and demographics could potentially accelerate population growth beyond the levels experienced in recent decades.

The vast majority of residents work outside the Shire which translates to significant community travel distances and time. Due to limited public transport, community members without access to a car likely experience reduced travel freedom. Increasing employment opportunities within the Shire that can be serviced by public transport is a key goal of growth area planning.

Affordable, social and key worker housing

Housing affordability is complex with a multitude of factors outside the control or influence of spatial planning, including rising construction costs, inflation, population growth and migration patterns. Planning can provide an enabling environment for housing need, housing diversity and requirements for inclusion of affordable and social housing.

Ten ways planning can support housing affordability and diversity, Planning Institute of Australia, 2024

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.

There are low numbers of rental properties and demand for key worker housing in Meredith associated with windfarms, agriculture and food manufacturing.

The Gheringhap Employment Precinct will provide employment close to Bannockburn, Batesford and Stonehaven and may accelerate demand for housing in these areas.

Higher levels of social housing and varied lot sizes can contribute to greater diversity and resilience within communities and should be a priority outcome of future development.

An increase in social housing will be facilitated through a guideline for greenfield development to contribute to social housing in the Golden Plains Shire Social Housing Plan (2021).

Escalating housing and rental prices mean many are becoming financially locked out of cities and look to the regions for housing. Planning and delivery of infrastructure that aligns with growth prevents congestion and ensures the lifestyle appeal of regional towns is not diminished.

Housing affordability, urban exodus and infrastructure challenges, Planning Institute of Australia, 2024

Community wealth and wellbeing

Golden Plains is entering a period of population growth which, over the coming decades, will bring new capital investment and residential development. This influx, and the resultant changes, should contribute to the strong collective vision for the Shire.

By taking an active and supportive planning approach, the next phase of population and economic growth will contribute to, rather than extract or detract from, community wealth in the Shire. Due to various factors, including identified constraints and the need to preserve the character and rural setting of the Shire, many towns and communities will experience a much slower rate of growth.

It is critical that growth in certain areas of the Shire delivers benefits across the entire Shire.

To support productive, sustainable landscapes into the future, all rural land converted for residential purposes needs to be used efficiently and to the minimum extent required for sustainable living. New residential areas are only to be zoned from the residential suite and not for larger rural living purposes.

New growth areas will be interesting, vibrant, inclusive places, with diverse economies, populations and land uses, 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.

Employment

Around 70% of working people that live in Golden Plains Shire work outside of the Shire (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021).

The Golden Plains Shire Industrial Land Needs Assessment (2022) identifies an insufficient amount of zoned industrial land across the Shire to meet short, medium and longer term demand for both smaller and larger allotments. There are opportunities to support more local industry by unlocking industrial land and attracting more residents to provide a sustainable local workforce.

The Gheringhap Employment Precinct is strategically identified for larger industrial lots. As supply of industrial land diminishes in Geelong, demand for land in the Gheringhap Employment Precinct is likely to be realised.

Meredith is a potential location for value adding/processing of agricultural production that could be investigated further. A new structure plan for Meredith should consider a suitable location for an industrial precinct that caters for larger land users.

Services and Infrastructure

Part of the attraction of towns in Golden Plains is the lifestyle and country atmosphere they offer within a reasonable distance of regional cities and metropolitan Melbourne, making them accessible on a semi-regular basis.

As towns grow and there is more competition for services and infrastructure, there is risk that this lifestyle appeal is diminished. Small towns are impacted by even slight changes in population.

Rapid technological innovation has implications for energy and transport.

PIA Foresight Anticipating Future Trends Shaping Planning, Planning Institute of Australia, 2024



Planning for infrastructure and services to support growth is critical and requires cooperation with different levels of government.

The three levels of government, as well as communities, developers and businesses, all play a role in planning and supporting growth in regions and towns.

Table 2: Role of Government and Developers

Federal Government	State Government	Local Government	Developers
<p>National level policies such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • climate • migration • telecommunications • major infrastructure 	<p>Critical and community infrastructure including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • schools • hospitals • transport 	<p>Local services, infrastructure and regulation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • place-based policies • building regulation • public health • local roads and footpaths • parks and playing fields • libraries • local environmental issues • waste disposal • community services 	<p>Financing and delivering urban projects including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • residential subdivisions • retail centres • industrial precincts • housing diversity • development contributions

To calculate development contributions, estimations of the required infrastructure upgrades is needed. Some areas in the Shire will require a substantial amount of infrastructure to support the anticipated growth including transport, community and recreation facilities, and adequate drainage infrastructure.

In areas where there is existing infrastructure, contributions will go towards amenity and upgrades, including streetscape improvements, drainage, street lighting and footpaths. Developers will also still be required to provide drainage and transport as part of planned growth.

The Service Limitation and Civil Infrastructure Analysis (2024) provides a methodology to identify the optimum locations for future growth and sequence developments to take advantage of existing infrastructure and services. The Multi-Criteria Analysis model is designed to be updated as additional information is available to assist with the long term planning for growth.

Accessibility, Transport and Mobility

Proximity to Geelong and Ballarat means a significant portion of the Golden Plains population is within the catchment to employment and services in these regional cities. Therefore, duplicating higher order services such as hospitals, specialised medical, higher and tertiary education, government services and larger entertainment facilities in Golden Plains is unlikely. However, accessibility to these services is car dependent. There is a real need, desire and opportunity for more diverse, accessible and sustainable transport options across the shire.

For future populations, a car-based suburban model is out of date and requires redesign. However, for now, growth in Golden Plains is locked into the car-based model given there is no available public transport.

Spatial policy is a powerful tool to address this issue and the railway between Geelong and Ballarat presents a spine that could accommodate new growth. Meredith, Lethbridge, Bannockburn and Teesdale would grow, based on proximity to this transport spine.

The G21 Integrated Transport Strategy (2022) predicts that the region will remain heavily car dependent until public transport becomes a viable alternative. It advocates for the revival of the passenger rail between Geelong and Bannockburn, running through Geelong's Western Growth area. A future population at Stonehaven could also access the service.

The Department of Transport and Planning and the City of Greater Geelong have advised that the Hamilton and Midland Highways will reach capacity with the planned Western Geelong Growth Area population and growth at Bannockburn. Given the transport limitations identified, considering Stonehaven as a growth area is subject to traffic investigations and modelling, and would be dependent on solutions and potential upgrades to a number of connections within Geelong.

Similarly, while Cambrian Hill aligns with the City of Ballarat's strategic ambitions to contain growth within an 8km arc of the Ballarat CBD, developing this location must be in sequence with the greenfield growth currently identified and being planned for.

Community and stakeholder feedback from the Growing Places Informing Document included strong support for the re-instatement of passenger rail, a focus on improved bus networks, connections and frequency, and enhanced active travel modes.

It is important that public transport services in Golden Plains are integrated into the broader land use and 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.

The increase in remote working presents opportunities for reducing the dependency on cars for daily activities. The range of transport options is changing which presents opportunities to plan places differently to support new active transport modes and zero emissions technology.

Integrated planning and transport is fundamental to the future growth of Golden Plains Shire.

Development in growth areas should prioritise multi-modal connectivity with pedestrian-friendly pathways, dedicated cycle lanes and public transport stops at key activity centres and schools. Coupled with this is the challenge to reduce emissions, ensure accessibility to all modes and make efficient use of space.

Sewerage

Council will continue to work with Barwon Water in developing the case for sewerage for Meredith, as well as consideration of other towns including Lethbridge and Teesdale.

Barwon Water has advised that existing and planned infrastructure in the Western Growth Area of Geelong cannot accommodate the growth scenario identified at Stonehaven. A new servicing solution (in particular sewerage) will need to be sought. It would likely need a new standalone solution or a significant upgrade to planned infrastructure.

CONCLUSION - WHAT WE FOUND

Using the range of informing reports, the following 'What is left?' map was produced to show where capacity exists within the municipality in the context of constraints and opportunities.

Drawing on extensive consultation with stakeholders and the community, suitable locations for housing growth were then identified that balance the need to:

- ensure the safety of future communities;
- protect what's valuable;
- provide adequate land and infrastructure to support growth projections; and
- deliver net community benefit and sustainable development

The identified locations are close to services, jobs, public transport (opportunities), regional centres and their strategic development areas.

WHAT IS LEFT?

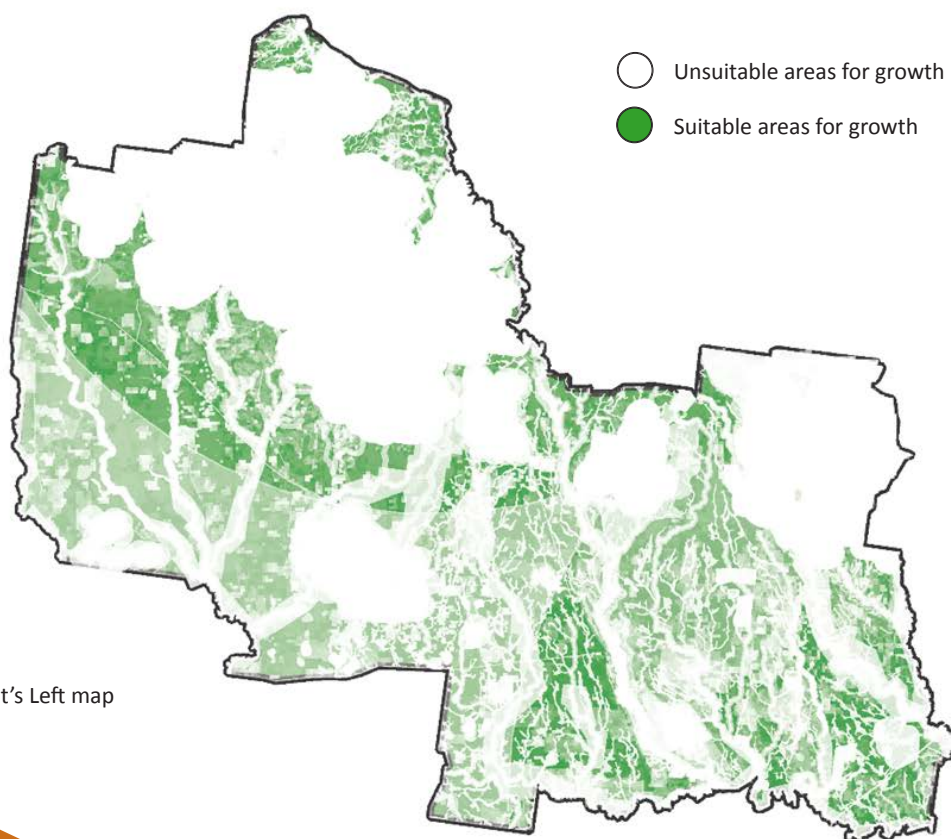


Figure 3 : What's Left map

THE GROWTH STRATEGY/ SCENARIO

Positioned between the Cities of Greater Geelong and Ballarat, Golden Plains Shire is in a unique position as it already provides the State Governments Victoria in Future (ViF) 15-year forecast growth, but has the opportunity to leverage a higher level of growth from its neighbours which are experiencing significant pressure.

With a large geographic area but low rate-base, meeting community expectations in terms of services and infrastructure is a key challenge for Golden Plains. Broadening the rate-base through an increased population could help, but also requires additional investment in infrastructure to support that growth.

Informed by extensive research and technical studies, and drawing on significant community and stakeholder input and feedback, the GPS identifies housing change areas and preferred development outcomes to provide clarity and certainty about where growth and intensification could occur over the long-term to 2050 and beyond.

The aim is to leverage the growth to deliver benefits across the Shire's communities, while protecting important landscapes and agricultural land for the future, and maintaining the 'country feel' of Golden Plains.

In light of restrained Federal and State Government spending on major infrastructure projects, the GPS prioritises infill growth over undeveloped areas without existing infrastructure:

- Growth is primarily focussed in Bannockburn, Meredith, Lethbridge and Teesdale; and
- Cambrian Hill and Stonehaven are identified as future growth opportunities only if necessary infrastructure becomes available.

The GPS change areas are shown on the map, and described in the table using the categories of minimal, incremental and substantial change areas.

Minimal change areas

Areas that are constrained by planning considerations such as the physical capability of land to safely accommodate more residential development. For example, areas where additional housing is unsuitable for providing future housing growth due to bushfire risk or flooding. They may also be protected because of their special heritage, environmental or landscape characteristics.

Incremental change areas

Areas with capacity for housing growth and more diverse types of housing where housing growth occurs in context with its character.

Substantial change areas

Where housing growth will be facilitated to take advantage of their proximity to jobs, services or public transport. Where housing diversity and intensification will occur and result in a new built form and neighbourhood character.

Table 3: Summary of Growing Places Strategy change potential

Townships and Localities		Current role	Strategic Direction	Change	Precondition
Bannockburn		Sub Regional Centre	Regional Centre	Substantial	As per Bannockburn Growth Plan
Meredith		District Town	Sub Regional Centre	Substantial	Reticulated sewerage New structure plan
Lethbridge Teesdale		District Town	District Town	Incremental	New structure plan Increase bushfire resilience
Inverleigh		District Town	District Town	Incremental	
Rokewood		District Town	District Town	Minimal	
Linton		District Town	District Town	Minimal	
Smythesdale		District Town	District Town	Incremental	New structure plan Increase bushfire resilience
Cape Clear Napoleons	Scarsdale Shelford	Town	Town	Minimal	
Berringa Corindhap Enfield Garibaldi Haddon	Maude Murgheboluc Ross Creek Sutherlands Creek	Small Town	Small Town	Minimal	
Anakie Bamganie Barunah Park Batesford Berrybank Cressy Dereel Durdidwarrah Durham Lead Happy Valley Hesse Illabrook Mannibadar Mount Mercer Morrisons Newtown	Nintingbool Piggoreet Pitfield Pittong Rokewood Junction Russells Bridge Smythes Creek Springdallah Staffordshire Reef Steiglitz Wallinduc Werneth Willowvale Wingeel	Locality	Locality	Minimal	
Cambrian Hill		Locality	District Town or Sub Regional Centre	Substantial	New Structure Plan Provision of transport infrastructure and other services
Stonehaven		Locality	District Town or Sub Regional Centre	Substantial	New Structure Plan Provision of transport infrastructure and other services Other strategic justification and identification
Gheringhap		Locality	Employment Precinct	Substantial	As per Structure Plan

GOLDEN PLAINS SHIRE 
 GROWING PLACES STRATEGY
 CHANGE AREAS

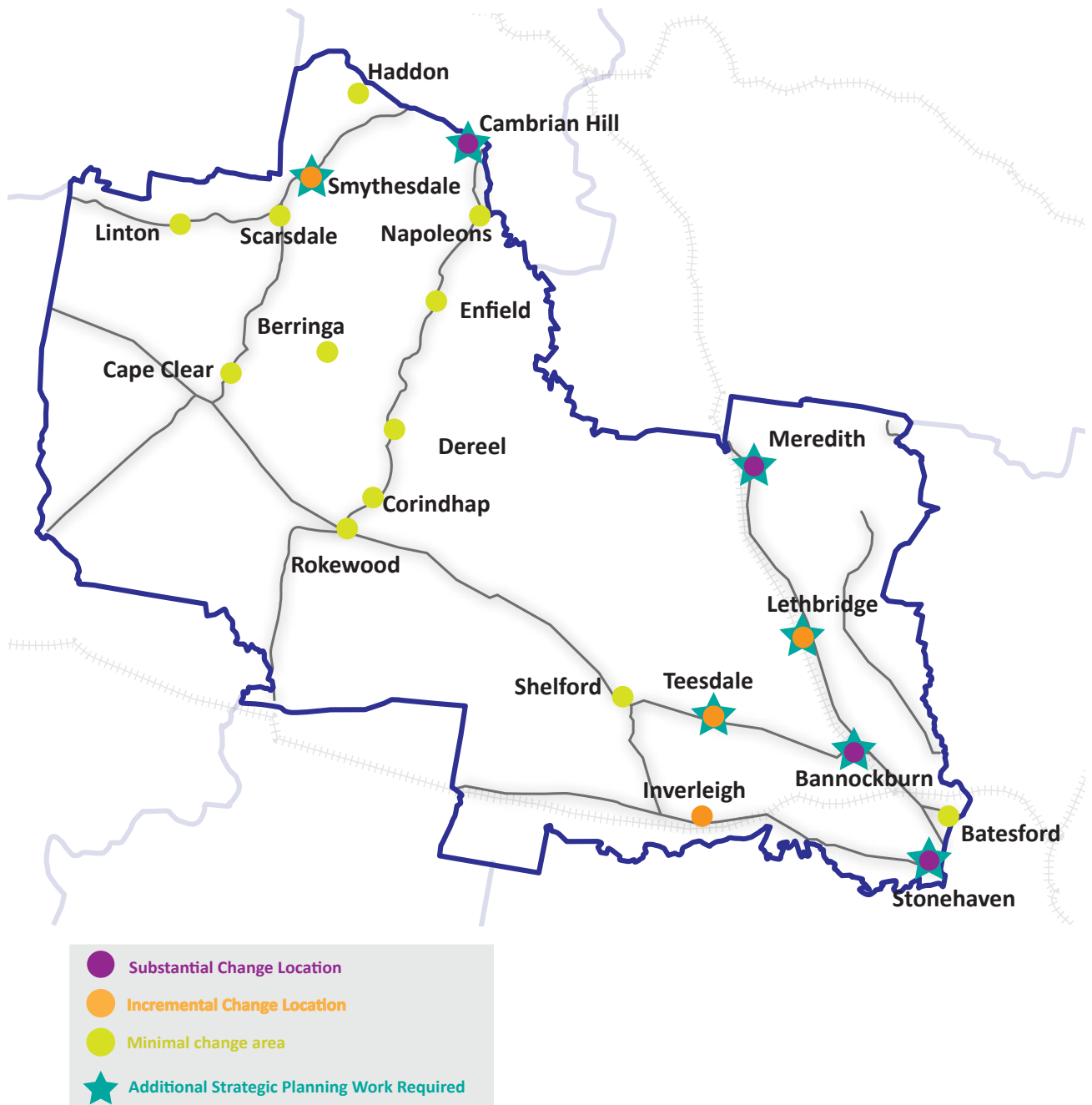


Figure 4: Golden Plains Change Areas

PLANNING FOR GROWTH

Blueprint for growth – potential growth locations

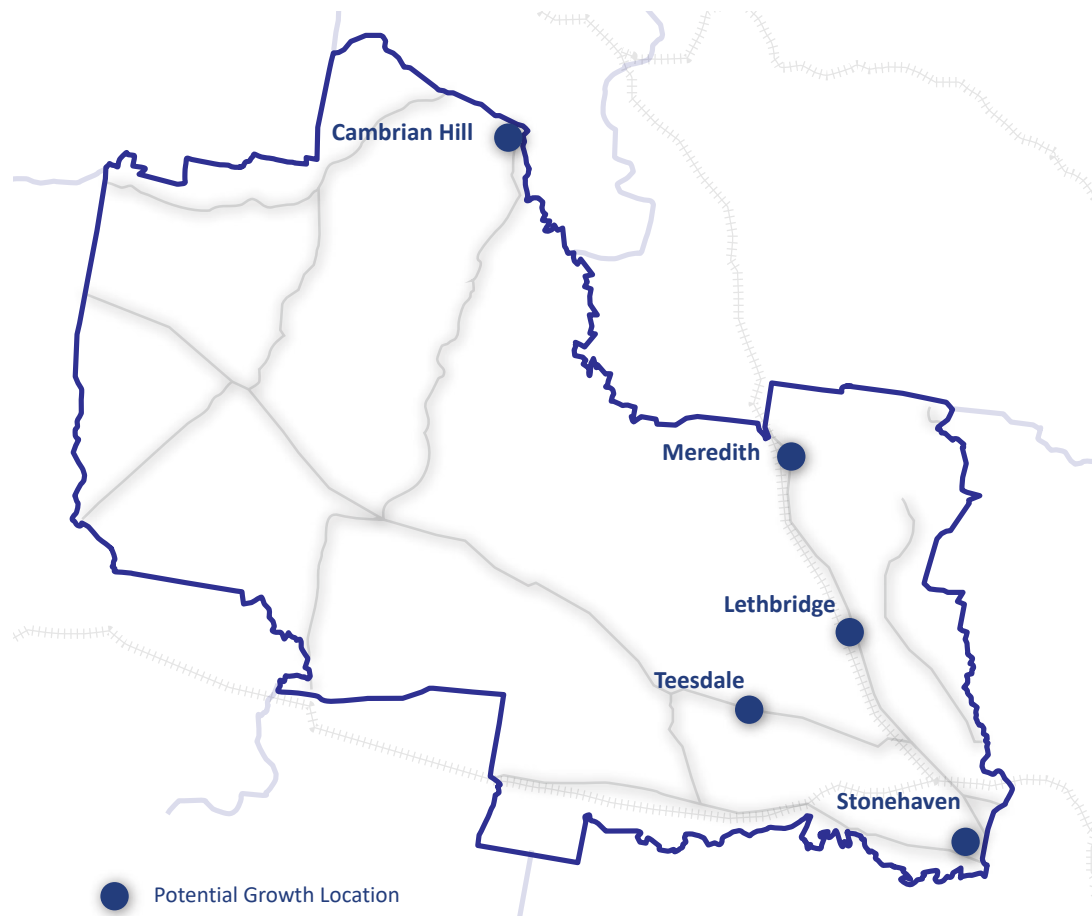


Figure 5: Potential Growth Locations

The role of planning is fundamentally spatial: to co-ordinate a pipeline of housing aligned with infrastructure capacity, population trends and housing preferences. To put the right housing in the right place, not just focus on housing numbers. (Planning for the Housing we Need, PIA, August 2023).

The Potential Growth Locations: Meredith, Lethbridge, Teesdale, Stonehaven and Cambrian Hill provide a blueprint for sensible long term growth, to 2050 and beyond. The timing is not what is most important. What is clear from the research and analysis undertaken is that these locations can sensibly and sustainably accommodate future growth.

The Potential Growth Locations is where future strategic work will be concentrated.

Foundations and fundamentals for growth

It is essential to have a sequenced plan of where housing growth can be located to support efficient infrastructure delivery. Integrated planning reduces infrastructure outlays, utilises spare capacity and concentrates activity near clusters of services and transport choices.

The Potential Growth Locations can cater to various scenarios and population projections to 2050 and beyond.

Bannockburn remains the focus for future growth consistent with the Bannockburn Growth Plan, which could cater for an additional 13,000 homes.

Meredith is the next location where future growth will be considered, subject to a commitment by Barwon Water to service the town with reticulated sewerage.

Additional growth will be considered at **Lethbridge and Teesdale**, subject to significant infrastructure commitments to reticulated sewerage and public transport.

Cambrian Hill has been strategically identified as a location for growth in the Northern Settlement Strategy (2019). This is essentially an extension of Ballarat’s growth, with access to trunk infrastructure including sewerage. It is important to sequence the development of Cambrian Hill in line with the growth areas of Ballarat.

Stonehaven has not previously been identified in Regional or Local growth plans. Analysis identified this area as generally clear of constraints, making it appropriate for further investigation as a growth location. This area would extend on the planned future growth of Geelong. To consider growth in this location, transport matters associated with the capacity of the Hamilton Highway will need to be resolved and a regional analysis of land supply/ housing needs undertaken.

Based on the findings and directions of the Informing Document and Growth Scenario, the following table presents the future work and fundamental requirements for implementation.

Table 4: Summary of foundations and fundamentals for future planning

Growth Location	Essential infrastructure	Enabling Infrastructure	Key Character Elements
Meredith	Reticulated sewerage	Passenger rail	The use of wide streets and timber structures creates a light and open quality that should be retained in future developments.
Cambrian Hill	Reticulated sewerage	Ballarat Link Road	Future development should build on the unique features of Cambrian Hill including the retention of remnant native trees, space to plant large canopy trees, retain views to Mount Buninyong and enhance the Yarrowee River environs.
Stonehaven	Capacity of Hamilton Highway addressed or resolved by alternative transport options Reticulated sewerage		Rural character elements including drystone walls, planted windbreaks, rural fences, open vistas, views to the Barrabool Hills.
Lethbridge		Passenger rail, reticulated sewerage	Future development could celebrate Lethbridge’s bluestone geological heritage by utilising bluestone as a design element.
Teesdale		Passenger rail	Wide verge and footpath on one side of the road and large street trees. Views to clusters of established native trees.

Key character elements for other locations that are not Potential Growth Locations but that have been identified for incremental or substantial change are outlined below.

Bannockburn: Future development should incorporate drystone walls and wind break tree species as these are predominant features of the town and would preserve its unique identity in the region.

Inverleigh: Future development should feature bluestone building materials and space to plant large canopy street trees as these are predominant features of the town which would help preserve its unique character.

Smythesdale: Retention of the heritage character of the town centre will be important into the future. The wide verges in the main streets coupled with the narrow back streets contribute to the small country town feel.

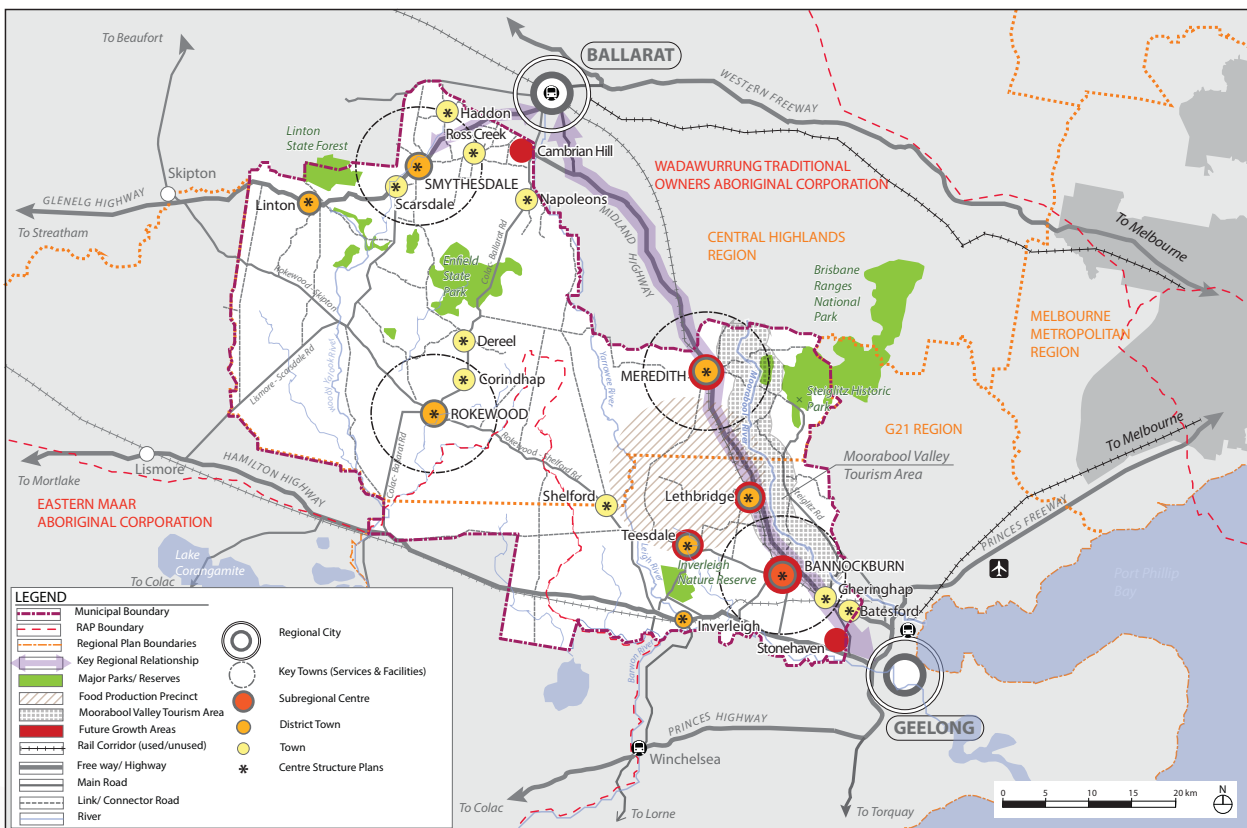


Figure 6: Updated Golden Plains Shire Framework Plan



PROVIDING FOR HOUSING NEED

Municipal

The GPS caters to a variety of scenarios for population growth over the next 25 years.

With the scarcity of greenfield residential land supply in Bannockburn over the last decade, there is insufficient data to predict growth rates once residential land becomes available.

The Bannockburn Growth Plan will meet the needs for the Shire's predicted growth over the next 15 years based on VIF 2023 populations estimate .

Growth following the VIF projections will require planning for the next growth front in readiness for 2040.

A faster take up of land in Bannockburn when land is rezoned and available for residential use will bring forward the need for a new growth front earlier than 2040, putting pressure on the Potential Growth Locations to be ready sooner.

The preferred approach is to commence further investigation into Potential Growth Locations sooner rather than later, in readiness and to be 'on the front foot' to ensure best outcomes that align with the Community Vision and directions of the GPS.

If Meredith is serviced with reticulated sewer, it could provide the necessary land supply. It is imperative that Council advocate for the provision of reticulated sewerage at Meredith through Barwon Water and State and Federal Government, so the necessary groundwork investigations and structure planning can occur in readiness for variations in land supply, including land supply being taken up faster than anticipated.

The Victorian Housing Statement (2023) included a target for 70% of new development to be infill development. This is impractical in a regional and rural setting as the density

necessary to achieve this figure would not be able to be delivered in our Townships. Infill development will continue to be encouraged, but higher densities can only be supported in locations with reticulated sewerage.

Regional

Taking a broader view and considering housing supply beyond the Shire, it is relevant to consider Cambrian Hill and Stonehaven. These are locations within a 8-10km radius of the CBD of Geelong and Ballarat. These locations are spatially connected to their respective regional city and have been identified as suitable locations for future growth in this Strategy.

Plan for Victoria targets

The draft housing target set for Golden Plains Shire is 11,700 new houses by 2050. The Bannockburn Growth Plan can accommodate over 8,000 new homes in the South East Precinct Structure Plan, North West Development Plan and South West Development Plan (Precinct Areas) and 13,000 new homes at full development including the Future Investigation Areas. The Future Investigation Areas are intended to provide certainty for future development after the Precinct Areas are developed, which is only forecast to be necessary before 2050 in a high growth scenario.

The additional land supply that could be provided in Meredith is unknown until more detailed planning work is undertaken. If reticulated sewerage was provided it could be expected that the land supply would be substantially higher than what may be supported in low density residential developments in Lethbridge and Teesdale.

It is important to note the draft housing target for City of Greater Geelong is 139,800 and for the City of Ballarat it is 46,900.

GROUND WORK REQUIRED

Significant planning work will be required before any future development can be undertaken. This will be achieved through updating the Town Structure Plans for Meredith, Teesdale and Lethbridge and the development of Precinct Structure Plans for Cambrian Hill and Stonehaven.

These plans will need to include background studies to ensure that the location and extent of development can be delivered in line with the Community Vision.

These include but are not limited to:

- > **First Peoples Cultural Heritage will be supported in each growth location through:**
 - a Cultural Values Assessment
 - a Place Name Audit, to determine if the growth location have any culturally insensitive and/or offensive names
 - the use of place names, including dual place names and welcoming signs
 - designs and master plans outlining the protection and enhancement of places while promoting community awareness and strengthening of Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar cultural heritage
 - to encourage and support the return of Country, waterways, rivers and wetlands to Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar to support their spiritual connection and cultural practises.
- > **Bushfire Risk Assessment**
 - Including a response to Clause 13.02-1S Bushfire
- > **Stormwater Management Plan and Flood Impact Assessment**
- > **Flora and Fauna Assessment**
 - Including targeted surveys as required by DEECA
- > **Arborist Report**
- > **Infrastructure Servicing Assessment**
- > **Land Capability Assessment**
- > **Environmental Site Assessment, including responses to:**
 - Planning Practice Note 30 Potentially contaminated land
 - Ministerial Direction 1 Potentially Contaminated Land
 - Sodic Soils Assessment
- > **Transport Impact Assessment**
- > **Historical Heritage Assessment, which includes:**
 - mapping and assessment of dry stone walls by a qualified specialist to ensure the protection of heritage value and incorporation into the landscape
 - design that incorporates heritage places into the urban development which protects and conserves their value.
- > **Buffers Assessment, which responds to PPN92: Managing buffers for land use compatibility**
- > **Social and Affordable Housing Plan**
- > **Response to the Community Wealth and Wellbeing Plan**
- > **Response to the Sustainable Development Framework**
- > **Development Contributions Plan**
- > **Character Assessment and response**
- > **Economic and Retail Assessment.**

ACTIONING THE STRATEGY

PLANNING SCHEME AMENDMENT

The directions of the Strategy are included into the Planning Scheme through changes as shown in Appendix 1. This Planning Scheme Amendment will be undertaken by Council as the next step of this Strategy.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

The GPS is intended to be a living document that can adapt as the Shire grows. To be useful into the future, it is imperative that it is regularly reviewed and updated with current information.

It is most appropriate that the review is conducted in line with the Council Plan review cycle. This cycle is linked to the Planning Scheme Review that is mandated through section 12B of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to be conducted within a year of the date the Council Plan is required to be approved.

It is expected that Council will be required to provide updates on our progress to meeting the Housing Targets. A change to the targets or a potential failure to meet the targets would be another trigger for a review. A review of zoned land supply should be conducted annually for this purpose.

The Multi Criteria Analysis tool developed for the Civil Infrastructure Analysis report has been designed so that it can be updated with additional information as it becomes available, or as infrastructure and services are delivered.

These triggers may include:

- Delivery of a reticulated sewerage to Meredith.
- Delivery of services in the Western Geelong Growth Area or the Ballarat West Precinct Structure Plan.
- Provision of improved public transport.
- Consolidated land holdings that allow for a master planned development approach.
- A proposal that aligns with the Community Wealth and Wellbeing and Community Vision principles. This could include a sustainable approach or the delivery of social and affordable housing.

Council must also be prepared to adjust business models once Census data is available.



TABLES AND FIGURES

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LINKS

Links to the technical documents and assessments used in the Growing Places Strategy

Informing Document

Background Studies:

- [Strategic Bushfire Risk Assessment and a Township Based Assessment](#)
- [Housing Needs Assessment \(including a Background Report\)](#)
- [Natural Environment and Hazards Analysis](#)
- [First Peoples Cultural Heritage Report](#)
- [Post-Contact Heritage Report](#)
- [Industrial Land Supply Analysis](#)
- [Characteristics and Comparative Significance Analysis](#)
- [Service Limitations and Civil Infrastructure Analysis](#)
- [Agriculture Assessment](#)
- [Biodiversity Assessment](#)
- [Community Wealth and Wellbeing Analysis](#)

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