

Towards a structure plan for Smythesdale: Opportunities report

A report to Golden Plains Shire Council

15 November 2024 (v1)

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the author. Information in this document is current at the time of writing. While all professional care has been undertaken in preparing the document, the author accepts no liability for loss or damages incurred because of reliance placed upon its content.

Introduction

Towards a structure plan for Smythesdale: Opportunities report (this report) sets out considerations which are likely to be informative to future planning in Smythesdale and to the preparation of a structure plan that will guide development over the coming years.

This report is intended to guide the community and stakeholders through the planning opportunities, to obtain early views and to stimulate discussion on the future of Smythesdale. It builds on recent strategic planning as part of the Growing Places Strategy, a shire-wide approach to growth planning which was endorsed by Golden Plains Shire Council in August 2024.

The Growing Places Strategy includes a new growth scenario for Golden Plains Shire which directs growth to existing (for example, Bannockburn) and potential new locations which are optimised to support growth. Smythesdale is not identified as a growth location in the Growing Places Strategy.

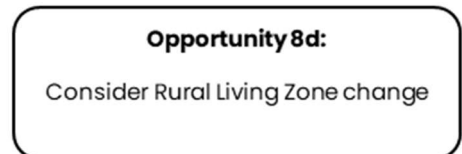
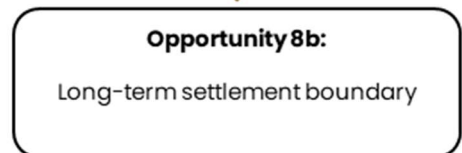
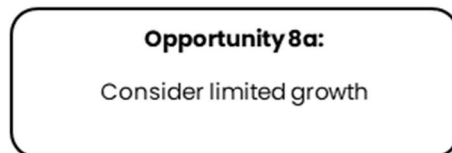
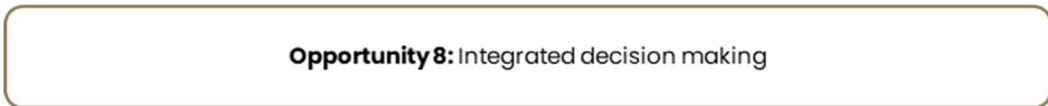
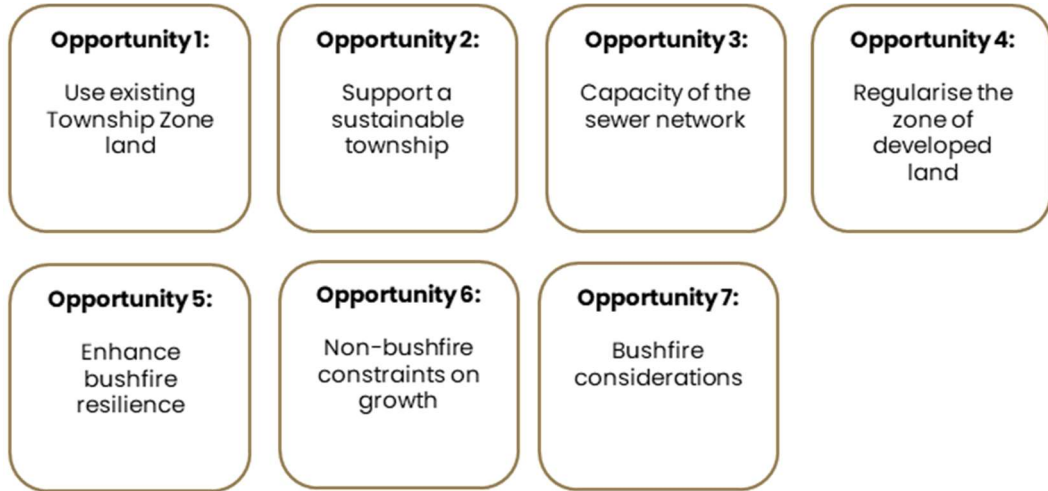
Future strategic planning for Smythesdale will proceed based on local opportunities to support a sustainable township, having regard to local aspirations and opportunities as well as physical constraints associated with natural hazards and physical services.

This discussion paper focuses on opportunities that could inform preparing a structure plan for Smythesdale. These are summarised on the next page and illustrated on Figures 1, 2 and 3.

The Council has not formed a view at this time on which opportunities should be pursued.

The Council seeks community views on which opportunities should be further investigated in preparing a structure plan for Smythesdale. The views of public authorities will also be important to determine which of the opportunities should be further considered.

Summary of opportunities



Opportunity 1: Use existing Township Zone land

The urban parts of Smythesdale are within the Township Zone. The Township Zone permits the development of a lot with a dwelling and allows consideration of more than one dwelling on a lot. There has been some take up of Township Zone land over the past decade (over 60 new homes), but many vacant lots remain.

Township Zone lots are within the Smythesdale sewer district and sewer services can be available to this land. This could be subject to main extensions funded by developers or landowners seeking to develop their land.

There are environmental constraints in the Township Zone. This includes areas within the Salinity Management Overlay and the Bushfire Management Overlay. The planning scheme ensures these environmental constraints are considered in development proposed in the Township Zone.

Opportunity 1 seeks to use existing Township Zone land as the initial emphasis for planning for new dwellings in Smythesdale.

Opportunity 2: Support a sustainable township

The core of Smythesdale is within the Commercial 1 Zone, oriented on both sides of Brooke Street. This area accommodates shops, cafes and services, with many uses located within historic buildings. The Well located on Heales Street provides another community node. There is limited accommodation for visitors within Smythesdale, but camping and caravan stays are available in Smythesdale Public Gardens and there are bed and breakfasts available in the wider locality.

A sustainable township requires commercial facilities and services to provide what the community needs. The Commercial 1 Zone in combination with the Township Zone ensures that as new facilities are proposed, the town can accommodate them. Proposals for new commercial land can also be considered as the need arises.

North of the township is a strip of land within the Commercial Zone 2. This land is constrained for development and is unlikely to be developed for commercial purposes. The zoning of this land may need to be reconsidered.

Opportunity 2 seeks to ensure there is adequate provisions for non-residential uses in Smythesdale to support a sustainable town.

Non-residential uses can usually be enabled in a bushfire constrained settings because, unlike individual homes, they can be closed on high-risk bushfire days. Through closure, the risk can be managed on the highest risk days and on other days, on-site mitigation (such as vegetation management, water supply, etc) can manage risks.

It is therefore likely that the future structure plan can enable a range of uses to support a sustainable township, including commercial uses, community uses, tourism uses and tourism accommodation.

Opportunity 3: Capacity of the sewer network

Smythesdale was sewered in 2012. The capacity of the sewerage network is 320 connections. This may be reduced if development other than dwellings are introduced, as these may have larger requirements. There is no expectation that the sewerage system would be expanded.

The available sewer network capacity is an asset for Smythesdale. Previous consultation was supportive of new development being serviced with reticulated sewerage.

Opportunity 3 recognises that there remains some capacity within the sewer network.

Centra Highlands Water is a key stakeholder in managing sewerage and water in planning decision making.

Opportunity 4: Regularise the zone of developed land

Housing between Johnston Street and Bandys Road, south-west of the town, is within the sewer district. Most lots contain a dwelling. The land is within the Rural Living Zone, with a minimum lot size for a dwelling without a planning permit being 8ha and a minimum lot size of 8ha for subdivision.

Lots in this area are about 4,000sqm (0.4ha). The Rural Living Zone means that every house or extension needs a planning permit and there is no potential to subdivide the land for new dwellings. Applications for a planning permit for new dwellings are expected to explain how they fit within a rural environment and contribute to agriculture. These are not especially relevant for this land.

Given the land is serviced, it may be more suitable to be within a Low Density Residential Zone. This would recognise the primary use of the land is for residential uses on serviced lots, better regulating under the planning scheme residential uses.

Opportunity 4 recognises that land between Johnston Street and Bandys Road could be better suited to the Low Density Residential Zone.

This land is shown on **Figure 1**.

This opportunity does not seek to enable more than one dwelling on a lot given the risk from bushfire, maintaining what is allowed under the current Rural Living Zone. A planning scheme control permitting only one dwelling on a lot would likely accompany any change to the zone.

Opportunity 5: Enhance bushfire resilience

Council in 2022 commissioned a Shire-wide strategic bushfire assessment to support the development of the Growing Places Strategy. It considered the bushfire risk to all settlements in Golden Plains Shire from a planning–decision making perspective, including Smythesdale.

The 2022 bushfire assessment considered how planning and building controls for bushfire apply in Smythesdale and identified a proposal to enhance the resilience of new development in Smythesdale. This would involve the Bushfire Management Overlay, a planning scheme control, being applied to areas of the town where it currently does not apply. The areas are shown on **Figure 1**.

Smythesdale is already within a bushfire prone area, which is a building–system control. This means that new homes are already built to bushfire standards (referred to as a bushfire attack level). The Bushfire Management Overlay would supplement this by requiring vegetation on a lot to not include bushfire hazards (for example, only non–hazardous landscaping in gardens) and for a potable water supply for most development (i.e. a water tank). The requirements would only apply to new development and would not affect existing development. These requirements already apply to new homes where the Bushfire Management Overlay currently applies and have been operating effectively.

The Bushfire Management Overlay would also enable new development other than dwellings to be considered and introduced into Smythesdale with more confidence, as necessary bushfire measures like closure on high risk days would be routinely considered in new development.

Opportunity 5 seeks to enhance the resilience of Smythesdale by ensuring all new development considers bushfire under the planning scheme.

The Council would seek to ensure that single dwellings remain mostly planning permit free in Smythesdale, so any proposal to include additional land into the Bushfire Management Overlay would be done via a permit exemption with conditions. This means if bushfire mitigation is included in a proposed new dwelling, a planning permit would not be needed.

Including additional land in the Bushfire Management Overlay can be justified in Smythesdale and would, over time, reduce bushfire risk in new development and as older homes are replaced, reduce the risk to the town overall. This risk reduction, whilst hard to quantify, may enable some limited growth to be enabled in Smythesdale.

Opportunity 6: Non-bushfire constraints on growth

A structure plan for Smythesdale needs to consider whether new growth should be enabled outside the existing Township Zone and other areas where a planning scheme change might be needed. Whether new growth is appropriate will be dependent on bushfire considerations.

To support consideration of bushfire, it is necessary to identify other constraints on new growth. This is to ensure bushfire assessments do not assess land which is not capable of new growth, in any event.

There are four main constraints on outward growth. These are shown in **Figure 2**. They are:

- The Smythesdale landfill operates in the north of town. EPA guidelines provide for a 1,500 metre buffer to buildings or structures from the edge of landfills. Whilst development can be considered within this area under the current planning scheme, Council would not seek to make planning scheme changes which increases people in the buffer area. The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is a key stakeholder in managing buffers.
- Land subject to inundation is oriented to the Woody Yaloak River, to the west of the town.
- There is extensive Crown land on the edges of Smythesdale, meaning land is not available for development in any event.
- Existing vegetated areas to the east of Smythesdale, meaning intensification of existing rural living development is unlikely to be acceptable for environmental reasons.

The above means that the practical ability to grow Smythesdale is to the south.

Opportunity 6 recognises that outward growth adjoining the existing settlement can only be enabled to the south. This can be used as an input to bushfire considerations.

Opportunity 7: Bushfire considerations

The 2022 bushfire assessment identified that Smythesdale overall is a higher risk settlement according to planning considerations. This is because of the forests to the north-west, west and south-west where large landscape-scale bushfires can arise. Fire on the edges of the settlement, including where grassland edges are on fire, is to be expected. Ember attack into settlement areas, which can ignite local fires in gardens and destroy dwellings, is also to be expected.

Generally, the existing Township Zone land is relatively lower risk than land further out. This is because the core of the town is lower hazard and provides a level of protection if people are sheltering in the outdoors (for example, if leaving early has not occurred or if structures have failed). Sheltering in the outdoors will still be dangerous due to ember attack and smoke hazards.

Planning scheme policies would not support Smythesdale being a designated growth area. This is now reflected in the Growing Places Strategy.

The 2022 bushfire assessment identified local opportunities that could be considered in structure planning where the following arises:

- New growth enables better outcomes to existing town areas, providing for an overall risk reduction at the settlement level. An overall risk reduction is a key objective sought in planning scheme policies.
- Enable limited growth and then include in the structure plan a long-term bushfire constrained settlement boundary confirming further growth would not arise in future.

Opportunity 7 recognises that in the higher risk setting, some opportunity for local growth immediately adjoining the existing settlement could be considered and assessed in preparing a structure plan.

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) is a key stakeholder in managing bushfire in planning decision making.

Opportunity 8: Integrated decision making

Opportunity 8 is in four parts to reflect the complexity of planning for growth in Smythesdale and the need for integrated decision making around acceptable bushfire outcomes, the capacity of the sewer district and the future of Yellowglen.

Each is discussed separately below, but structure planning will need to integrate decision making and weigh up competing objectives.

Opportunity 8a: Consider limited growth

Having regard to Opportunity 6, new growth could only be enabled to the south of the town. Initially, two areas of land are identified. Site A is bounded by Glenelg Highway, Johnston Street and the rail trail. It is about 13ha in total. Site B is bounded by Browns Road, Taylor Street, the rail trail and a notional extension of Bandys Road. It is also about 13ha in total.

Site A and Site B together could accommodate up to 100 lots, depending on lot size. The number of lots will be limited by the capacity of the sewer system and bushfire considerations.

Site A and Site B would provide for development which would be included, under Opportunity 5, within the Bushfire Management Overlay. Development would only be acceptable if the bushfire mitigation provided by the Bushfire Management Overlay was required by the planning scheme.

Where it was provided, low hazard development with perimeter roads would arise. This would provide new contemporary edges to the southern part of Smythesdale and would prevent a moving fire from entering this part of the town, a scenario reasonable contemplated based on existing conditions. A risk reduction for existing development would arise, a beneficial outcome. Concurrently however, development of Site A and Site B would introduce more people overall into the town.

Opportunity 8a recognises two logical growth areas that can be considered for growth in structure planning but only if acceptable as part of an integrated decision that prioritises life-safety from a bushfire perspective and considers the servicing of land.

Opportunity 8b: Long term settlement boundary

Many structure plans have a settlement boundary. A key purpose of a structure plan can be to apply a settlement boundary to indicate in the planning scheme the limits to township growth.

The 2022 bushfire assessment identified an option to enable limited growth (see Opportunity 8a) and to then prevent further outward growth, which would be done via a settlement boundary. This sought to manage concerns that new growth would continue in future as time passes and new structure planning occurred. Instead, a bushfire constrained permanent settlement boundary would be given statutory effect in the planning scheme.

Where limited growth was enabled to harden up the edge of parts of Smythesdale, in combination with structure planning and planning scheme changes that directed no further growth beyond this in perpetuity, an argument could be favourably assessed against bushfire policies.

Opportunity 8b recognises that Smythesdale is a bushfire constrained settlement. Structure planning now can confirm a long-term settlement boundary with an expectation that it will not be revisited in future.

Regularising the zone of land south-west of the town (Opportunity 4) would have the effect of including that land within the settlement boundary.

A long-term settlement boundary will need to consider whether Site A and Site B is included (Opportunity 8a).

Beyond these areas, it will be difficult to promote growth further beyond Bandys Road. It is expected that the structure plan will preclude new growth occurring beyond Bandys Road, based on bushfire considerations in conjunction with the capacity of the sewer district not being able to accommodate it. This means planning scheme amendments to enable more intense residential development would not arise.

Opportunity 8c: Planning for Yellowglen

The planning scheme currently enables planning permission to be sought for low density development on the Yellowglen site, north-west of the Township Zone. More than 100 lots for new dwellings could be provided. A development plan for the Yellowglen site was recently refused by the Council, with a new development plan application recently lodged. The CFA did not support the original development plan.

Each application for planning approval is considered on its merits, with the Council not yet considering the most recent development plan application. However, the 2022 bushfire assessment identified the Yellowglen site as high risk based on strategic and landscape bushfire considerations. There remains uncertainty about the uses and format of development on the Yellowglen site. The Council may also not be the ultimate decision maker.

Opportunity 8C recognises that future uses and the format of development at Yellowglen is uncertain because of bushfire considerations.

The Smythesdale structure plan may need to consider the evolving situation as it relates to the Yellowglen site.

Opportunity 8d: Consider Rural Living Zone change

The landscape to the north of Smythesdale includes land within the Rural Living Zone. The 2022 bushfire assessment identified much of this land as a high bushfire risk, although the risk reduces towards Cambrian Hill as the forested context diminishes and grassland hazards become dominant. Concurrently, it is recognised that there is an over-supply of land within the Rural Living Zone in this part of Golden Plains Shire.

Under the planning scheme, Rural Living Zone land can seek planning permission for subdivision to create new lots for a dwelling under the following circumstances:

- In some areas, lots larger than 4ha can be subdivided into 2ha lots.
- In some areas, lots larger than 16ha can be subdivided into 8ha lots.

See **Figure 3** for the different areas. The Rural Living Zone is not the only planning consideration and not all lots can be automatically subdivided. Each proposal needs to be assessed on its merits.

The further subdivision of this area for rural living development on either 2ha or 8ha lots represents a sub-optimal planning outcome when compared to development being directed to an existing settlement, such as Smythesdale. This is because Smythesdale is lower hazard and provides a place of enhanced protection in a bushfire. Development in or immediately adjoining the settlement can access the low hazard land without travel on roads. Rural living development across a landscape is also more difficult for fire authorities to defend in a bushfire. The town of Smythesdale likely represents lower risk development than rural living development to the north.

There may be opportunity to reduce bushfire risk under the planning scheme by removing some potential for further subdivision in parts of the Rural Living Zone and translating some of the development into the town of Smythesdale.

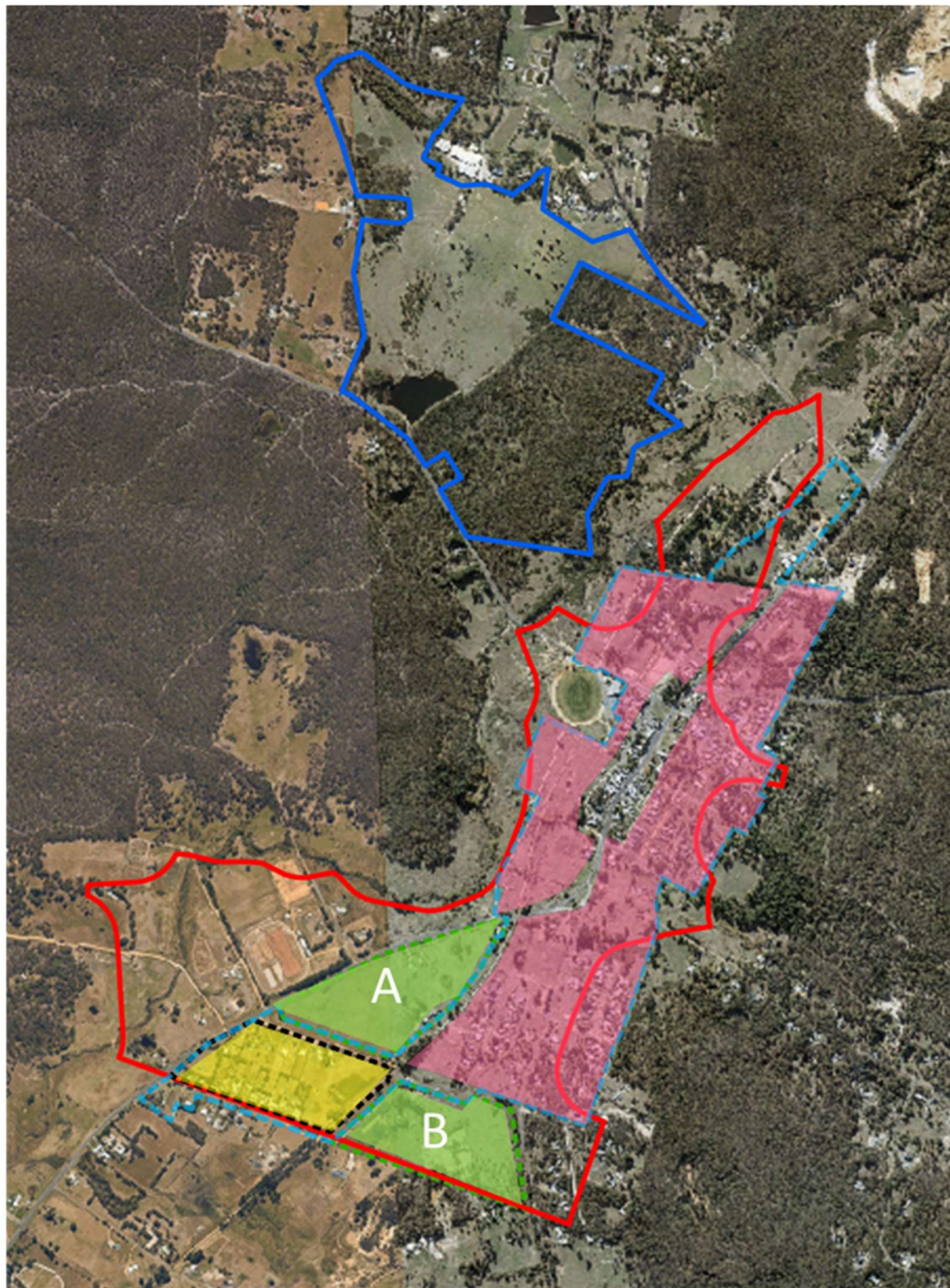
Opportunity 8d recognises that limiting further subdivision in the Rural Living Zone in high risk bushfire areas and reallocating envisaged change to Smythesdale could be a way to grow the town and enhance bushfire safety.

This opportunity does not propose any change that affects the development of a single dwelling on an existing lot.

This opportunity does not assume that the quantum of lots not capable of being created in the Rural Living Zone would be replicated in the town, as this is dependent on other opportunities including the capacity of the sewer district and integrated decision making.

However, there may be opportunity to recalibrate past decisions contained in the planning scheme, so they better reflect contemporary bushfire planning policy and life-safety considerations.

Figure 1: Opportunities to consider in structure planning



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|--|--|
|  Opportunity 1: Deploy existing Township Zone land |  Opportunity 5: Enhance bushfire resilience (apply BMO) |
|  Opportunity 3: Capacity of the sewer district |  Opportunity 8b: Consider limited growth |
|  Opportunity 4: Regularise the zone of developed land |  Opportunity 8C: Planning for Yellowglen |

See report for other opportunities not shown on figure

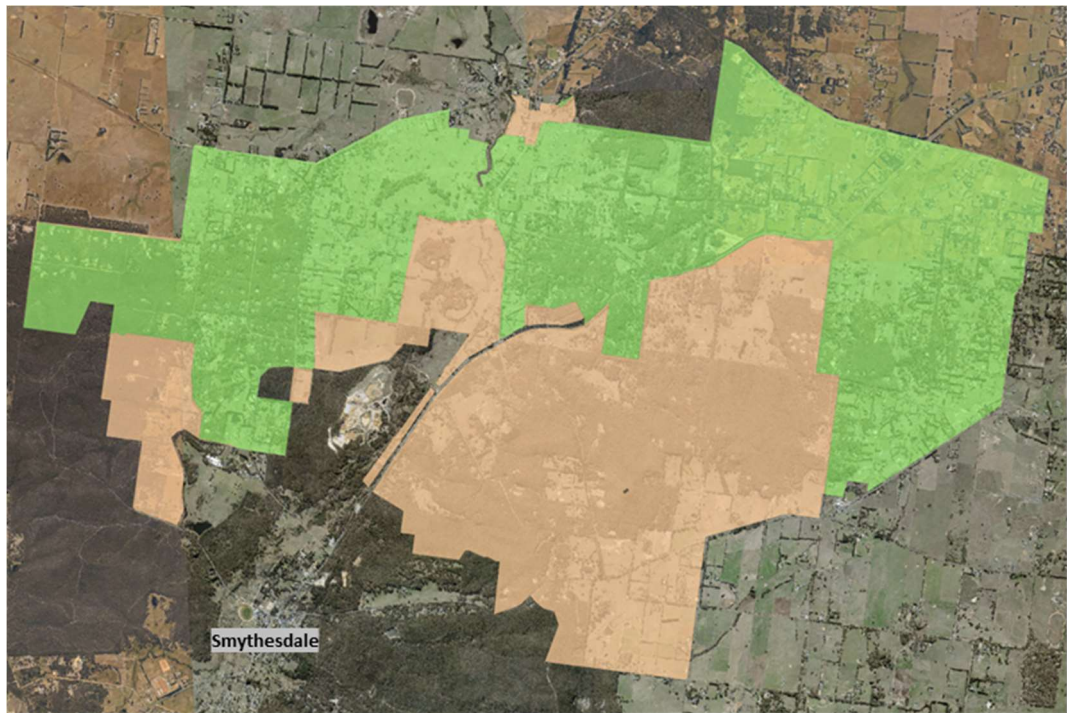
Figure 2: Non-bushfire constraints on growth




- | | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|---|--|
|  | Study area |  | Land subject to inundation |
|  | Landfill buffer area
(notional) |  | Salinity Management Overlay |
|  | Crown land | | Vegetated areas
<i>(as shown on aerial photo)</i> |

Areas of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage align with the Woody Yallock River and other named waterways

Figure 3: Consider Rural Living Zone changes



 Rural Living Zone
excluding Area A

 Rural Living Zone
Area A