

Planning for Melbourne’s Green Wedges and Agricultural Land

City of Whittlesea Submission

What it is about Melbourne's green wedges and peri-urban areas that you value most. Please select your top three of the following values in order of preference.

1. Environmental and biodiversity features (e.g. coastal areas, waterbodies, forests and grasslands)
2. Agriculture (e.g. growing food for Victorians)
3. A strong, dynamic economy (e.g. based on agriculture, timber, transport, tourism, education, manufacturing, the service industry and commerce)

Strengthening the legislative and policy framework

Legislative and policy framework for Melbourne’s green wedges

(Consultation Paper section 3.1.1, pages 13 - 27)

To what degree do you support the proposed options to strengthen the legislative and policy framework for Melbourne's green wedges? Ensure you only tick one checkbox per option.

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Amend the 'Planning and Environment Act 1987' to include a vision, objectives and regional policy for green wedges, and require the preparation, review and ministerial approval of Green Wedge Management Plans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Update state planning policy for Melbourne’s green wedges to clearly articulate the preferred outcomes for these areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Review and update Planning Practice Note 31: 'Preparing a Green Wedge Management Plan' to improve the structure, form and content of Green Wedge Management Plans	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Introduce regional policy directions for Melbourne’s green wedges	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any comments about the options to strengthen the legislative and policy framework for Melbourne's green wedges?

Amendment to the Planning and Environment Act (the Act)

- Council support amendments to the Act, although would like an undertaking that DELWP will consult with Councils further in respect to drafting the specific changes to the Act and in the development of regional policy statements.
- Council request further clarification from DELWP in terms of which 'strategic plans' will be subject to ministerial approval. Is this just for Green Wedge Management Plans or will this refer to any other strategic documents that affects Green Wedge land?

For instance, the City of Whittlesea is currently developing a strategic plan for the Whittlesea Township which, given the lack of an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) around it, is classified as Green Wedge land. Would this document therefore need to be approved by the Minister under the proposed changes?

- While Council offers in principle support to amending the Act to require the preparation, review and ministerial approval of Green Wedge Management Plans, it is suggested that similar to the Planning Scheme Review process outlined in section 12B of the Act, the Act should detail appropriate time frames for the preparation/review of the Management Plans. Appropriate guidance in the form of a detailed practice note is also required to support the development and review process.

Update the Planning Policy Framework (PPF)/ Clarifying state policy objective for green wedges

- Council in principle support updating the PPF to clearly articulate the preferred outcomes for green wedges. However, further review of the suggested wording is recommended to clearly define the terms: 'non-urban purpose of the green-wedges' and 'future productive use'. The proposed wording is not clear enough to provide meaningful guidance for on ground decision making. For instance, is a golf course a 'non-urban' use? Are all educational facilities 'non-urban'? Does 'productive use' strictly refer to agricultural use? If the purpose is not listed elsewhere (i.e. in the Planning & Environment Act), it needs to be clearly defined in the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP).

Reviewing Green Wedge Management Plans

- A review of Planning Practice Note 31 is supported to ensure that there is a closer alignment with the planning scheme and planning policy.
- There is a need to clarify if the intent of GWMPs is still to act as a framework for land management action and practice.
- While Council agree that 'a key area for reform is to ... improve their requirements for detailed environmental, landscape and land use inventory', it will be very resource intensive to gather and curate this data such that it can be comparable longitudinally and horizontally across all green wedge areas. Council's will require additional resources and support from DELWP to implement this reform.

- Further, the mechanisms for capturing the relevant data would need to be developed and led by DELWP, in consultation with local government, to ensure a consistent approach across all Green Wedges, in order to meaningfully monitor not only the individual GWMPs but also the broader state planning policy, which is a key policy commitment of the State Government.
- It is suggested that in addition to a Practice Note or Guidelines to help Council develop a consistent approach in preparing evidence base to inform the development of GWMP, DELWP should also take the lead in curating such data across all green wedges.
- Additional resources and support will be required from the State government to assist Councils in the implementation and monitoring of the GWMPs. Depending on the type of data requirement and monitoring and reporting adopted, this might need to be further prescribed by the new Practice Note. Based on the City of Whittlesea's own experience in adopting a more onerous reporting regime (which ultimately was unsustainable for Council), this could require additional staff resources equivalent to 1.5 - 2 FTE to coordinate the implementation, data collection and monitoring for the life of the GWMP.

Introducing state-backed regional policy for green wedges

- Council support the introduction of regional policies for green wedges in the PPF.
- It is also suggested that if a regional GWMP policy is proposed, the local GWMP should include a mandatory response to the regional vision/objectives embedded in the regional green wedge policies.
- While Council strongly support the introduction of regional policy directions for green wedges, we are concerned that the proposal to 'Map areas of important agricultural production in regional policy', is inconsistent with the strong consultation findings that all agricultural land is strategically important. Council are concerned that this will leave the door open to landowners/developers and the like seeking approval for non-agricultural land uses (such as rural living) in the areas not identified as 'important' on the proposed map.

This is particularly important where agricultural capability has already been eroded by minimum subdivision areas of well under 8 hectares and where landscape policies prioritise "traditional" farming over emerging farming practice.

Further clarification is sought about the intent of this mapping and what, if any, measures are to be proposed to avoid the unintended impacts identified above whereby land not identified as important is potentially incrementally lost. This part of the project needs stronger regional and state guidance to ensure it is consistent with the strong consultation findings that all agricultural land is strategically important.

Legislative and policy framework for Melbourne's agricultural land

(Consultation Paper section 3.1.2, pages 28 - 32)

To what degree do you support the proposed options to strengthen the legislative and policy framework for Melbourne's agricultural land? *Ensure you only tick one checkbox per option.*

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Update the Planning Policy Framework to ensure that all agricultural land is protected	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Update the Planning Policy Framework to encourage land uses that have limited or negligible reliance on soil as the basis of production, to be located in areas where soil based agriculture is likely to be constrained	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Update the Planning Policy Framework to include new regional policy for Melbourne’s agricultural land	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Establish 'right to farm' legislation to protect existing and lawful agricultural uses from nuisance complaints	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Introduce the 'agent of change' principle into legislation to assign responsibility for mitigating impacts of lawful agricultural operations (e.g. dust, noise and odour) to the person or organisation who introduces a new use or development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Update the Planning Policy Framework to encourage appropriate siting, design and scale of sensitive uses and developments to avoid conflicts with agricultural uses	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any comments on the proposed options for strengthening the legislative and policy framework for Melbourne’s agricultural land?

Protecting all agricultural land surrounding Melbourne

- Council strongly supports changes that seek to protect all agricultural land rather than just strategic agricultural land.
- However, there are still big gaps between the high-level guidance conveyed in PPF and decision making on ground. The current VPP and planning schemes already emphasise protection, however, it is unclear to Council planners exactly what they are protecting the land against. ie. it is unclear what land uses should be supported and can sometimes be used to support traditional farming at the expense of innovation and new agricultural enterprises. This gap needs to be addressed in policy, and it is not clear that this will happen

based on the current recommendation in the Consultation Paper. To this end, it is worthwhile defining what is 'agricultural land', land zoned as 'Farming Zone', 'Rural Activity Zone'. Further clarification is needed of which land uses will be considered appropriate or inappropriate on agriculture land.

Protecting the natural resources that underpin agricultural land use

- Council support updates to the PPF to encourage land uses that have limited or negligible reliance on soil as the basis of production, to be located in areas where soil-based agriculture is likely to be constrained. To support this, it is suggested that guidelines be developed around what those land uses might be. In the absence of such guidance, Council foresee issues with landowners/developers trying to justify 'rural living' as an acceptable land use as the soil is 'no good' for agriculture.
- There is also be potential for other uses to be supported in appropriate locations on a 'temporary' basis (subject to a permit), where they are complementary to the primary purpose of the zone, do not require significant infrastructure, do not have a significant environmental footprint or risks, and can be easily removed.

Improving regional policy protection of Melbourne's agricultural land

- While Council strongly support a regional policy that seeks to '*encourage opportunities for growth and diversification of other activities complementary to agriculture that leverage the advantages of proximity to the city of Melbourne and its local market*', it is suggested further guidance needs to be provided for applicants, council planners and VCAT to agree on:
 - What does 'diversification' look like in practice,
 - What are the activities that should be supported,
 - What would these complementary activities entail.
- With respect to a regional policy that seeks to '*recognise the economic and employment contributions of Melbourne's agricultural land to local communities, the region and the State of Victoria*'. It is suggested that this could also be expressed through the advantages provided by a sustainable local food system in terms of community food security and health and wellbeing.

Legislating the right to farm

- Council strongly support 'right to farm' legislation as a foundation for increasing agribusiness diversification, value adding and innovation. It is suggested that DEWLP should also undertake a review of existing zoning that apply to Green Wedge/peri-urban land to ensure that the zoning has been applied appropriately to support the underlying purpose of the land.
- Council suggest further emphasising that the 'right to farm' does not override the requirements of other Acts (eg. Catchment and Land Protection Act and the Environment Protection Act) and Clause 52.17 of the VPP. There will be some farming activities that these acts will limit including but not limited to, clearing vegetation, damming of waterways disposing of agricultural chemicals. The Acts are necessary for environmental protections. Council acknowledge that the consultation report clarifies the above point and suggest this clarification should be communicated with any other future campaign for 'right to farm.'

Agent of change

- Council strongly support the introduction of the 'agent of change' principle to assign responsibility for mitigating impacts of lawful agricultural operations (e.g. dust, noise and odour) to the person or organisation who introduces a new use or development. This will provide reasonable protection to existing agricultural land uses from encroaching sensitive or non-agricultural uses.
- However, care needs to be taken to ensure that this principle is not used to unreasonably limit or prevent new, innovative and otherwise legitimate agricultural operations from establishing in the green wedge. (ie. land uses that meet the intended zone purpose)
- The agent of change principle should also seek to manage other issues such as kangaroo management, pest animals and pest plants/weeds, as appropriate.

Siting and Design

- Council strongly support the update of the Planning Policy Framework to encourage appropriate siting, design and scale of sensitive uses and developments to avoid conflicts with agricultural uses. Such policy would provide the leverage necessary to avoid future potential conflicts, by ensuring adequate buffer/separation distances are allowed for.
- It is essential that the policy should also require consideration of 'future' agricultural potential on adjoining land for the siting and design of non-agricultural or sensitive land uses.

Supporting agricultural land use

Managing subdivision and dwelling development in agricultural areas

(Consultation Paper section 3.2.1, pages 36 - 40)

To what degree do you support the proposed options for managing subdivision and dwelling development in agricultural areas? Ensure you only tick one checkbox per option.

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Amend the 'Planning and Environment Act 1987' to require parliamentary ratification of proposals to subdivide land into more lots or smaller lots than currently provided for in the planning scheme in rural zones within 100km of Melbourne	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amend the subdivision provisions of the Farming Zone and Rural Activity Zone within 100km of Melbourne to prohibit the creation of a lot for an	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
existing dwelling smaller than the minimum lot size.					
Amend the Farming Zone and Rural Activity Zone to make all dwellings within 100km of Melbourne a Section 2 (Permit Required) use.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Introducing decision guidelines and application requirements for new dwellings in the Green Wedge Zone and Green Wedge A Zone.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any comments about the options and proposed responses to managing subdivision and dwelling development in agricultural areas?

Parliamentary ratification to subdivide land into more lots / smaller lots than currently provided for in the planning scheme in rural zones within 100km of Melbourne

- This change does not apply to the Green Wedges or the City of Whittlesea.

Managing subdivision in Farming Zone and Rural Activity Zone

- Council support the defence of the existing minimum lot size, encouraging the consolidation of lots for existing and future agriculture.
- However, it is suggested that state and regional policy should also recognise that not only larger lots are productive, that smaller lot sizes can still be productive, depending on the farming practise (e.g vertical farming) and commodity being produced.
- The policy message should be framed to recognise that some areas in the Green Wedge and peri-urban area may already be fragmented with smaller lots, and to encourage productive agricultural use on lots of diverse sizes. This recognises that not all farming is the same and that even (existing) smaller lots can be viable for agricultural purposes rather than being left for rural living or other land uses.
- It is suggested that policy should provide greater certainty and flexibility for those farm businesses who are and will be making adjustment in farming approaches that will take untraditional and innovative forms. Farmers are facing unprecedented change and uncertainty. At the same time, exciting new opportunities are emerging. To take advantage of these new opportunities, farm businesses need to be more productive, innovative and sustainable. This means that agricultural uses will need to adjust in ways that may not be traditional forms of farming, and which needs to be recognised and supported by the planning system.

Dwelling development in agricultural areas

- The current decision guidelines and considerations in the GWZ are general and unspecified. It is suggested that the particular provisions and other reforms with more specific ResCode like metrics would be of significant benefit to planners and applicant's alike.

Manage Rural -residential development

- Whilst the Consultation Paper acknowledges the need to change the FZ and RAZ to prevent smaller lots being created, consideration should also be given to the need to review minimum lot sizes in rural areas. With significant pressure on larger lots closer to existing services and infrastructure being subdivided into smaller lots that meet the existing minimum lot size requirements this would likely result in an adverse outcome effectively creating rural-residential development.

Facilitate a dwelling "in conjunction with" the agricultural land use

'Introducing application requirements for dwellings into the Green Wedge Zone and Green Wedge A Zone that require applications for dwellings to be accompanied by a written statement that explains how the proposed dwelling responds to the decision guidelines for dwellings in the zone. This change allows dwellings to be considered but ensures the use does not compromise the long term productivity of surrounding farmland or limit the operation and expansion of agricultural uses. (DELWP, Consultation Paper, 2020)

- Council suggest further guidance be provided by DELWP on how these decision guidelines will encourage legitimate proposals that *'support agricultural production'* or *'encourage legitimate conjunctional use'*? Current interpretation of the planning provisions tends to treat dwellings proposed on farms as a residential use. The current policy and guidance provided is insufficient and many planners do not have enough understanding of agricultural and green wedge issues to determine whether there is a nexus between an agricultural use proposed on the land (which frequently does not require a permit) and the use of the land for a dwelling (which should satisfy the test of "in conjunction with" the agricultural land use).
- However, the "in conjunction with" test will often be based on non-planning issues such as animal welfare and security (incidence of crime). It also relies on the continuation of the agricultural use (which cannot be reliably conditioned under the permit as it is not part of the remit of the permit). Further consideration needs to be given as to how the guidance and interpretation can be improved to ensure fair and reasonable outcomes.

Minimise impact on future agriculture use in Green Wedge area

'Whether the dwelling will adversely affect the operation and expansion of adjoining and nearby agricultural uses.'

'The potential for the proposal to lead to a concentration or proliferation of dwellings in the area and the impact of this on the use of the land for agriculture and natural systems.'

(DELWP, Consultation Paper, 2020)

- It is noted that not all green wedges are the same. The vision for the Whittlesea Green Wedge is in part to support and grow new agricultural and agribusiness land uses. Unlike

other areas such as the Mornington Peninsula or Yarra Valley, Whittlesea does not have a large existing agriculture sector.

Council have prepared an Agricultural Prospectus and is actively seeking to promote and encourage new agricultural/agribusiness uses to establish within our green wedge. To support this, Council are seeking a more proactive approach in state and regional policy to prevent incompatible uses (ie. dwelling or sensitive uses that do not meet the ‘*support agricultural production*’ or ‘*legitimate conjunctional use*’ test) from being established in the green wedge which might impact our capacity to support new and innovative agricultural land uses that may seek to establish themselves in the future. For instance, neighbouring properties may not have agricultural activities at the time of approval of the dwelling, but 5 years later the neighbour/s commence farming and the owner of the dwelling subsequently complains? While the ‘Agent of Change principle’ will not apply to the primary use, the existing dwelling will still impact on the establishment and ongoing operation of the farming practise.

- It is suggested that dwelling approvals should be subject to the acknowledgement that it is being built in an area where the primary purpose is agricultural activities and at any time neighbouring properties may commence agricultural activities. This acknowledgment should be built into the planning provisions and inform the decision on requirements such as setbacks from the property boundary (that reflect a reasonable buffer distance), site coverage of non-agriculture uses to minimise impact on future agriculture uses. Such requirements should in essence ‘future proof’ adjoining land so that it may be used for agricultural uses in the future.
- There is a need to define ‘concentration or proliferation’ of dwellings in an area. For instance, is 10 dwellings per 100 hectares considered a concertation?

Improving decision-making on agricultural land

(Consultation Paper section 3.2.2, page 41)

To what degree do you support the proposed options for improving decision-making on agricultural land? Ensure you only tick one checkbox per option.

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Develop a practice note to guide council decision-making on planning permits in agricultural areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Establish an agricultural referral or expert advisory service to support decision-makers and facilitate compliance with the planning scheme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any comments about the proposed options for improving decision-making on agricultural land?

New Practice Note

- Council strongly support a practise note to guide decision-making on planning permits in agricultural areas.

Expert advisory service

- In principle, solutions that seek to provide additional guidance to assist with decision making and more consistent outcomes is broadly supported.

However, Council suggest more information is needed to clarify this proposal further:

- Whether this advisory service will be permanent/ongoing?
- Who would provide this advice and their expertise? Need to ensure the “experts” are not aligned with industrial agriculture and that they are across the full range of farming practices, including emerging and non-traditional farming practices, so they do not limit diversity and innovation. It is also important that these ‘experts’ do not become quasi decision makers.
- When an expert advisory service will be required/triggered?
- The referral of expert advisory service should not be a requirement for all types of applications. Rather, the option to refer an application to the expert advisory service should be available to support decision makers with more complex decisions only. The decisions makers (the RA) should be able to undertake the required assessment and not become reliant on the advice of the expert advisory service for all decisions. Therefore, the provision for such a service should ensure that it does not become a default approach, whereby Council or the community insist the service is used for all decisions and it becomes the quasi decision maker.
- How to sure timely delivery of an advisory service which fit into the timeframe of statutory planning?
- Given statutory planners are required to make decisions in a timely manner, the establishment of an expert advisory service, would need to ensure that advice can be accessed in a timely and effective manner.

Future proofing Melbourne's foodbowl

(Consultation Paper section 3.2.3, pages 42 - 47)

To what degree do you support the proposed options for future proofing Melbourne's foodbowl?

Ensure you only tick one checkbox per option.

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Develop a new regional policy to preserve opportunities for irrigated agriculture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Introduce a new overlay designed to protect food-producing areas with access to secure water supply and irrigation infrastructure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Establish a process to determine where the new overlay should be applied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any comments about the proposed options to future proof Melbourne's foodbowl?

General Comments:

- Opportunities for, and investment in, recycled water infrastructure in addition to innovative farming solutions is paramount to ensuring that agricultural activities respond appropriately to climate change. This requires whole of government approach linking with the relevant water authorities to prioritise the necessary planning and investment. This could involve governments and authorities actively supporting pilot programs to showcase viable recycled water opportunities and outcomes. These pilots will be crucial in realising an alternative water future particularly given the potential for some negative sentiment.

New regional policy, Clause 14.02-3R - Preserving opportunities for irrigated agriculture around Melbourne

- While Council support new regional policy for irrigated agriculture, Council is seeking further clarification on what the proposed differences in protections are between this policy and the rest of the policy for non-irrigated agricultural areas? In practise, how does the level of protection differ between the two? ie. what use will be excluded for those areas covered by a water supply overlay.

New planning overlay for food-producing areas with access to secure water supplies and irrigation infrastructure.

- Council also support the introduction of a new overlay to protect food-processing areas with access to secure water supplies and irrigation infrastructure, although further clarification is required in regard to how the 'Indicative Recycled Water Supply Areas' will be identified? Does or can this be extended to include areas that provide opportunities for and investment in recycled water infrastructure.

Process to determine the new overlay

- Council strongly support DEWLP in establishing a transparent process to determine where the new overlay should be applied. Council are also seeking an undertaking that DELWP will consult with Councils in determining the appropriate process.

Strengthening referral and notice requirements

(Consultation Paper section 3.2.4, pages 47 - 48)

To what degree do you support the proposed option for strengthening referral and notice requirements? *Ensure you only tick one checkbox per option.*

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Ensure water authorities have a clear role in the decision-making process for applications to use or develop land in protected irrigation districts or in non-urban areas identified as having potential for access to alternative water in the future.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any comments on the proposed option for strengthening referral and notice requirements?

Water authorities have a clear role in the decision-making process

- While Council strongly support this initiative, it needs to be adequately resourced. Further clarification is needed about whether/how state government will ensure water authorities are adequately resourced to perform this function, particularly in peri-urban areas where water authorities are lean on resources. Melbourne Water is not typical.

Supporting agricultural diversification, value-adding and innovation

(Consultation Paper section 3.2.5, pages 49 - 50)

To what degree do you support the proposed options for supporting agricultural diversification, value-adding and innovation? *Ensure you only tick one checkbox per option.*

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Update the definition of 'Primary produce sales' to support farm gate sales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amend the definition of 'Host farm' to require a direct link to an 'operating agricultural property'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make 'Host farm' a Section 1 (as-of-right) use in specified zones, providing it is undertaken in conjunction with agriculture and accommodates no more than 10 people at any one time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If the Host farm is within 100 km of Melbourne, the use must be in conjunction with Agriculture, Natural systems, Outdoor recreation facility, Rural industry or Winery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any comments on the proposed options for supporting agricultural diversification, value-adding and innovation?

General

- In principle, Council are strongly supportive and is keen to explore all options facilitating agricultural diversification, value-adding and innovation in our green wedge areas. In addition, Council acknowledge the importance of striking a balance between supporting agribusiness diversification/innovation and protecting the key environmental and landscape qualities. Both aspects have been and will continue to be key focus of our GWMP.

Council would like to emphasise that there are and will be other types of value adding farming innovations in addition to farm gate sales and host farms. It is important to draft policy/controls in a way that is not intentionally or unintentionally burdensome to impact on Council's flexibility to consider those innovative proposals in the future.

Farm gate sales

- Council are generally supportive of changes to remove 'red-tape' for farm gate sales. In particular, Council agree that the scale and intensity of the farm gate sales should be a guiding element in decision making.
- Planning provisions should aim to increase flexibility, providing maximum opportunity to encourage farm gate sales and other value adding innovations to support agribusiness diversification/innovation. Controls/policy should therefore be designed with this as an overarching objective.

- *Definition of 'Primary Produce sales':*

'allow sale of produce from land held in one ownership to support farms comprising divided holdings in the same ownership. "(DELWP, Consultation Paper, 2020)

It is suggested that this definition be reviewed as the meaning is not clear and appears overly complicated. Consider *'Allow produce sold to be sourced from other holdings that are in the same ownership.'* Although this could become complicated if land holdings are large distances apart from each other.

'allow sale of ancillary goods (such as crackers and bottled drinks) to be consumed with the primary produce (e.g. cheese or strawberries)' (DELWP, Consultation Paper, 2020)

It is suggested that the term 'ancillary goods' should be further clarified or provided with more guidance to ensure it can be implemented in a practical manner. In its current form, it could still be subject to interpretation which could undermine the intent to provide flexibility. For instance, will bread be an ancillary good for olive oil? Can products from neighbouring farms be sold? Farm gate sales provide an important, additional income stream to assist with the viability of farms. Therefore, the policy needs to strike the balance between providing clear practical guidance, consistency in application across Green Wedges and discretion to support and encourage farm gate sales. It should be based on the scale/proportionality of the farm gate sales to provide flexibility in what is sold.

Host Farm

The purpose of host farms is to accommodate people for education, tourism or a visitor experience. There are two major issues with the current definition of 'Host farm':

- *It is unclear on the extent to which this use must be linked to agricultural use of land*
- *The definition is silent as to what is an appropriate scale of a host farm (e.g. the number of bedrooms within a host farm).*

Proposed options:

- *Amend the definition of the land use term 'Host farm' to require a direct link to an 'operating agricultural property'.*
- *Move 'Host farm' to a Section 1 (as-of-right) use providing it is undertaken **in conjunction with** agriculture and accommodates no more than 10 people away from their normal place of residence at any one time. If these conditions are not met, the use will require a permit.*

(DELWP, Consultation Paper, 2020)

- Council support the facilitation of Host Farms (subject to a merits-based assessment) as a way of increasing small scale accommodation in green wedge areas to boost local economies.
- However, Council are not supportive of the proposed definition of 'Host farm' which requires a direct link to an 'operating agricultural property'.
The proposed definition does not provide clear guidance as to what a host farm will look like in terms of scale and intensity. For instance, a host farm could comprise of five separate new buildings or it could be an operation within an existing dwelling. Each at face value will meet the definition but differ vastly in scale and intensity, and therefore their impact on the landscape will also significantly differ.

- Council do not support 'Host Farm' as a Section 1 use providing it is undertaken in conjunction with agriculture and accommodates no more than 10 people

Firstly, Council are not supportive of the move of host farm to a Section 1 use when in contrast a single dwelling is a Section 2 use. Lack of control in this aspect could result in the proliferation of accommodation buildings across the green wedges, While Council supports some flexibility, it is felt that this proposal could have widespread unintended impacts and further undermine the protection of agricultural land.

Secondly, Council suggest that the 'in conjunction with' test also needs further clarification. For instance, 'ancillary use' might be a better term.

The reason being based on CI 64.02 Land Use in Conjunction with Another Use of the planning scheme, there must be "an essential association between the two uses". While a 'Host Farm' accommodation can value-add to existing productive farms. It is questionable whether a Host Farm could ever be deemed "essential" therefore meet the test. Ultimately, decisions will be tested at the VCAT where practice notes carry no weight compared to the wording of Clause 64.02.

Council suggest that 'ancillary' might be a more accurate description of the association between the agricultural use and the host farm. 'Ancillary' is also understood in planning terms and is adequately supported by existing case law to guide its application.

- On another note, Council note that there is no clear definition in the planning scheme for workers accommodation, causing unnecessary dispute at VCAT as whether a building of such purpose is permitted or not in rural zones. Council suggest the definition of 'Group Accommodation' in the VPP be reviewed as part of this project so it can potentially cover workers accommodation.

Managing use of green wedge and peri-urban land

Managing the urban-rural interface

(Consultation Paper section 3.3.1, pages 51 - 52)

To what degree do you support the proposed options for managing the urban-rural interface?

Ensure you only tick one checkbox per option.

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Provide planning practice guidance on how to consider and direct planning in urban-rural interface areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide guidance on preferred transitional land uses for land at the urban-rural interface and provide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
urban design/buffer guidance for transitional locations					
Introduce conditions in land use zones for particular uses, such as public open space or uses serving urban populations (e.g. schools, places of worship and infrastructure), to be located in transitional locations only	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Introduce the ability to apply other rural zones more suited to the roles and land conditions of particular locations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any comments on the proposed options for managing the urban-rural interface?

General

- In principle, Council are supportive of policy being introduced which would ensure appropriate buffers between new residential subdivision and rural areas. It is suggested this policy or the planning provisions should be written in such a way to prevent these buffer areas/lots from being subject to subdivision in the future so as to ensure the buffer is maintained.
- In addition to appropriate transitional uses, Council suggest that there is also needed to consider transitional lot sizes for land within the UGB to help better manage the interface between the Urban Growth Zone and the Green Wedge on issues such as bushfire and as a buffer to adjoining rural activities.

Rural Living Zone

- The use of transitional zones between urban zones the UGB need to be considered carefully. Often there is pressure to support additional housing on larger lots close to urban areas without them being in conjunction with agriculture.
- Council are not supportive of the use of the Rural Living Zone (RLZ) as a “transition” zone – it would encourage the encroachment of residential uses (and expectations) further into productive land. The RLZ is often treated by most planners as though it is a residential zone. It will also encourage greater pressure for subdivision from some landowners if this zone is characterised as an orderly planning outcome for the UGB interface. The change to RLZ could also inflate prices and speculation, along with potential complaints towards legitimate agricultural uses on neighbouring farms.
- It should be noted that some Councils have already promoted de facto rural living at the urban rural interface by reducing lot sizes often due to pressure for subdivision from landowners. There is strong need for a “hard” boundary rather than a transition zone that can more readily be allowed to creep outward over time. The concept that every strategic

review of rural land should produce more land for “rural living” is endemic in this state. Further, the use of a transition zone will simply serve to undermine the purpose of the UGB and green wedge in the first place

Preferred transitional uses

- Council suggest that Public Open Space should be used as a preferred transitional land use. This idea should be considered or embedded in one of the development/design elements.

The UGB will face continued pressure for further extension unless some similar logical terminations can be established, such as the Quarry Hills Regional Parkland and the Grassy Eucalypt Woodland (GEW) investigation area reserved for Melbourne’s north.

Public Open Space in interface areas creates a functional buffer that can be managed in a way that addresses concerns of both key users. Whittlesea’s application of this in the Quarry Hills Regional Parkland is a good example of how this can be achieved.

Schools/Places of worship in transitional locations

- Council **do not support** introducing conditions in land use zones for urban uses such as schools and places of worship to be located in transitional locations. The existence of such conditions imply that these uses are appropriate in a green wedge/peri-urban context, whereas, this would rarely be the case. Such uses are urban in nature and should be accommodated within the UGB. Council will provide further comments in the section below.

Other uses

While not identified in the Consultation Paper, aged care and retirement villages are another form of ‘urban use’ which are sometimes sought to be located the Green Wedge. Council do not support these types of urban uses being permitted in the Green Wedge. Like schools and places of worship, they need to be located within the UGB or within defined settlements if outside the UGB. It is the primary role and purpose of the PSP process and the urban zones to identify all relevant urban uses and plan for them within the UGB.

Managing discretionary uses

(Consultation Paper section 3.3.3, pages 54 - 60)

To what degree do you support the proposed options for managing discretionary uses? Ensure you only tick one checkbox per option.

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Require that Educational facilities (primary and secondary schools) be located adjacent to the Urban Growth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Boundary, adjoin or have access to a road, and not be located in high bushfire risk areas					
Require that Places of worship be located adjacent to the Urban Growth Boundary, adjoin or have access to a road, and not be located in high bushfire risk areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Redefine 'Halls' to differentiate commercial uses from those that provide community support services, and require that Halls be located adjacent to the Urban Growth Boundary, adjoin or have access to a road, and not be located in high bushfire risk areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restrict the number of patrons for Exhibition centres to a maximum total of 150 at any one time, and prohibit Exhibition centres in areas of high bushfire risk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amend the Rural Conservation Zone to insert conditions of use (i.e. minimum lot size requirements, number of bedrooms, in conjunction with test) for 'Group accommodation' and 'Residential hotels' consistent with conditions in the green wedge zones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure new categories of camping and caravan parks are reflected in the planning scheme, and permit camping and caravan parks in certain zones only when they fall within 'bush/primitive' or 'tourist' categories	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prohibit Data centres in the Green Wedge Zone, Green Wedge A Zone and Rural Conservation Zone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amend the Green Wedge Zone, Green Wedge A Zone and Rural Conservation Zone to require Data centres to be located adjacent to residential, commercial or industrial zoned land	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any comments on the proposed options for managing discretionary uses?

Schools and Place of Worship

- **Council do not support** the condition to ‘locate these uses adjacent to the UGB’. Proponents of these uses (schools and place for worship) are looking for cheap, available land by locating them on the edge of the UGB. The existence of such a condition implies that these uses are appropriate in a green wedge/peri-urban context, whereas, this would rarely be the case. Such uses are urban in nature and should be accommodated within the UGB rather than seeking to amend the planning provisions to allow these urban uses in non-urban zones. The VPA are currently in the process of reviewing the Precinct Structure Plan (PSP) Guidelines, and it is through changes to these PSP Guidelines that greater provision/planning for other schools and places of worship should be embedded, rather than a watering down of the fundamental elements of the green wedge planning provisions.
- It is noted that previous amendments to the VPP have already had the effect of softening the rural zone provisions to make a broader range of previously prohibited uses, discretionary in particular zones. It is suggested further review of the zone provisions to strengthen the controls further with a view to reintroducing prohibitions for particular uses rather than just restrict where they can be located. The conditions whilst restricting their location will still potentially have an impact on surrounding agricultural uses.
- It is suggested that schools should in general be located within the UGB or identified settlement areas/zones unless there is an education purpose that is centred on agriculture/ biodiversity. As noted in the Consultation Paper, schools often require significant areas to support buildings and recreational facilities which has the potential to impact the natural environment or being developed on land which could be used for agricultural purposes.
- Council fully acknowledge there is increasing demand for land to accommodate private schools for growth area communities and this need is not sufficiently considered as part of the current PSP process. However, we suggest those schools should be accommodated within the UGB, similar to other schools planned in PSP.

Halls

- Council support the change of definition to “Community Hall”. It will provide for community facilities that are most likely to be run by a committee of management rather than being a commercial enterprise.
- Council suggest caution against a prohibition of their construction in Bushfire Management Overlay areas as this could preclude the construction of community facilities that provide valuable support to Victorian communities. It is suggested that the gathering of people at community halls can be managed in line with the fire risk on a particular day.

Camping and caravan parks

- Council support the proposal to amend Clause 73.03 (Land use terms) to reflect the new categories of camping and caravan parks in line with proposed changes to the registration categories under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997.
- Council support eco-tourism that is compatible with the Green Wedge values. However, Council also recognise the need to manage these uses carefully as they can be used to provide permanent/semi-permanent, affordable residential accommodation which is not in keeping with the Green Wedge values and the Residential Tenancies Act 1997.
- On this basis, Council strongly support the proposal that camping and caravan parks only be permitted in certain zones when they fall within 'bush/primitive' or 'tourist' categories.

Soil and earth storage (“clean fill” / illegal dumping)

- Council strongly suggest the definition of earthwork and the permit requirement for earthwork be reviewed as part of this review. It is an action well over-due.

In May 2019, the City of Whittlesea’s Mayor along with the Mayors of nine other green wedge Councils wrote to the Minister for Planning asking for improved **definitions and planning permit triggers in the VPPs to address** this issue as a priority.

- The environmental and amenity impacts of uncontrolled soil dumping in the green wedge has been a longstanding issue (and has been exacerbated in recent years with all the road projects and level crossing removals) and is the subject of significant concern for most green wedge Councils. While it is understood that the EPA and DELWP may be looking into this issue separately, it must not be addressed in isolation of this green wedge and agricultural land review. The unregulated dumping of fill directly impacts on the agricultural and environmental values in our green wedge and will have long term consequences due to unstable contaminated soils of unknown origin. It is timely for the review and potential reinstatement of earlier provisions to enable Councils to manage soil, earth storage and illegal dumping in a more proactive way rather than through reactive enforcement due to the absence of a permit trigger.
- Also, a different approach has been taken for this issue, compared to options proposed for changes to the planning scheme in line with work that is still pending on the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (camping and caravan parks).

Data Centres

‘A data centre is a physical facility in which computing and networking equipment is concentrated for the purpose of collecting, storing, processing, distributing or allowing access to large amounts of data.

The introduction of this land use term was a response to emerging land uses that include facilities such as server farms for cloud computing and/or data storage and power services.

These kinds of facilities have the potential to occupy a large area of land. In addition, their appropriateness in, and effects on the values and priorities of, green wedge and peri-urban areas are also in question.’ (DELWP, Consultation Paper, 2020)

- Council support the prohibition of these uses in green wedge areas as allowing non-agricultural purposes could inflate prices and speculation. It is an intensive urbanland use which is not consistent with the primary purpose of the green wedges.

Review Section 1 and Section 3 Uses

- Council recommend DEWLP review Section 1 Uses in Green Wedges to add permit triggers/conditions which will enable Council to mitigate unintended impacts rising from the scale/ intensity of some of the uses.

Arenas and sheds

For instance, in the Whittlesea Green Wedge areas, arenas and sheds take up productive agricultural land or are built on structurally unstable sodic soils which create environmental issues such as tunnel erosion. This is a serious concern, yet a permit is not required for use. In addition, some sheds being built are larger than those on industrial blocks in Thomastown and are clearly not required for agricultural uses. This is an anomaly in the green wedge, which needs to be addressed.

Dams

Another example is dam which currently does not trigger a permit. Given the importance of water and the extensive work being done to understand and manage our water resources, dams should trigger a planning permit to enable Council with relevant water catchment & water authorities to manage and assess potential impacts from taking water from the upper reaches of streams and creeks and other potential impacts on the environment and landscape.

Other

- Council suggest that DEWLP review the ‘use’ table and consider allowing small scale, agriculture or environment related education centres in Green Wedge areas. Currently, ‘Education Centres (other than primary and secondary schools)’ use in the Green Wedge is a prohibited use while Primary Schools are a Section 2 use. This means that education centre for an agri-business would be prohibited which is not consistent with the objective to support diversification and innovation of agriculture business. This type of inconsistency towards agricultural related uses should be addressed through this process.

Improving the design of development in green wedges

Implementing design and development guidelines

(Consultation Paper section 4.1, pages 62 - 71)

To what degree do you support the proposed options for implementing design and development guidelines? Ensure you only tick one checkbox per option.

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral (Neither support or oppose)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Introduction of a new planning practice note to assist responsible authorities to assess development proposals on green wedge land	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adjust the decision guidelines and introduce application requirements for development applications in Green Wedge zones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Update the form and structure of Green Wedge Management Plans to require new or updated Green Wedge Management Plans to identify landscape typologies and detailed design guidelines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Introduce a new particular provision that contains design guidelines and standards for development in green wedge areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amend the schedule to Green Wedge zones to allow site coverage, setbacks and building heights to be mandated for developments associated with discretionary uses	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any comments on implementing design and development guidelines?

General

- Council, in principle, welcome further planning guidance through the introduction of additional practice notes.
- Council are generally supportive of the introduction of discretionary application requirements for development, noting that these requirements may need to be responsive to the scale and form of development. The introduction of the written submission should consider the implication on 'mum and dad' applicants who may not be engaging a planner to prepare their application.
- *'require new or updated GWMPs to identify landscape typologies and detailed design guidelines.'* (DELWP, Consultation Paper, 2020)

Council suggest that this should be a state-wide project such as the State government work on Distinctive Areas and Landscapes Project. This is a significant amount of extra work to the preparation of Green Wedge Management Plans, which will be difficult to translate to planning schemes because of the level of evidence required. Without such translation, it is questionable how much effect it will have on planning decisions.

- Strongly support guidance on setbacks and site coverage for developments. Clarity and guidance on application requirements will strengthen the intent of the zones.
- Council further suggest that a principle should be adopted where if there is no existing agriculture on the neighbouring block, the assessment of the sensitive non-agricultural use application should treat the situation as if there were (or will be) an agricultural use on the neighbouring blocks, and the decision making on site coverage and setback of sensitive use to the boundary should be considered accordingly.

This is on the basis that the main purposes of this review which is to protect the land for future use for agriculture. This is critical in areas where agriculture may not be the primary land use in many green wedge and peri-urban areas at the moment. Not applying this principle will see further land lost in the green wedge.

Element 2 – Site layout

- This is supported provided the primary use of the land (ie. agriculture) is considered.
- However, the green wedge values of landscape amenity and tourism have to achieve a balance in accordance with the agricultural function and economic value. Horticultural structures or farm gate shops should not be required to meet high architectural standards and permit requirements that make them prohibitively costly to establish near roads.

Element 11 – Safety - p. 71

‘A design response that balances the need to minimise bushfire risk and protect vegetation should ensure that the design and siting of a new building/development avoid/minimise the removal of established vegetation in a way that also addresses bushfire management controls of the Bushfire Management Overlay.’ (DELWP, Consultation Paper, 2020)

‘Design requirement

Set clear public expectations that development of land that exposes people to increased risk of natural hazards (such as bushfire) should be discouraged or prohibited.’ (DELWP, Consultation Paper, 2020)

- Council suggest that this ‘design requirement’ be reviewed. It is too broad and possibly contradicts one of the objectives to ‘encourage development of land that does not require vegetation removal’. a
- It is suggested that the design requirements could also allow for development associated with short stay/temporary use and development where the risk to human life can be managed by excluding occupation during high risk periods (eg. camping, host farm). This is quite different to proposals that establish permanent settlement.

Further comments

Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the proposed planning system changes for Melbourne’s green wedges and agricultural land?

- Council acknowledge and emphasise that Melbourne’s Green Wedge and peri-urban areas are multi-dimensional and provide a diverse range of important services, capabilities and values ranging from environmental conservation, habitat, heritage protection, rural living, landscape quality, tourism, recreation as well as valuable agricultural land.

Urban Growth Boundary

- The vision for 2050 which includes containing Melbourne’s footprint and a ‘stable and consistently applied UGB’ is strongly supported.
- To encourage farming in our green wedges there needs to be certainty around the UGB to prevent community uncertainty, artificial inflation of prices due to land banking which also incentivises degrading environmental and agricultural values to increase development potential. This means limiting planning provisions or zones that allow a transition of uses, which in effect just supports the continuous creep of urban uses and expectations. A hard boundary needs to be maintained through the UGB, policy and the planning provisions implemented. Alternative approaches to support this hard edge such as the use of public open space ie. the Quarry Hills Regional Parkland and the Grassy Eucalypt Woodland (GEW) investigation area reserved for Melbourne’s north.
- The Consultation Paper does not adequately deal with the lack of a defined UGB around some of the rural/semi-rural townships within the Green Wedge of metropolitan Melbourne. The Consultation Paper whilst dealing with the interface and transitional zones and the like, does not provide any direction on how a consistent UGB will be achieved or what it will look like.
- A clear UGB provides long term certainty and clear strategic direction. The current UGB has not been applied consistently with some smaller townships within the Melbourne Metropolitan area defined by a clear UGB, whilst others such as Whittlesea Township having no clear UGB (with the whole Town designated as Green Wedge land under the Planning & Environment Act).
- For metropolitan municipalities with a hard UGB around such Townships - whilst there is still some pressure from individual landowners outside the UGB to support rezoning/relocating the UGB to achieve individual gain, there is broader municipal support for having a clear UGB. It provides clear strategic direction about where housing and other urban uses should be located.
- For others such as Whittlesea Township, the lack of a clear UGB around the Township has resulted in a sense of uncertainty within the local community and some land use speculation/land banking around the perimeter of the Township. This has resulted in increasing pressure to extend the Township boundary to support additional residential development.

Grassy Eucalypt Woodland investigation area

- The Grassy Eucalypt Woodland (GEW) are Nationally significant ecological communities that are listed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

In 2009, the Victorian Government entered into an agreement with the Commonwealth Government under the EPBC Act to undertake a strategic assessment of (among other things) the extension of Melbourne’s urban growth boundary. The Commonwealth Government approved the extension of the urban growth boundary, subject to conditions aimed at ensuring that development occurs in a way that protects areas of environmental significance. This includes securing 1200ha of GEW Reserve in the Whittlesea Green Wedge as part of a broader Biodiversity Conservation Strategy across Melbourne’s growth areas.

The Whittlesea GEW investigation area is covered by an Environment Significant Overlay (ESO) which was introduced into the Whittlesea Planning Scheme in August 2010 via VC68. However, to date no land within this reserve has been secured or acquisition processes commenced. It is noted that the State Government in 2020 have introduced the Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA) Levy to assist with funding the obligations of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2013 including acquisition of the land for the GEW and other conservation reserves. Whilst the MSA levy has been introduced, the State Government has not outlined a timeframe for acquisition of land for the GEW.

- Securing the GEW investigation area will not only protect biodiversity assets and safeguard the landscape qualities for Whittlesea’s green wedges but also help to implement DEWLP’s proposal to manage the urban-rural interface by introducing a permanent and functional buffer to the urban growth areas.
- Establishment of the proposed GEW conservation reserve within Whittlesea’s Green Wedge, as described in the Melbourne Strategic Assessment, is important not only for the City of Whittlesea, but also adjoining Councils and the State of Victoria as a whole. Council request that the State Government make good on their commitment to secure/purchase this land, as a matter of priority.

Prioritise rural road infrastructure in peri-urban land to support agricultural production.

- Council suggest that targeted funding for rural road infrastructure should be a state government priority if peri-urban land is to support agricultural production.

On page 34 of the Consultation Paper, a range of non-regulatory measures to encourage agricultural use are listed. However, the responsibility to maintain existing road infrastructure is **not** mentioned, despite being raised in the first round of consultation with local government as an important issue for the maintenance of a productive landscape and the movement of goods to market. Given the competing demands for infrastructure, Interface Councils are often in the position of having to prioritise urban road infrastructure and its maintenance over that of rural roads. It is therefore important to specifically reinforce the need to prioritise rural road infrastructure in the context of supporting agriculture, and targeted funding available to support this.

Aged care and retirement village

- While not identified in the Consultation Paper, aged care and retirement villages are another form of ‘urban use’ which are sometimes sought to be located in the Green Wedge.

Council does not support these types of urban uses being permitted in the Green Wedge. Like schools and places of worship, they need to be located within the UGB or within

defined settlements if outside the UGB. It is the primary role and purpose of the Precinct Structure Planning process and the urban zones to identify all relevant urban uses and plan for them within the UGB.