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KEY ISSUES

Melbourne Metropolitan Growth

The southern areas of the Shire are closely linked economically and socially to the northern suburbs of the metropolitan area. Many new residents to the Shire have sought to combine a rural or rural-township lifestyle with ready access to employment and services in Melbourne. This location relative to Melbourne strongly influences the growth and development of the Shire. At the 1996 census over 34% of the workforce of the whole Shire were employed in the metropolitan area. For the southern half of the Shire the proportion commuting to Melbourne for employment was nearly 53%. Increasingly opportunities should be taken to build the employment and service base of the Shire’s towns and to promote and develop business opportunities based on the Shire’s proximity to Melbourne.

The Puckapunyal Military Base is situated in the north of the Shire, to the west of Seymour and is the single largest employer within the Shire. Its continued operation is of vital importance to the Shire’s economic development.

Population Growth and Development

Continuing population growth will place demands on land, services and infrastructure. In responding to market demands and the preferences of the population, a variety of housing demand is likely to be seen throughout the Shire. Various areas in the Shire have different capacities to provide for and support new development. Each of the Shire’s towns, villages and rural areas present different characteristics and capacities which need to be considered in the context of future growth.

Extensive areas around the Shire’s major towns have been zoned for residential development. The co-ordination of future residential development with infrastructure and servicing costs borne by the developer, will be an integral strategy for the management of growth. The rapid growth in the population of a number of towns has not necessarily been co-ordinated with the traditional range of facilities and services. It is proposed to ensure that Development Contributions associated with new residential development will provide more fully for the accelerated demand for facilities and services in these communities. Further work will be carried out to devise adequate funding arrangements through the use of Development Contribution Plans. This work will commence following the completion of the government review of the Development Contribution Plan system in early 2002. The increase in demand for rural residential properties also requires a more structured response. Strategies need to be prepared to cope with the demand for improved infrastructure brought about by rural residential development, e.g. sealing of local roads, whilst at the same time ensuring that continuing rural residential development does not unduly tax the Shire’s resources. Tight control needs to be maintained on expansion of residential developments in the rural areas.

Transport and Infrastructure

Mitchell Shire has considerable transport and infrastructure resources. The Shire is well served by the State’s highway network with direct links to Shepparton, Bendigo and Albury-Wodonga as well as Melbourne and to the east along the Goulburn Valley Highway. The national rail system provides frequent services between the main towns and Melbourne. Comprehensive water supply and sewerage systems are provided to Seymour, Kilmore, Broadford, Wallan and Wandong/Heathcote Junction. Strong attention needs to be given to effluent treatment in rural residential areas and unserviced towns such as Pyalong. The density of residential development must be linked to the capacity and availability of systems to maintain water quality in streams.
The completed Western Ring Road linking with the Tullamarine Freeway and the now operating elements of City Link, together with the projected construction of the Craigieburn Bypass connecting the Hume Freeway to the Ring Road, will contribute to increased population growth pressures within the Shire as access to Melbourne is made easier. The Hume Freeway Corridor acts as an economic opportunity for transport related businesses and industries. With increasing employment opportunities in Broadmeadows and Tullamarine, the attraction for growth particularly low density and rural residential focussed on existing towns in the southern part of Mitchell Shire will continue to increase.

Private motor vehicles are likely to remain the principal means of transport for the journey to work for those residents employed in metropolitan Melbourne. The availability of an enhanced fast train service, however, with improved stations and modal interchange facilities would offer an economic and efficient alternative means of commuter transport. An enhanced “sprinter” service with travel times to the CBD of between 35 minutes and 50minutes for towns between Beveridge and Broadford (about 1 hour for Seymour) would compare favourably with existing services to Geelong and Pakenham.

Proximity to Melbourne also means that many residents of the metropolitan area see the Shire’s towns and rural areas as a tourist and recreational outlet. While this can have economic advantages, day-trippers often spend little money in the areas they visit and can make resource demands on local communities.

**Management of Natural Resources**

The natural resource base and rural areas of the Shire are a significant asset supporting about $25m worth of agricultural product annually. The most important elements of the agricultural economy are the production of wool and beef cattle. Timber production from plantations is of increasing importance. The rural areas are also valued by the community as providing a quality landscape and environmental setting. There has been strong demand for residential use of rural land particularly in the southern half of the Shire for hobby farms, lifestyle farming, rural living and rural residential development. In some cases this has reduced grazing pressure, led to increased tree planting and more intensive efforts of land management. In others it has impacted on adjoining agricultural production, increased pest and environmental weed management problems. It has also led to expectations of increased servicing provision potentially imposing substantial costs on the Shire and imposed substantial servicing burdens on the Shire.

The Shire mostly lies in the upper catchment of the Goulburn River system. The Goulburn catchment is one of the State’s most significant and also forms part of Australia’s most important river basin system - the Murray-Darling. Management of high water table and salt levels in the irrigation areas downstream of Mitchell Shire is a national issue. Salt from the Mitchell Shire contributes to this problem. Over-cleared catchments and poor land management needs to be addressed. Those areas south of the Great Dividing Range lie in the Port Phillip catchment mostly within the Maribyrnong River catchment. Generally water in the Maribyrnong catchment is in poor condition with high salinity levels. The management of river catchments in the Mitchell Shire is a major issue for the quality of the local environment and the whole region. The use of Land Capability assessment is a useful tool for the planning of development and determining the capacity to support particular land uses.

**Economic Development and Employment**

Industrial areas are well established in Broadford, Seymour and Kilmore. In most cases, the businesses operating in these areas are of a small to medium size although some larger companies, e.g. Nestle, have facilities in the Shire. The industrial sector is a significant employer of local people, however, a majority of the shire’s working population commute out of the shire for employment purposes. While there is still significant industrial land stock available closer to Melbourne, it is unlikely that there
will be a need for additional industrial land in the shire for some years. Forestry and timber production are also important local industries and agricultural production whether from full or part time farming is still a major component of the economy of the Shire and is very important in the service role of the towns. Activities associated with the Puckapunyal Army Base are the most significant employer in the shire and government decisions about the use of the base can have major effects on economic activity in the shire.

The Shire has recently completed an Economic Development Planning Strategy. The Key Issues of the Strategy are as follows:

Analysis undertaken for the Hume Corridor Study indicates that up to around 2,500 new jobs will need to be generated over the next 20 years in order to support the expected rate of population growth.

A proportion of these jobs will be generated through the demand arising from new residents in sectors such as retail, business services, construction and service industries. Nevertheless, a substantial number of jobs will need to be generated through growth of existing firms and through the attraction of new businesses to the Shire. This will be particularly important for those parts of the Shire which are forecast to have a stable or declining population.

The Strategy has identified a number of competitive advantages and new opportunities which should form the basis for attracting new industries, and which point to opportunities in

- Transport, storage and distribution sectors
- Manufacturing sectors which support the construction industry
- Agriculture-related activities including meat processing, horticulture, and viticulture
- New agricultural production and processing opportunities in wildflower, timber and goat meat
- Continuing development of the textile and clothing manufacturing sector

Opportunities will be pursued and assisted by Council where they are characterised by the following attributes:

- Contributes to employment generation
- Is compatible with surrounding land uses
- Is supported by or can be supplied with appropriate infrastructure
- Does not negatively impact on the environment or on liveability attributes of the Shire